

FANATICISM: AN ANALYSIS ON BTS' "ARMY" FAN BEHAVIOR ON TWITTER

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ABSTRACT

Fandom is the main support system for its idol. Every fandom has its own method to express their support and love toward their idol – they also motivate themselves to help their idol in achieving the most success in their career. Hence, every fandom is willing to thrive and support their idol in every possible way. Nonetheless, some fandoms may express their support in an aggressive way due to their extreme enthusiasm and obsession with their idol. ARMY is one of the fanatic K-Pop fandoms that is known to express their support in extreme behavior in which it makes them gain the label 'toxic fandom' by the internet users.

Kata Kunci: fandom; fanaticism; K-Pop; BTS; ARMY

INTRODUCTION

Due to the rapid development of internet technology advancement, the current advanced technology provides various methods that facilitate people to virtually connect and interact with others around the world. Through this advancement, people can virtually gather and interact with their friends in real life as well as find new friends that share the same interest as them. For instance, Korean Pop or widely known as K-Pop has become a worldwide phenomenon with the support of advanced internet technology. The advanced internet technology facilitates the K-Pop fans through the existence of social media to find and connect with other K-Pop fans without having any barriers. One of the social media that K-Pop fans usually use is Twitter because Twitter provides space for them to express their support for their idols verbally and visually. Currently, there have been more than six billion K-Pop-related tweets as of 2020 (Hutchinson, 2021) which shows how vast and rapid the spreading of K-Pop on Twitter is. Although, it is important to note that other than the support of advanced internet technology, its rapid spreading is widely affected by the existence of the fans who claim themselves within one or more K-Pop fandoms. Through these fandoms, they spread the information about their idols on Twitter which gain the attention of more people to join and create a digital interaction

to show their support and devotion for their idols.

K-Pop itself is a known genre focusing on Korean-based idols with each of the idols having their own loyal fandoms. Fandom is an enthusiastic group of fans of someone or something (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.) – and in this case, these fandoms idolize K-Pop idols that vary from solo K-Pop singers to big K-Pop groups that contain several members. Each fandom shows its support for its idols in various ways – there are several major behaviors that these fandoms do for their idols such as doing music and video-streaming efforts, providing public advertisements for their idols during special circumstances such as on birthdays and group anniversaries, crowdfunding, buying merchandises, as well as attending both virtual and physical concerts (Delivered, 2021). These behaviors not only take an immense of energy and time of the fans but also the material aspect of the fans as well. Yet, the fans willingly do all of the behaviors mentioned above solely to show their support and loyalty, so that their idols can gain more popularity and achievements. These kinds of fans behaviors can be caused by the fans' attachment and one-way intimacy toward their idols. In her 2011 study, a psychology professor named Gayle S. Stever mentioned that attachment and one-way intimacy is a likely result of looking frequently enough at pictures of a media figure. It can also result

in exhibited feelings off amiability that leads to emotions like concern, care, and attraction (Gao, 2022).

However, in relation to having attachment and one-intimacy to their idols, when it comes to showing their support for their idols, there are circumstances where fanaticism occurs. Fanaticism itself means having an extreme interest in something, to a degree that others may find unreasonable (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022). Oftentimes, some of the members of a certain K-Pop fandom can show their fanaticism toward their idols by behaving verbally aggressive toward other fandoms. These circumstances often occur on Twitter where various fandoms gather and interact. Such behaviors include verbally attacking other idols and fandoms with malicious comments and bullying other idols and fandoms as a certain fandom identifies themselves as more superior than other fandoms.

One of the K-Pop fandoms, known as “ARMY”, is a well-known global fandom of BTS, one of the leading Korean boy groups. BTS is widely known because of its global achievements as well as the loyal and big fandom that has been supporting BTS throughout the members’ careers. Other than fully supporting BTS’s musical career, ARMY is also active in supporting other global causes, for instance during the #BlackLivesMatter campaign, ARMY successfully joined the campaign and raised 1 million dollars of donations in less than 24 hours (Delivered, 2021). Nonetheless, ARMY is also known to be quite fanatic and oftentimes shows its support toward BTS in an extreme manner. Many of the K-Pop fandoms, other genre fandoms, as well as internet users, have been verbally attacked and bullied by ARMY on Twitter, which makes them gain the label of ‘toxic fandom’ on Twitter users. Hence, this study focuses on analyzing the behavior of BTS’s ARMY as a K-Pop fandom as well as the factors that result in ARMY gaining the label of toxic fandom.

K-Pop is a subculture of the Korean Wave that is widely known as “Hallyu”.

Although the term Hallyu has been known for the last two decades, K-Pop itself started to gain popularity in the last five to ten years. Known for its distinctive styles and talented idols, K-Pop gained the public’s attention with the debut of Seo Taiji and Boys in the early 1990s, especially with the country’s lift on travel restrictions created a bigger possibility for the artists to explore and produce their musical production with the influence of other cultural elements (Vincent, 2019). Following the debut and success of Seo Taiji and Boys, in the late 1990s, three Korean major idol agencies namely SM Entertainment, YG Entertainment, and JYP Entertainment started the journey of debuting various successful K-Pop idols for the last two decades. There have been various well-known Korean idols from the agencies, such as EXO and SNSD from SM Entertainment, BIGBANG, 2NE1, and BlackPink from YG Entertainment, as well as Wonder Girls, Miss A, and TWICE from JYP Entertainment.

Currently, several other Korean agencies also have debuted various Korean idols including HYBE Corporation which is the agency that successfully debuted BTS and TXT. As the agencies for these idols, the teams within the agencies have to be able to come up with refreshing and creative concepts for their idols so that they can gain more fans and popularity. Therefore, it is no surprise that K-Pop has a lot of variety in its musical and choreographical elements.

As defined by Cambridge Dictionary, fandom is an enthusiastic group of someone or something (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). In K-Pop, a fandom is a group filled with people who are ready to support their idols – whether it is a solo, a duo, or even a boy and/or a girl group. The main objective of fandom is to show the support and devotion of the fans toward their idols. There are various ways that the fans can show their support and devotion to their idols, but the common ones include music and music video streaming, writing thoughtful and supportive messages on social media especially Twitter, and buying merchandise.

Fans' aggressive behavior on social media, especially on Twitter can be led by fanaticism. Fanaticism can be seen as a belief that leads the people to blindly uphold their belief by doing everything in maintaining so (Goddard, 2001) (Eliani et al., 2018, 62). In addition to this, fanaticism can also be defined as a form of extreme enthusiasm and devotion toward a certain person or thing. Enthusiasm in fanaticism implies a degree of involvement and interest or concern for a certain person or a thing. Whereas devotion implies emotional attachment, a commitment that is accompanied by active behavior to be involved in showing devotion toward a certain person or thing (Nugraini, 2016) (Eliani et al., 2018, 62).

This extreme behavior often leads to aggressive behavior as fans tend to be defensive toward their idols due to the attachment and a high sense of interest toward their idols. The belief that their idols are superior to others also becomes another factor of the fans' aggressive behavior as the fans' main defense mechanism to show their support for their idols. Aggressive behavior as the result of fanaticism is shown through disagreeing, attacking, and debating other idols and fandoms while also having the tendency to boast about their idols' achievements and not acknowledging other idols' achievements (Supelli, 2011) (Eliani et al., 2018, 63). These fanatic actions not only badly affect the fandom's image but also the idol's image as well.

Most fans' behavior lies heavily around their idols' lives. This is because every fan has a sense of attachment that arises from celebrity following behavior related to the ethological theory that describes the individual attachment to other individuals, but in this case, the fans' attachment to their idols. According to Staver, fans can develop one-way intimacy as well as attachment to their idols because much like a newborn who develops intimacy by staring at its caregiver, this illustration can also be used to define the state of being a fan. Fans can develop intimacy and attachment by frequently looking at their idols' pictures and videos.

Additionally, after developing intimacy and attachment, such emotions as concern, care, and attraction start to appear, leading to obsession in terms of feeling connected and interacting with the idols (Gao, 2022).

METHOD

This study uses qualitative data as the main source of analysis. To support the analysis, this study uses fan behavioral theory to analyze the behavior of ARMY as BTS's fans in determining the aggressive behavior that leads to fandom toxicity which is depicted on Twitter. In addition to that, this study also uses other data that is taken from digital articles and related journals that raise a similar idea to this study. This study focuses on analyzing how ARMY is deemed aggressive and toxic on social media in expressing their support for BTS.

The study has three stages that begin with implementing an in-depth analysis of ARMY's fandom behavior and what factors can be seen and counted as toxic fandom behavior. Next, the researchers collect the data of analysis that is taken from two sources which are Twitter as its main data source whereas similar digital articles and journals are the supporting data source. Lastly, the collected data is analyzed by using fan behavioral theory to modify the fan behavior of BTS's ARMY.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Adorable Representative M.C. for Youth or widely known as ARMY is a well-known fandom of the rising Korean boy group, BTS. BTS rose to fame globally after topping the Billboard Hot 100 with their viral song, "Dynamite". Other than that, BTS and ARMY managed to set the world record for attracting the most viewers for a concert live stream during the coronavirus pandemic (Moon, 2020). Although BTS debuted in 2013, the official fan club was formed in 2014, and ever since then, ARMY was the main support system for BTS. However, as the fandom grew bigger, the fandom has become obsessed and fanatic with BTS. Not only does the fandom becomes attached to

their idols but also the fandom begins to act aggressively toward other fandoms on Twitter. On top of that, there are also circumstances where ARMY acts aggressively toward other fellow entertainers as well. These two examples of fandom behaviors are prime examples of fanaticism as the fandom expresses their support in an extreme enthusiasm and devotion that leads to aggressive behaviors (Eliani et al., 2018, 62-63). These aggressive behaviors that are shown by ARMY on Twitter result in the label of toxic fandom as given by other Twitter users. For instance, there are various circumstances where ARMY is seen underestimating as well as badmouthing other artists and fandoms.



Figure 1. The figure above portrays how ARMY underestimates other artists.

As seen from the two tweets above, it can be seen that ARMY acts defensively for BTS as well as how they underestimate other artists' capability to protect BTS. They did so as the fandom has developed a sense of attachment to BTS that results in various

feelings such as concern and care toward BTS (Gao, 2022).



Figure 2. The figures above show ARMY's toxic behavior by attacking other fandoms.

The figure above shows how toxic ARMY can be in supporting BTS. They even verbally attacked and bullied other fandoms as they are obsessed with BTS thus, they can not accept BTS's defeat to other artists. As seen in the second figure above, it can be seen that ARMY even tried to sabotage and invalidate ASTRO's win and called AROHA – ASTRO's fandom – cheaters. This behavior shows ARMY's fanaticism with BTS as explained by Supelli that showing the belief that their idols are superior to others also becomes another factor of the fans' aggressive behavior as the fans' main defense mechanism to show their support for their idols is signs of a fanatic fandom (Supelli,

2011) (Eliani et al., 2018, 63). These fanatic behaviors result in disagreeing, attacking, and debating other idols as seen in Figure 2.

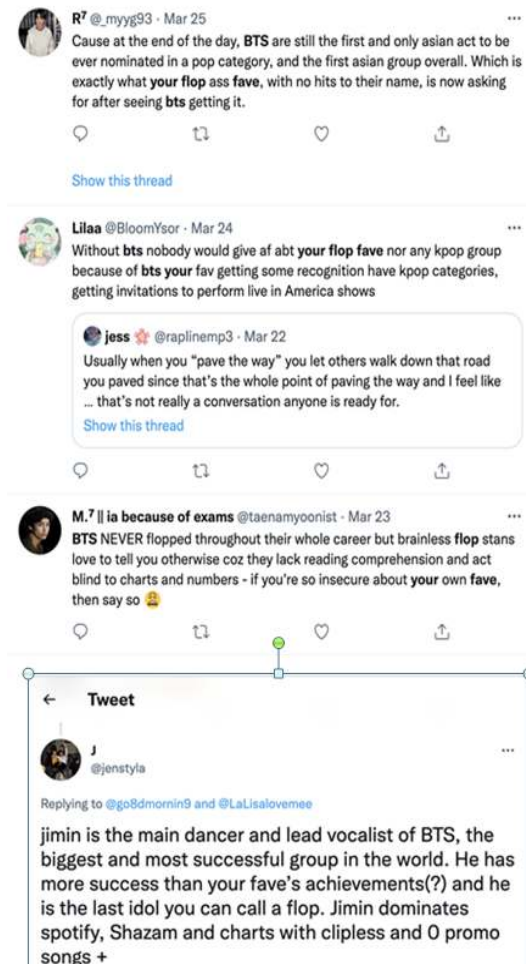


Figure 3. The figure above shows ARMY's fanatic behaviors.

The fanatic behaviors also can be seen in how ARMY always boasts BTS's achievement in an extreme way. They always claim that BTS is the K-Pop group that paved the way for other K-Pop groups to be recognized in the American industry. They also boast that BTS was the first K-Pop group to be invited to the Grammys hence to ARMY, BTS is superior to other K-Pop groups and that other groups should always pay the biggest respect and look up to BTS.

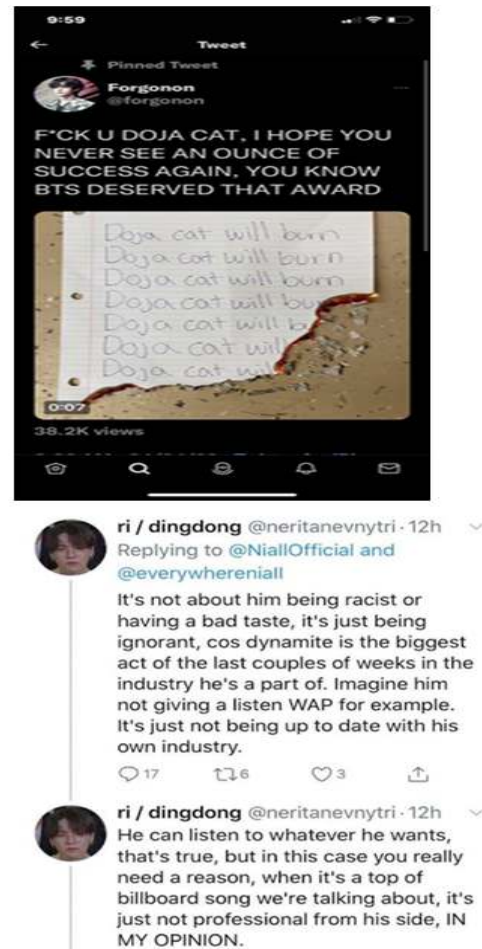


Figure 4. The figures above show how ARMY verbally harasses and attacks other entertainers.

Not only attacking other fandoms, but there have also been circumstances where ARMY is seen to attack other entertainers. For instance, recently, one of ARMY is seen attacking Doja Cat, one of the well-known female rappers, as they cannot accept the fact that BTS lost to Doja Cat at the Grammys. Another toxic behavior from one of ARMY is also seen in a 2018 tweet where one of ARMY is seen to be tweeting about XXXTentacion's death and how he did not deserve any respect as much as BTS – in which these topics were not related at all. The first two examples of ARMY's toxicity on Twitter are when Niall Horan, a singer, and former One Direction's member, confessed that he had never listened to any of BTS's songs. Niall's confession angered ARMY and in the two last figures above, it can be

seen that ARMY is attacking Niall, saying how he is being unprofessional and embarrassing by not listening to any of BTS's songs. From all the examples that have been shown above, it can be seen that some of the behaviors that are shown by ARMY on Twitter are fanatic and toxic behaviors. As explained by Staver, fans can develop one-way intimacy as well as attachment to their idols which can lead to obsessions (Gao, 2022). Similar to ARMY's behavior on Twitter, the examples shown above portray how ARMY has developed attachment and obsession toward BTS that they are even willing to attack and harass others to support and protect BTS.

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CONCLUSION

ARMY is known as one of the biggest fandoms globally, and its sole cause is to support BTS's career. However, judging from their behaviors on Twitter in expressing their support and enthusiasm, it can be seen that their behaviors can be extremely aggressive toward other fandoms and idols, and or entertainers. Seeing the extremity of their behavior, ARMY can be seen as an obsessed fandom who is willing to support and protect BTS at all costs – although in doing so, they may end up belittling and underestimating others.