

Participatory Culture and Fan Loyalty in Idol Groups: The Case of BTS

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Abstract: Within the framework of event theory, this study attempts to study the influence of participatory culture on fan loyalty of idol groups using BangTan Sonyeon Dan (BTS) as an example by means of interviews and questionnaires. Based on the results of existing studies, the study found that participatory culture basically presents a positive influence on fan loyalty. Unexpectedly, for one, interaction among fans does not largely reflect a dissipating effect on the negative emotions generated by negative news. For two, fans would be more inclined to consume products that are both meaningful to their personal lives and beneficial to the idols themselves. In conclusion, the study found that despite the differences in the pathways of influence between fan-fan interactions and interactions with idols themselves, the participatory culture of idol groups as a whole still showed a facilitating effect on fan loyalty. At the same time, fans still maintain a certain degree of consumption rationality in participatory culture, demonstrating the cultural advantage of participatory culture in guiding fans to mitigate impulsive consumption. This study empirically links the relationship between participatory culture and fan loyalty, and provides a model for the development of idol groups.

Keywords: Participatory culture, fan loyalty, fan groups, fan culture, BTS

1. Introduction

1.1. Practical Background

BangTan Sonyeon Dan (BTS) is a male idol group under the South Korean entertainment company HYBE Entertainment (formerly Big Hit Entertainment), which debuted on June 13, 2013. BTS was the first South Korean artist to reach #1 on the Billboard 200, and whose song “Dynamite” became the longest running song in the top 10 of Billboard Hot 100 among the artists' songs. In addition, BTS was the first South Korean artist to appear at the Grammys, and the first South Korean artist to perform at the Grammys. The quality of their music and performances is high, and they have received many achievements that have won them a large number of fans around the world.

BTS and its team have built an intimate and active fan base culture by filming and releasing behind-the-scenes videos of their work, meaningful music videos, and actively interacting with their fans on social media, transforming fans from recipients to participants in their output. BTS's self-involvement and participation in their creations have made authenticity, sincerity, and genuineness the impression of BTS in the eyes of their fans. “Intertextuality deepens the web of content for audiences, creating more opportunities for them to engage and respond [1].” Therefore, fans often

share the videos they make on social platforms or participate in fan communities and fan activities, so as to build a good cultural atmosphere of fan groups.

1.2. Theoretical Background: Event Theory

There are major and minor events in history. Major events are gradual changes in social structure over a long period of history. Minor events are episodic events that have an impact on history. In the process of historical development, history is affected by structure on the one hand, and by human activities on the other. The latter are historical events. The occurrence of historical events does not conform to the rules of society and changes the original rules. Therefore, historical events are differences to structures.

There are three reasons why event theory was chosen for this study:

Firstly, BTS greatly opened up the overseas market for K-POP and changed the strategy and pattern of hallyu development.

Secondly, BTS laid the cornerstone for the globalisation of K-POP: “BTS paved the way”.

Thirdly, BTS made a breakthrough in the globalisation of the Korean Wave, allowing Asian faces to appear frequently on the international stage.

Therefore, BTS 'success as an idol group is closely linked to its fans. Thus, we view BTS as a historical event in the K-POP industry and use event theory to study the connection between BTS and its fan base and how BTS builds trust and loyalty with its fans. The main points of the study are relevant to idol groups and even the pop culture industry.

1.3. Research Theme

It can be found that BTS has had a great impact and influence on the Korean pop music industry. However, no empirical research on the impact of participatory culture on fan loyalty has emerged in the field of research on BTS as an idol group, and this study attempts to fill this gap. Therefore, this study introduces the concept of participatory culture, uses research in other fields as a reference for variable selection, and uses interviews and questionnaires to study the unattended area of the impact of BTS's participatory culture on fan loyalty, which is also the significance and value of this study.

1.4. Research Significance

Theoretically, this study attempts to critically absorb the results of previous research and tries to discover the commonalities between different fields. Based on this, the study attempts to construct the relationship between fan group culture and fan loyalty, and to delve into the topic of participatory culture using an empirical research method.

On the practical side, the study tries to refer to BTS to provide a reference perspective for other idol group business models and to provoke thoughts on building a healthy fan group culture.

2. Method

2.1. Literature Review

A literature search of CNKI as well as Google Scholar reveals that existing research studies on BTS and its fan community at home and abroad can basically be divided into three categories: branding and marketing strategies, globalisation and cross-cultural influences, and fan culture and social media interaction. The vast majority of them are one-way studies of BTS's brand management strategy or BTS's fan community culture, with fewer than ten studies that truly look at the relationship between the two in an interactive light. In the few studies that have examined the interaction between BTS and its fans, researchers have used two main approaches.

One way is through textual analyses or literature summaries, exploring BTS's interactions with fans through the Internet or offline, and examining the culture of BTS's fan community and the position of the idols themselves within it. Lazore points out that BTS has made full use of the element of “storytelling” to gain more engaged fans and establish a fan community with a “participatory culture” [1]. Blady analyses how the peer support community created by BTS has spread to the fan community from a psychological point of view [2]. Kim & Hutt, on the other hand, used event theory to examine how BTS fans banded together and used collective action to create social change, and the role of the idols themselves in this [3]. This choice of research approach fits well with the content of the study and allows for a more nuanced focus on BTS's fan culture building strategies. However, it also limits the study of fan community culture to analysing the existing situation, without exploring its actual impact and practical significance.

Another way is through empirical research, by means of interviews or questionnaires, to study BTS's fans' brand loyalty as well as brand identity. Lee & Kim investigated the impact of stage performances on brand trust and loyalty [4]. McLAREN & JIN explored the social media-mediated emotional flow between BTS and its fans and the resulting fan identity based on cross-cultural fan theory [5]. This research approach provides data to support the cross-cultural and cross-regional communication situation of BTS and focuses on the issue of the relationship between fan loyalty and BTS itself. However, it does not address the broader topic of the culture of the fanbase that has been established by BTS and its corporate guidance.

Consequently, there has been no empirical research on the impact of participatory culture on fan loyalty in studies of BTS, and this study attempts to fill this gap.

In order to fill the gap of empirical research methodology, this study introduces the parent theory of participatory culture at the theoretical level, and at the practical level, it refers to the methodology used in studies under the broader proposition of “fan loyalty” as the keyword [6]. Representative studies include Xue Haibo's study, which divided community interaction rituals into interpersonal interaction and human-product interaction, and pointed out that they have a significant positive effect on fan loyalty [7]. Li Jing explored the relationship between idol attraction, idol response, fan participation, community relationship, fan commitment, fan expectation, fan identification, satisfaction, relationship duration and fan loyalty [8]. In addition, reference is made to the research on fan culture in the field of sports. For example, Stevens empirically explored the relationship between fan identification, sports participation, following sports and fan loyalty [9]. The above literature enriches the research methodology of this study and will be used as a basis for variable selection to provide a more solid theoretical foundation for this study.

2.2. Variable Selection

This study identifies variable basing on Xue Haibo's variable design and Stevens and Rosenberger's variable design. Besides, with combining the relevant literature and the results of in-depth interviews, this study identifies human-product interaction and interpersonal interaction as the dimensions of measurement for the independent variable participatory culture, and sense of belonging, favouritism, consumption willingness, publicity willingness, negative news tolerance, and satisfaction as the measurement dimensions of the dependent variable fan loyalty [7,9].

2.3. Variable Definition

Participatory culture is a concept established in cross-media internet communities. Jenkins explained that “A participatory culture is a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby experienced participants pass along knowledge to novices. In a participatory culture,

members also believe their contributions matter and feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least, members care about others' opinions of what they have created) [6].”Since BTS fans have basically achieved the identity transition from mere consumers to co-creators, it can be said that there is a participatory culture in the BTS fanbase.

At the same time, BTS's fan base has a high degree of fan loyalty. Fan loyalty includes both attitudinal and behavioural loyalty, and different scholars have different views on the specific definitions of attitudinal and behavioural loyalty [10]. According to the Chinese scholar Shi Rongrong, “Fan loyalty refers to the loyalty of fans to their idols, which is reflected in positive attitudes. When an idol has negative news, fans with higher loyalty will not be affected by the news but will continue to support the goods he endorses or recommends [11]”. In previous studies on BTS, there are also many results on fan loyalty, empathy, and identification, which show agreement with the idea that “the authenticity of BTS builds empathy with the audience ARMY (the name of BTS fans) and enhances their ability to effectively convey these messages [2]”.

Specific variables are defined in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: Definition of independent variable

| Variable | Dimension | Definition |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|--|
| Participatory culture | Human-product interaction | He (the community member) can interact with other community members, which means interacting interpersonally, and this interaction can lead to an emotionally and cognitively rich community experience [7]. |
| | Interpersonal interaction | Community members can also interact with products, services, brands, and so on. This interaction is between the person and the product, which can also lead to an extraordinary consumer experience [7]. |

Table 2: Definition of dependent variable

| Variable | Dimension | Definition |
|-------------|-------------------------|--|
| Fan loyalty | Fan identification | Fan identification with a sports team is the personal commitment, perceived connectedness and emotional involvement a spectator has with a team [9]. |
| | Preference | This is a positive attitude towards their favourite stars and may tend to only have a soft spot for their favourite stars [8]. |
| | Consuming willingness | Loyalty in this study refers to fans' dedication to purchase products or services related to their favorite celebrity and positive word-of mouth [12]. |
| | Advertising willingness | Consumer loyalty should also take into account whether customers are able to promote the brand spontaneously [13]. |

Table 2: (continued)

| | | |
|--|-------------------------|--|
| | Negative news tolerance | When an idol receives negative press, loyal fans will not be affected by the news but will continue to support the goods he endorses or recommends [11]. |
| | Sense of satisfaction | Interacting with a fan or idol helps to improve the quality of the fan's real life [12]. |

2.4. Research Hypothesis

With regard to the two distinguishing features in the BTS fanbase, which are participatory culture and fan loyalty, this study attempts to establish a link between the two and ask questions accordingly:

Q1: Does the participatory culture of the BTS fan community have an impact on fan loyalty?

Q2: How does the participatory culture of the BTS fan community affect fan loyalty?

In implementing the research questions, an attempt was made to bring in a wide range of propositions or theories from more neighbouring fields, such as brand communities and fan studies, to enrich the specific measurement dimensions of this study.

Based on the research questions and theoretical additions, this paper proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Participatory culture has an impact on fan loyalty.

H2: Participatory culture has impacts on fan identification, preference, consuming willingness, advertising willingness, negative news tolerance and sense of satisfaction.

H2-1: Participatory culture promotes fan identification with the fan community.

H2-2: Participatory culture promotes fan preference for idols.

H2-3: Participatory culture makes fans more willing to spend money on idol-related products.

H2-4: Participatory culture makes fans more willing to promote their idols.

H2-5: When there is negative news about one's idol, fans dissipate their negativity through participatory cultural communities.

H2-6: Participatory culture promotes fan satisfaction.

2.5. Questionnaire

2.5.1. Research Objective

The objective of this paper is BTS fans in China. The demographic characteristics of the interviewees were recorded in the questionnaire, which covered three questions including gender, age and occupation of the interviewees. This part of the questionnaire is used to understand the personal characteristics of the fan base, to deepen the understanding of them, and to find typical deep interviews that can represent this characteristic.

According to the data statistics, the questionnaire respondents in this study are all female, and the average age is 20.68 years old. Among them, 79.49% were students, 10.26% were employed, 2.56% were freelance, and another 7.69% did not want to disclose their professional status.

2.5.2. Questionnaire Design

Due to the lack of research on the influence of fan group culture on fan loyalty in the field of idol groups, this study selected the measurement dimensions of the independent and dependent variables by taking into account the actual situation of the fan group culture of idol groups and referring to the studies in different fields. On this basis, a questionnaire was designed using a five-point Likert

measure, and some of the questions referred to the scales of Stavros Tachis and George Tzetzis [14, 15].

The questionnaire was divided into four parts.

Part 1: Introducing the basic content of the questionnaire and asking for willingness to participate.

Part 2: Asking for the basic information of the questionnaire respondents, including gender, age, and occupation.

Part 3: The main part of the questionnaire.

In the interpersonal interaction dimension, this questionnaire was refined into three scenarios: fan community, fan activities, and fan-made videos. In the dimension of human-product interaction, it is similarly refined into three scenarios: idol social media, concerts, and official release videos. The questionnaire respondents are first asked whether they have participated in such scenarios, and if so, the following six questions are developed:

- ① This scene makes me feel a sense of belonging.
- ② The scene makes me like BTS more.
- ③ The scene makes me spend more on related products.
- ④ When there is negative news, I will devote myself to the scene and succeed in eliminating the negative feelings.
- ⑤ The scene makes me feel satisfied as a fan.
- ⑥ I will forward the scene to my own social media (or to friends who are not ARMY).

If not, the above six questions will not appear and the respondent will jump directly to the next scenario. This is done until all six scenarios have been asked.

Part 4: Supplementary questions (see Table 3).

Table 3: Measurement of preference

| Variable | Question |
|------------|---|
| Preference | I could never switch my allegiance from my favorite team even if my close friends were fans of another team [14]. |
| | It would be difficult to change my beliefs about my favorite team [14]. |
| | I would still be committed to my favorite team regardless of the luck of any star players [14]. |

2.5.3. Questionnaire Distribution

The questionnaires were distributed on WeChat groups, Weibo, Xiaohongshu and other platforms for 20 days, and 39 questionnaires were collected, with a validity rate of 100 percent.

2.6. Interview

2.6.1. Interviewees

The research object of this study is BTS's fan group, and in the selection of interview participants, the criteria of this study are: (1) currently identifying themselves as BTS's fans; (2) having a better understanding of the activities and processes of BTS's fan group; (3) having more than 1 year's experience of liking BTS; and (4) conforming to the typical image of a fan as shown in the questionnaire object: female, around 20 years old, and a student.

Based on the above criteria, two interview respondents were selected for this study, both of whom were female, 20 years old, and undergraduate students. Interview subject A has liked BTS for a total of seven years, and interview subject B has liked BTS for a total of five years.

2.6.2. Interview Structure

In addition to asking for basic information, the interview questions in this study were distributed as three questions related to participation in and feelings about interpersonal interaction and human-product interaction, and one for each of the seven measurement dimensions of fan loyalty (Table 4).

Table 4: Interview structure

| Variable | Dimension | Question |
|-----------------------|---|--|
| Participatory culture | Interpersonal interaction | Do you watch fan-made videos? What types of videos do you watch? How do you feel after watching the videos? |
| | | Do you participate in fan events? How does participating in fan activities make you feel? |
| | | Do you participate in fan communities? Why do you participate? How do you feel about it? |
| | Human-product interaction | Do you follow BTS's social media platforms? How often do you check what BTS posts? Have you ever left them a message on their social platforms? How does this content make you feel? |
| | | Do you watch BTS's music videos, documentaries, group variety shows and other content? What can you learn from them? Does this content contribute to your impression of BTS? Does it bring anything to your personal life? |
| | | Do you want BTS to come to China? What are the reasons? What would you do if they came to China to develop? |
| Fan loyalty | Fan identification; Sense of satisfaction | Would you admit to being a fan in public? Why are you willing to admit it? |
| | Advertising willingness | Would you recommend BTS to others? In what ways? |
| | Consuming willingness | Have you ever been to a BTS concert? Or have you ever purchased any BTS-related products (number of times, platforms, ways of knowing)? What is the reason for buying? |
| | Negative news tolerance | Have you heard any negative news about BTS? How do you feel about the negative news? How did you feel when you first saw it? How do you digest such emotions? |
| | Preference | Would you still like BTS if it wasn't the so called TOP? What is the reason? What if they weren't the strongest in their field? |

2.6.3. Interview Process

Interviews were conducted via microphone. The length of the interview was one hour for each interviewee. Interview dialogues were recorded using audio recording and transcription.

3. Result

Table 5: Descriptive statistics results for variables

| Variable | Scenario | Maximum | Minimum | Average |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Fan identification | Fan community | 5 | 1 | 3.72 |
| | Fan activities | 5 | 1 | 4.42 |
| | Fan-made videos | 5 | 1 | 4.67 |
| | Idol social media | 5 | 1 | 4.56 |
| | Concerts | 5 | 1 | 5.00 |
| | Official release videos | 5 | 1 | 4.72 |
| Preference | Fan community | 5 | 1 | 3.72 |
| | Fan activities | 5 | 1 | 4.54 |
| | Fan-made videos | 5 | 1 | 4.79 |
| | Idol social media | 5 | 1 | 4.56 |
| | Concerts | 5 | 1 | 5.00 |
| | Official release videos | 5 | 1 | 4.72 |
| | Other questions | 5 | 1 | 4.68 |
| Sense of satisfaction | Fan community | 5 | 1 | 3.78 |
| | Fan activities | 5 | 1 | 4.12 |
| | Fan-made videos | 5 | 1 | 4.69 |
| | Idol social media | 5 | 1 | 4.51 |
| | Concerts | 5 | 1 | 5.00 |
| | Official release videos | 5 | 1 | 4.77 |
| Advertising willingness | Fan community | 5 | 1 | 3.56 |
| | Fan activities | 5 | 1 | 3.72 |
| | Fan-made videos | 5 | 1 | 3.77 |
| | Idol social media | 5 | 1 | 3.74 |
| | Concerts | 5 | 1 | 4.90 |
| | Official release videos | 5 | 1 | 3.85 |

In the original scale, 1=completely disagree, 2=comparatively disagree, 3=fairly, 4=comparatively agree, and 5=completely agree. As can be seen in Table 5, all the data for the four variables of fan identification, preference, sense of satisfaction, and advertising willingness are higher than 3.5, which means that the fans' agreement on the four questions related to participatory cultural promotion of fan identification, preference, sense of satisfaction, and advertising willingness are between “fairly” and “completely agree”. Therefore, H1, H2-1, H2-2, H2-4, and H2-6 can be proved. Although H2-3 and H2-5 are still to be discussed, from the data obtained from these four dimensions of fan loyalty measurement, it can already be concluded that participatory culture has a positive effect on fan loyalty.

At the same time, the responses of the interviewees provided evidences.

3.1. Interpersonal Interaction

For one, the interviewee stated her opinion about participation in fan communities.

Interviewee A: “Yes, for example, if something happens on Twitter, no matter which group it is about, then ARMY will troll that group together.”

It can be seen that fans are able to obtain a more solid emotional link from the fan community by assuming a common “external enemy”, so fans can establish a sense of belonging to the fan group from the fan community.

Secondly, interviewee expressed her approval of participating in fan activities.

Interviewee A: “There is more of a sense of me recognising that I am a member of the fans, and then there is very much a sense of belonging to the fan community.”

It can be seen that fans are able to build recognition of the fan community through interaction with fans when participating in fan activities.

Thirdly, interviewees talked about their feelings when watching fan-made videos.

Interview subject A: “I feel happy.”

Interview subject B: “Feeling more like BTS.”

Thus, the fact that fans feel fondness for their idols by watching fan-made videos, which even translates into a sense of happiness in their own personal lives, are indicative of the role of interpersonal interaction in promoting fan loyalty.

3.2. Human-product Interaction

For one, interviewees have many feelings about browsing the social media posted by their idols.

Interviewee B: “I’m the one who gets especially excited when Kim Taehyung (a member of BTS) posts some business replies and has a sense of satisfaction.”

Interviewee A: “I like to look at Instagram and the kind of daily life of film, food, and funny things they post on it when they’re on holiday. I would realise that everyone has a very different way of getting through life. In the original way of looking at them, I probably saw them more as a brand concept coming up, but inside INS I would find that it was an area that I had never discovered before. Because I’m introverted and don’t usually go out, it feels like someone else is taking you out with them.”

In response to this question, Interviewee B mentioned the satisfaction that comes when idol behaviour meets expectations. Interviewee A provided a new idea that the content released by idols allows fans to participate in their lives, thus experiencing what they cannot experience in their lives and having a sense of novelty and happiness.

Secondly, interviewees stated that they often watch official videos as well.

Interviewee B: “It feels like you can build a more comprehensive impression of them through this content, I guess.”

Interviewee A: “When I have a lot of things in my life that I can’t get over relatively well, after watching it, I found out that they are in the same state as myself, so let’s just let go of the difficulties in life.”

That is, fans not only get to know their idols from the videos and shorten the distance between them and their idols, but even learn about their idols’ state of life. In other words, fans let idols participate in their actual lives, establish their own identity with to fans, and gain happiness in their lives.

Thus, in summary, the questionnaire and interview can answer Q1 and Q2, proving H1, H2-1, H2-2, H2-4, and H2-6. That means participatory culture has a positive effect on fan loyalty.

4. Discussion

While the results of the study were able to answer the research questions, unexpectedly, the study also found slight discrepancies with the hypothesis.

First, some differences had happened to H2-5. Interviewees, however, expressed their general reluctance to turn to fan communities.

Interviewee B: “I don't really watch them chatting. I'm afraid of seeing some negative news, sensitive news or something. I mainly just read the kind of news about buying things cheaply at reduced prices and getting information about buying tickets for concerts and so on.”

The questionnaire data showed that the mean values of the dimensions of interpersonal interaction were generally lower than those of human-product interaction in this willingness. Moreover, the mean value of the question “When there is negative news, I will turn to the fan community and successfully dissipate the negative emotions” is even lower than the median value of the five-point scale. This result also suggests that fans' willingness to choose the fan community is low when it comes to dissipating negative emotions (Table 6).

Table 6: Negative news tolerance

| Variable | Scenario | Maximum | Minimum | Average |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Negative news tolerance | Fan community | 5 | 1 | 2.71 |
| | Fan activities | 5 | 1 | 3.04 |
| | Fan-made videos | 5 | 1 | 4.23 |
| | Idol social media | 5 | 1 | 4.13 |
| | Concerts | 5 | 1 | 4.90 |
| | Official release videos | 5 | 1 | 4.71 |

Through in-depth conversations with the interviewees, it is possible to get a glimpse of the psychological dynamics of fans behind this phenomenon.

Interviewee B: “I would choose not to read those negative comments. For example, if I see rumours of Kim Taehyung being in a relationship, I usually don't turn to other fans because we all have different viewpoints, and in the end, I just accept it.”

It can be seen that the reason for this result may lie in the fact that different fans have different viewpoints and thus fans generally do not tend to turn to other fans for help. At the same time, BTS fans will be more inclined to interact with BTS itself rather than with fans when they see negative news and develop negative emotions. This is reflected in the fact that fans are more inclined to watch videos (fan-made or officially released videos of BTS) or concerts, fan events, and other ways to have direct contact with BTS's image, music, and performances. The multi-sensory stimulation and closer proximity that can be gained in them makes it easier to bring a sense of intimacy and to be able to re-establish trust.

Again, interviewee responses reveal the complexity of H2-3.

When interviewees were asked whether the reason for consumption was primarily concerned with their own feelings, or whether they said they were concerned with what BTS could get out of it, all of them indicated that they were more concerned with the former, and showed a preference for utility in terms of purchase categories.

Interviewee A: “Official Merchandise, I guess. I buy more BT21 (BTS and an international cartoon brand company called ‘line friends’ jointly designed eight cartoon characters), which are some dolls that have absolutely nothing to do with their faces, or any variety of items, like rechargeables.”

Interviewee B: “I buy more clothes, including the ones they endorse themselves, like Calvin Klein, CLINE and those.”

Meanwhile, in the questionnaire measurements, the willingness to consume is at the lowest value in all the data compared to other fan loyalty measurement dimensions (Table 7).

Table 7: Consuming willingness

| Variable | Scenario | Maximum | Minimum | Average |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Consuming willingness | Fan community | 5 | 1 | 3.25 |
| | Fan activities | 5 | 1 | 3.27 |
| | Fan-made videos | 5 | 1 | 3.62 |
| | Idol social media | 5 | 1 | 3.87 |
| | Concerts | 5 | 1 | 4.30 |
| | Official release videos | 5 | 1 | 3.79 |

Combined with the interview responses, it can be seen that BTS fans in the participatory culture will generally prioritise their actual needs before selecting products that can bring actual benefits to BTS itself for purchase, and thus the fans' willingness to consume presents certain rational characteristics. This reflects the cultural advantage of participatory culture in guiding fans' consumption level.

In conclusion, in addition to confirming the research hypothesis, the existing research data and materials also bring some new findings. Firstly, the interaction between fans does not largely reflect the dissipation of negative emotions generated by negative news, probably because different fans have different views, and thus fans are generally not inclined to seek help from other fans. Secondly, fans' consuming willingness shows some rational characteristics, and they will be more inclined to consume products that are both meaningful to their own personal lives and beneficial to the idols themselves.

These new findings demonstrate the disadvantage of interpersonal interaction in participatory culture in resolving negative emotions, but human-product interaction complements it. Moreover, participatory culture has the advantage over other fan community cultures of being beneficial to fans' mental health while at the same time not guiding fans' consumption too much.

5. Conclusions

This study empirically explores the topic of how the participatory culture of the idol group BTS affects fan loyalty through interviews and questionnaires. The literature review revealed that despite numerous studies on BTS and its fans, there is a gap in empirical research on the impact of participatory culture on fan loyalty.

The study found that the participatory culture of the BTS fan community had a significant positive effect on fan loyalty. This participatory culture not only promotes close ties between fans, but also increases fan loyalty to the idol brand, which is manifested in stronger fan identification, sense of satisfaction, advertising willingness, and preference.

In addition, the study found that although fans maintained a certain degree of consumption rationality in the participatory culture, this culture still had an advantage in guiding fans and was able to mitigate the phenomenon of impulsive consumption. This finding provides a model for the development of idol groups, emphasising the important role of participatory culture in fostering and maintaining fan loyalty.

This study aims to present an interesting phenomenon in fan communities, but still has the shortcomings of a more limited data source and simpler data processing in terms of empirical research. In the future, a more in-depth study with a wider scope of investigation and richer data will be conducted to address the unanswered questions in this study, such as whether the reluctance of fans to turn to fan communities to resolve their negative emotions is universal, why fans in participatory culture can maintain their rationality in consumption, and how idol groups and their companies should take advantage of this phenomenon to adjust their branding strategies. Meanwhile, other researchers are expected to criticise and discuss the issues in this study.

All in all, this study fills the gap of empirical research on the impact of BTS participatory culture on fan loyalty, and provides new perspectives and understandings of the interactive relationship between idol groups and fans.

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