

Research on the Behavior and Nature of BTS Weibo Fan Community

Chenxi Yu*

University College, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, M5S 1A1, Canada

Abstract. The rise of social media has broken the geographical and communicative boundaries between fans, providing them with a more open platform to express themselves and pursue a shared spiritual resonance. This research focuses on the dynamics and psychological foundations of the BTS Weibo fan community to explore the emotional investment, community connections, and identity construction that arise from the excessive admiration and pursuit of a particular subject, whether virtually or in reality, in the social media era. Based on grounded theory, this research collects data generated by specific fan groups, including their content, interactions, and narratives, and iteratively analyzes and summarizes this data. The study identifies key characteristics of BTS Weibo fan behavior, such as sense of community, exclusivity and gift economy. These findings lay the foundation for further research on the evolving behaviors and motivations of fans, contributing to a broader discussion on media consumption, fan culture, and the psychological impact of online communities.

1. Introduction

In the past twenty years, digitalization and convergence have had a significant impact on the creation and consumption of media. According to Jenkins' theory of participatory culture, fans are the earliest adopters of new media technologies and the most active group among media audiences. They are enthusiastic about engaging in autonomous creation and dissemination of media content through "poaching." As both consumers and producers of information resources, their media consumption processes inherently contain a large amount of collective intelligence, thus forming specific community cultures [1].

From the classification of fan behaviors in this paper, it can be seen that with social media providing more convenient audiovisual production and dissemination technology platforms, activities within fan groups have become increasingly complex. Unlike print media, the breaking of spatial and temporal limitations by social media gives fans a more open platform for expression to pursue common spiritual resonance. Interaction has become more diverse, including not only in-depth discussions but also memes, fan art, autonomous creation, and real-time reactions to new content or events. The community is more vibrant and can quickly mobilize collective action, emphasizing active, public, and collective participation, shaping unique psychological experiences and community dynamics.

* Corresponding author: steph.yu@mail.utoronto.ca

This paper develops a research model to explore the classification and characteristics of fan behaviors on Weibo, specifically focusing on BTS fans. By analyzing various types of BTS fan behaviors on Weibo, such as content creation, interaction, participation, and community organization, as well as the nature of their behaviors, such as sense of community, exclusivity, and gift economy, this paper enhances the understanding of Weibo fan behaviors and their nature, filling a gap in related theoretical research. This study has significant practical implications for further understanding fan culture phenomena and provides valuable references for the broader discussion of media consumption, fan culture, and the psychological impact of online communities.

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Grounded Theory

Grounded theory particularly emphasizes deriving theories from data, asserting that only through in-depth analysis of data can a theoretical framework gradually be formed. This is an inductive process, requiring the continuous condensation of data from the bottom up. Unlike general grand theories, grounded theory allows research to discover new theories and concepts starting from the data itself, without the need to pre-establish hypotheses or theories [2]. In the study of the classification and nature of Weibo BTS fan behaviors, grounded theory provides a solid foundation. First, by collecting and analyzing interaction data from Weibo fans, these behaviors are coded and categorized, identifying the main types of behaviors. Next, an in-depth analysis of the nature of these behaviors is conducted. The research found a close relationship between the types and nature of Weibo BTS fan behaviors. For example, fans' behaviors of uniting to protect their idols reflect a sense of community, while also gaining a sense of group belonging and emotional satisfaction. Finally, through repeated comparison and induction of the data, the established model can reasonably explain the classification and nature of Weibo BTS fan behaviors, providing theoretical support for subsequent research.

2.2 Data Source

To avoid selection bias and reduce the possibility of human intervention, making the research results more credible, this study adopted a random sampling survey. A total of 40 Weibo posts related to BTS topics were selected as samples. These samples cover Weibo posts from different time periods, authors, and content types, ensuring diversity and representativeness. Detailed screenshots of the selected 40 Weibo posts were taken, and their textual content was recorded for gradual classification. By combining qualitative and quantitative analysis, this article thoroughly explored the behavior patterns and emotional tendencies of BTS fans on Weibo, gaining a deeper understanding of their nature and social behavior patterns. Finally, based on the nature of the samples, these materials were classified as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Formatting sections, subsections and subsubsections.

Post types	Instructions	Quantity
News Sharing	Posts sharing the latest news and updates about BTS.	7
Fan Art	Visual/Auditory art created by fans.	7
Interactive Posts	Interaction with other fans.	6
Personal Reflections	Fans expressing their feelings and thoughts about BTS.	15
Event Organization	Coordinating and promoting fan events, both online and offline.	2

Merchandise Transactions	Buying, selling, and trading BTS-related merchandise.	2
Translations and Subtitles	Translating BTS content into Chinese and adding subtitles to videos.	6

3. Result

3.1 Open Coding

During the open coding phase, by conducting preliminary processing and interpretation of the raw data, this study identifies phenomena, concepts and behaviors of research value in the data. These are then categorized, organized, and labeled. To avoid being constrained by any pre-set theories or frameworks, this paper excavates initial concepts from the raw data. Through organization, this study reviews 40 data sets and derives several functional content labels. High-frequency labels are retained, while low-frequency labels are discarded, ultimately resulting in the identification of corresponding basic concepts and categories, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Concepts and initial categories formed through open coding.

Initial category	Original statement example
A1 Private messages and group chats	Perhaps there is an Army sister who wants more WeChat friends, or there is a WeChat group or something like that? It's too hard to pursue celebrities alone. I want to get to know more Army sisters.
A2 Artistic creation	I. Homemade iPad Wallpaper share. II. Jungkook avatar sharing. III. On Tuesday, the South Korean comedy artist BTS is coming! The whole job is as easy as a palm~It's as easy as a palm!! (Funny Collection).
A3 Literary creation	At the moment the sword is unsheathed, the wind blows from afar. Blowing up the man's broken hair on the forehead. The moment the fire ignites. The killing intent boiled around, causing a cold silence in the eyes of the young man. When the wings of the undead bird glide across the sky, use a sword to shatter the glass cage that imprisons fate. Blowing the horn of victory, striking the magnificent war drum, commanding thousands of troops and horses ahead. The magma underground will also erupt into tremendous energy, gradually becoming a young adult. I am willing to protect the fragments of your dreams Happy Birthday Suga @Baidu Suga Bar Text by Yakult, Drawing by Bai An, Handdrawn by AC
A4 Music creation	Children's Choir One Voice Cover BTS Crown Single "Dynamite" I fell in love with the first line of singing, and the voice full of childlike innocence was healed!
A5 News update	[130603] V's first official appearance on Twitter. BTS is suspected to release a new song on June 7th. The "Spring Day" Melon weekly chart for preventing juvenile delinquency has broken through 380 weeks (7 years and 3 months), Melon's first and only song in history to achieve this milestone.
A6 Resource sharing	According to reports from foreign fans, it has been discovered that the illegal transfer of Jin's "hug activity" on June 13th is serious and widespread. We urge everyone to actively participate in safeguarding their rights and speaking out to ensure Jin's safety and prevent various problems from occurring.
A7 Translation and subtitles	[Xingyuan Translation] Bilingual Official MV. II. [2024Festa] BTS'Life Goes On' (in the forest ver.) GR Translation

A8 Personal reflections	I am a fan of the entire BTS, and I resist any reason to exclude any member! Remembering seven people laughing like seven hundred people, every time I hear them laughing, I automatically want to laugh.
A9 Celebration of events	Happy BTS 11th Anniversary.
A10 Mass streaming events	I had a great time playing offline for Xiamen's 11th anniversary today, I also got to know many young sisters who share the same responsibilities. Everyone is particularly beautiful, and the setting is also very beautiful. The host teacher has worked hard!
A11 Promoting and organizing offline fan events	BTS Chengdu 11th Anniversary Fans meeting. The first time I participated in offline activity, the atmosphere was excellent, and I exchanged gifts with more than a dozen sisters.
A12 Promoting and organizing online fan events	Let's vote together for the new album
A13 Trading	Some small gifts, I am not very good at making pictures, so let me put some small cards for everyone to receive. The requirements are: There is a record of purchasing 10 or more albums (must be a team album!!). Forward this post and use tag # Happy 11th Anniversary of BTS 0613's Debut #. Alternatively, if you have a small gift made by yourself, you can also come to me to exchange cards. Welcome everyone to come and play with me! BTS 11th Anniversary Photo Launch Location: Justfoto nationwide Release time: 6.19-7.4 Photo frame number: 52471 Official pricing: 29.9 (I am not profitable).
A14 Purchasing service	Purchase Announcement: #BTS Super Talk # Butter CD
A15 Support and Charity Initiatives	[Guarding Flower Bud Plan Announcement] Yesterday before the ninth anniversary of our debut, we actively participated in the public welfare activity of the "Guardian Flower Bud Plan" project in the name of Chinese fans of the BTS.

3.2 Axial Coding

In the axial coding phase, the study further organizes and classifies the various concepts and phenomena identified during the open coding phase to establish a more systematic and hierarchical theoretical framework. Through further analysis and organization, the study concludes that Translation and News sharing share the same nature, and thus both are categorized under Information Dissemination. This results in six main behavioral categories, including Interactive Behaviors, and 17 subcategories, such as Commenting and Replying, which collectively encompass the main activity categories of BTS fans on Weibo. Additionally, combined with the analysis in Table 2, examples A1 to A15 are classified and placed in Table 3 for better understanding. The detailed information is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Main categories and corresponding subcategories formed through axial coding.

Behavior classification	Behavior type	Behavior nature	Example
Interactive Behavior	Comments and Replies	Highly interactive	Commenting on BTS's Weibo posts, replying to other fans.
	Likes and Shares	Moderately interactive	Liking BTS-related Weibo posts, sharing Weibo content.

	Direct Messages and Group Chats	Highly interactive	A1
Content Creation	Artistic Creation	Highly creative	A2
	Literary Creation	Highly creative	A3
	Music Creation	Highly creative	A4
Information Dissemination	News Updates	Highly disseminative	A5
	Resource Sharing	Highly disseminative	A6
	Translation and Subtitles	Highly disseminative	A7
Emotional Expression	Personal Thoughts	Highly emotional	A8
	Celebration Activities	Highly emotional	A9
Organizational Activities	Support Activities	Highly organizational	A10
	Promoting and organizing offline fan events	Highly organizational	A11
	Promoting and organizing online fan events	Moderately organizational	A12
Transactional Behavior	Trading	Highly commercial	A13
	Purchasing Services	Moderately commercial	A14
	Support and Charity Initiatives	Highly commercial	A15

3.3 Selective Coding

At this phase, this study will further integrate, refine, and deepen the core categories and key concepts identified in the first two phases, to establish a more complete, systematic, and profound theoretical model. Through selective coding, this research categorizes BTS fan activities on Weibo into four types, exploring the primary nature of BTS Weibo fan behaviors, such as sense of community (see Table 4 in detail), laying the foundation for evolving fan behaviors and motivations in subsequent studies, and contributing to broader discussions on the influences of media consumption, fan culture, and online community psychology.

Table 4. Typical relational structures of main categories.

Relational Structure	Relational Structure Connotation
Interactive Behavior -- Sense of Belonging and Identity.	Enhancing community belonging, sense of community
Content Creation -- Self-expression and Sense of Achievement. Information Dissemination -- Sense of Contribution and Influence. Transactional Behavior -- Economic Benefits and Support for Idol.	Free labor, "gift economy"
Emotional Expression -- Emotional Resonance and Release	Energy surge, possessiveness toward the idol
Organizational Activities -- Desire for Leadership and Social Recognition	Hierarchy, fan exclusivity

4. Discussion

In recent years, the virtual environment of social media has provided a place for subcultural groups that are not accepted by mainstream values to communicate, and has formed a unique production model. Fan behaviors and characteristics have gradually attracted attention from various academic fields. Jenkins has made advocacy a primary objective of his research, particularly given the shift in his focus from resistance to participation, establishing it as a central framework for fan studies [3]. This is largely due to the fact that social media necessitates collaboration between the cultural industry and fans, highlighting the potential for cooperation within fan culture and between fan culture and the cultural industry [4].

4.1 Sense of Community

BTS fan chat groups and discussions on BTS-specific topics serve as manifestations of sense of community. Fans are individuals who identify with a shared identity and culture, forming a sense of belonging that is distinct from mainstream groups and mass media texts, and integrate themselves into a community that resonates with their values, interests, and objectives. BTS fans establish and nurture this communal bond through active participation in online communities, involvement in fan activities, and unwavering support for BTS. This communal connection aids BTS fans in shaping their identities while fostering a shared sense of belonging and collective consciousness among fellow fans [5].

4.2 Free Labor, “Gift Economy”

BTS fans also engage in various forms of financial support, such as card trading, purchasing services, and donating in the name of their idols. These behaviors are seen as a way to express intimacy and support for BTS, although they are purely driven by emotional willingness. Fans hope to bring happiness and success to BTS through these actions, which they consider as their labor in reciprocation. In this manner, BTS fans translate intimacy into financial support [6]. Additionally, characteristics of BTS fans include absolute loyalty and dedication. On Weibo, individual fan activities include, but are not limited to, disseminating information through technical means, demonstrating visual and aural creative abilities, reposting BTS official information with translations, and independently creating cultural products based on existing BTS-related texts. These cultural products include novels, comics, audiovisual content, and merchandise, imbuing texts with new meanings and features that reflect adoration and love for their idols. Through widespread dissemination on Weibo, they promote the prosperity of derivative works within the entire fan community. BTS fans establish a close connection with BTS through these means, viewing BTS's success as their own, demonstrating the transformation of strong fan communities within consumer pop culture [7]. These spontaneous behaviors within the fan community result in efficient organization, operating like a smoothly running propaganda machine, which Turk refers to as the “gift economy” and free labor [8].

4.3 Energy expansion and Possessiveness

In *Republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media*, Sunstein argues that in the realm of the internet and new communication technologies, like-minded groups engage in mutual communication and discussion. Eventually, their ideas, while similar to before, become more extreme in form [9]. The internet serves as a medium through which fans from around the world can easily and quickly gather, rapidly forming communities. Within these groups, through mutual discussion, individuals enhance their own identities, providing a

strong support pillar for each member of the group. With multiple reinforcing interactions and repetitions, these groups undergo significant energy expansion, gradually moving towards extremes. The polarization of fan communities can lead to detrimental and dangerous outcomes. Firstly, different fan groups may attack each other. For instance, BTS fan groups may ostracize personal fans of a particular member. These impulsive, sensitive, and combative fans gather together, and under the influence of heightened emotions, there is a high likelihood of negative group polarization. Secondly, extreme behaviors can manifest within fan groups. When idols prove their behavior is unacceptable, they often exhibit more extreme and irrational tendencies than ordinary people. Influenced by the polarization of fan groups, these extreme and irrational behaviors can become collective.

4.4 Hierarchy and Exclusivity

On Weibo, BTS fans are divided into different ranks based on their activity levels, and this ranking system serves to limit and manage community members. Moderators possess unlimited social capital and independently control the community's discourse and content, deciding what is acceptable. They manage the community by establishing rules and making decisions on deletions, with minimal involvement from users in these processes [10]. This indicates that moderators wield absolute power and control within the community; their decisions and rule-making directly influence the community's worldview, excluding those who are not true fans and ensuring harmony within the fan community. Furthermore, the exclusivity of BTS fan groups is evident in the creation of their own subcultures, actively isolating themselves from the outside world. In the BTS fan community, there's a specific term called "Taekooker," which refers to the collective name of the members Jungkook and V. This term is used to filter out viewers whose values do not align with those of the fan community, showcasing the fans' exclusivity.

5. Conclusion

This study aims to explore the behavior and characteristics of BTS fans on Weibo through a grounded theory approach, systematically analyzing interaction data of fans on the platform. Through this examination, the paper arrives at four conclusions. First, interactive behavior demonstrates sense of community. Second, content creation, information dissemination, and transactional behavior reflect fans' free labor and the nature of gift economies. Third, emotional expression showcases possessiveness and potential extremism among fans. Finally, the hierarchy system illustrates fan exclusivity.

Despite offering valuable insights, the study has limitations. Firstly, it primarily relies on fan data from Weibo, with a limited sample that may not fully represent all BTS fans' behaviors and characteristics. Secondly, due to privacy and platform restrictions, some fans' private interactions and behaviors could not be accessed, potentially affecting the comprehensiveness of the study. Thirdly, data collection was conducted within specific timeframes, not capturing changes and developments in fan behavior and characteristics over different periods.

The study focuses primarily on Weibo; future research could expand its scope to other social media platforms (such as Twitter, Instagram, etc.) for cross-platform comparisons of fan behaviors. Additionally, future studies could employ multiple methods such as surveys, in-depth interviews, etc., to gather more comprehensive and insightful information about fan behaviors and psychological motivations. Lastly, longitudinal studies are needed to observe changes in fan behavior and motivations over time, exploring their dynamic developmental processes.

In conclusion, this study provides a foundation for understanding the behavior and characteristics of BTS fans on Weibo, offering new perspectives and theoretical frameworks for future fan culture research. Further research is expected to reveal the complexity and diversity of fan behaviors in the era of social media more comprehensively.

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