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# Revealing Masculinity in BTS's Music: Between Self Identity and Market Desire

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## Abstract

*(Previous studies assessed that the Korean Wave, including the music group Bangtan Sonyeondan (BTS), had campaigned for a different side of masculinity. BTS, through their music, seems to carry the concept of a "female-friendly model of masculinity". This feminine masculine identity is attached to BTS members and creates a typical stereotype of Asian men in the United States. This study aims to determine the representation of masculinity displayed by the boy group BTS in their video clips from 2013 to 2021 and observe at least 33 video clips. The researcher observed the symbol representation in the video clip with a Critical Discourse Analysis from Norman Fairclough and then conducted a thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke. The results showed a change in the representation of masculinity throughout their careers. This change in representation is also a form of compromise and negotiation between BTS as artists and the music industry's demands at an international level).*

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## Introduction

Raewyn Connell emphasize that hegemonic masculinity is the behaviour that is considered to be ideal for men to exhibit in a society (Connell, 2020). Its primary purpose is to justify male superiority over females, thereby legitimizing patriarchal social systems (Scoggins & O'Brien, 2016). Men are expected to be more resolute, fearless, mighty, and powerful than women in order to fulfil the requirements of masculinity (Connell, 2020). The idea of hegemonic masculinity also requires men to hide their emotional responses and place an emphasis on their logical thinking (Hooper, 2019; Messerschmidt, 2018). If they do not, the value of their masculinity will decline. New masculinity, also known as soft masculinity, was discovered by gender researchers in the 2000s as a more female-friendly model of masculinity (Ainslie, 2017). As many other gender researchers followed up on Jung's observations of masculinity in East Asian popular culture, the idea of "soft masculinity" began to take shape. Louie refers to the 'girlish' looks and demeanours of

Japanese boybands (Jung, 2011) and likewise describes how notions of Chinese masculinity have 'softened' and become 'more feminine' (Louie, 2012). In visual terms, Soft Masculinity is described as "male images that are exceptionally feminine to Western eyes" (G. Song, 2016), while Jung believes that this is due to sentiments of nostalgia for an older conception of masculinity (Jung, 2011).

Soft masculinity can be found in cultural products from all over East Asia. However, the growth and export of Korean pop culture (known as the "Korean Wave" or "Hallyu"), which followed similar Japanese products in the late 1990s, has had the most impact on East Asian masculinity and changed it the most (Jeong et al., 2017; Kim, 2022; Trisni et al., 2019). The phenomenon of the success of the boy group BTS (*Bangtan Seonyondan*) has become increasingly global since dominating the top of the Billboard Global music chart. Even the success of BTS is on par with the Samsung and Hyundai company in terms of contributing to the South Korean government's economy because BTS often promotes South Korean products such as automotive products, tourism, cosmetics, food, and fashion (Keith, 2021; Proctor, 2021). Based on a report from The Wealth Record, in 2021, BTS's revenue reached 100 million dollars (Sullivan, 2021) which was converted to the equivalent of the Indonesian (with 267million citizen) State Budget in the same year.

The evolution of the concept of masculinity has finally created opportunities in the entertainment industry as a commodity. The media also benefits as a medium that perpetuates the concept of masculinity (Johnson et al., 2008; Prividera & Howard III, 2006). If it relates to business profits, then every effort is also made to obtain ever-increasing profits, to the point where the authenticity of masculinity is sometimes disregarded. Indeed, the media businessman is more concerned with the profit and loss of the entertainment products they produce (Croteau et al., 2006; Waschková Císařová & Metyková, 2015). As Beynon (2002) coined the phrases "new man as nurturer" and "new man as a narcissist," these phrases describe the modern male. The "new man as nurturer" voluntarily supported the women's movement and assumed a full domestic role, elevating their and their fellow men's consciousness and fostering a more caring, sharing, nurturing man. In the meantime, the "new man as a narcissist" is linked to commercial masculinity and innovative advertising (Beynon, 2002). Beginning in the 1980s, the commercial exploitation of men as sex objects grew into a multi-billion-dollar industry. Post-industrialism and the emergence of "image industries" such as advertising, media, promotions, public relations, and entertainment propelled the new man as a narcissist (Beynon, 2002; Lanuza et al., 2014).

Behind the success of BTS, the BTS group is also campaigning for a different side of masculinity. BTS seems to carry the concept of a "female-friendly model of masculinity" (Ainslie, 2017) which conveys positive messages about kindness, self-love, self-acceptance, and comfort and hope in their music (Kim, 2022). This feminine masculine identity is then attached to BTS members and creates a typical stereotype of Asian men in the United States (K. Y. Song & Velding, 2020) intercultural sensitivity has been the utmost important quality for global citizenship. Empirical literature on how gender norms operate across countries in the realm of a global circulation of media contents is limited. This study examines how young American individuals perceived masculinity embodied through Korean pop male band members' bodies. Survey data suggest that U.S. cultural norms played a significant role in research participants' (N = 772. At the beginning of their debut, BTS came up with the song War of Hormone, which was considered very misogynistic with the symbols shown in the girl's video clip, choreography, costumes, and song lyrics (Ju, 2019; Putri & Mintarsih, 2020).

However, *Big Hit Entertainment* is a record label that houses BTS and is led by Bang Si Hyuk (Hitman Bang), a producer, composer, and songwriter who also serves as

CEO. Big Hit Entertainment contributed to the transformation of the K-pop industry's marketing system. In the past, agencies frequently requested that television and radio stations play songs and music, but Big Hit Entertainment has accelerated the process by developing cutting-edge technology. Since his debut, Bang Si Hyuk has utilized AI (Artificial Intelligence) technology in audio production, content, and even its application, enabling artists to continue interacting with their fans. This strategy works because many Kpopers use new media, especially social media, to enjoy Korean's music (Khairil et al., 2019) movies and musics. However, the Korean fever lasts about a decade. During that period, this commodity became better known as Korean Pop or K-Pop where teenagers who became the biggest consumers of this commodity known as K-Popers. K-Popers can not be separated from the technology development and the use of social media. This study is carried out using three aspects (frequency, duration and attention and their fans often imitate them by do role playing on social media (Purwaningtyas & Oktara, 2023). Bang Si Hyuk was one of the first individuals in South Korea to use artificial intelligence in the entertainment industry (Haq & Mardianti, 2020). In addition, Bang Si-Hyuk and his executives conducted extensive market research in 2011 with great vigour. This result led to the development of a sustainable business model, the identification of the flaws in the existing K-pop idol system, and the promotion of a balanced relationship with the artists (Sharma & Jena, 2020).

The existence of a system built by the agency, BTS's entry onto the international stage is also influenced by media digitization's presence. Therefore, the rise of BTS on the global stage is attributable to the intensification of three changes during the 2010s decade: the expansion of online music fandoms, the expansion of music video programming and global consumption of YouTube music videos, and the emergence of an idol fandom involving non-music merchandise, games, and fiction. As of 2000, K-pop relied on attractive dancers and sharp dance choreography that suited YouTube videos (Kim, 2022). BTS's popularity persists despite the absence of a clear marketing strategy for Western audiences due to its consistent message content. BTS's display of feminine masculinity demonstrates that its members have feelings of emotion, friendship, love, sensitivity, and understanding and are not threatening to the intended market. BTS flaunts the body free of hair, sweat, and odour while wearing trendy clothing and fashion accessories and performing choreography in sync with the song's message. For instance, the collaboration with American pop singer Halsey on the track "Boys with Luv. BTS exhibits a professional demeanour while engaging in childlike laughter, demonstrating their unconventional masculinity. BTS presents their bodies as objects that demonstrate friendly masculinity and attract women's attention. These K-pop idols can commercialize themselves as an alternative or exotic masculinity to attract female Western audiences (Kim, 2022)

Big Hit as the agency of BTS do marketing strategy involves presenting masculine femininity. BTS's visuals are a fantasy-reality-abstracted version of K-pop and give a piece of calm music for the audience who overwhelm and depressed from various personal and social issues. The agency also has a detailed plan and concept under their agency. The idols are being recruited and trained, so they fulfil the requirement of an idol that exudes attention, sympathy, and motivation. On the other hand, agencies provide strategies with gripping narratives to engage the audience; the agency pays close attention to the audience's emotional state; the agency pays close attention to the audience's emotional state (Kim, 2022).

This study aims to determine the discourse of masculinity displayed by the boy group BTS in their video clips from 2013 to 2021 and observe at least 33 video clips. Researchers observes the symbol representation and interpret the context of the symbol with the social,

political, and cultural dynamics that occur when the symbol in the video clip is released to the public.

## **Methodology**

### **Critical Discourse Analysis**

Critical Discourse Analysis is a social science method that aims to confront authority with the truth. In a sense, CDA is both advocative and partisan, as it advocates (often implicit) action and change to correct certain “wrongs” in social life and takes the side of those who suffer from such “wrongs.” (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2018). The CDA primarily concerns political values (justice, equality, and liberty) as action motivations (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2018). Therefore, CDA is interested in emancipatory knowledge, a concern with social wrongs that can and should be rectified, including political “wrongs” (injustice, unfairness, discrimination, domination).

Critical Discourse Analysis analyzes action-oriented discourse, such as political and managerial, organizational, and other forms of discourse (Rogers, 2004, 2013). This methodology emphasizes discourse and the relationships between discourse and other social elements (power relations, ideologies, institutions, social identities) (Fairclough, 2013; Fairclough & Fairclough, 2018). The critical analysis does not merely describe existing realities; instead, it seeks to explain by illustrating the mechanisms associated with the term “capitalism.” Therefore, CDA examines the relationships between semiotics and other social elements.

Analyzing social elements begins with the three levels of social reality (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2018): social structures, social practices, and social events. Fairclough emphasizes the dialectical relationship between structure and event and between semiotic and other elements within each. The methodology consists of four “steps”: 1) focusing on the semiotic aspects of a social wrong; 2) identifying obstacles to addressing the social wrong; 3) considering whether the social order “needs” the social wrong, and 4) identifying possible ways to overcome the obstacles (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2018).

This research, therefore, begins by searching for social wrongs in the object of study that can be productively approached trans-disciplinarily, with a particular emphasis on the dialectical relationships between semiotic and other “moments.” Identify the issue, which will serve as the “entry point” for analyzing the dialectical relationships between semiotics and other social elements. The subsequent step is to determine if the social order “needs” the social wrong and observe the discourse ideology that contributes to maintaining extraordinary power and dominance relations. Developing a semiotic “entry point” into research on how these obstacles are tested, challenged, and resisted.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Masculinity of BTS**

#### *Old Masculinities of BTS*

As stated previously, masculinity is not a static trait but is susceptible to change due to numerous environmental constructions and rules (Beynon, 2002). Throughout their career, BTS also has experienced shifts in how they portray masculinity in song lyrics and music videos. At the start of his career, BTS members frequently wore black clothing, metal accessories, and black eyeliner to create a “fierce and furious” impression.





Picture 2 BTS – No More Dream (2013)



Picture 1 BTS – N.O (2013)

Since the beginning of their debut, BTS has chosen hip hop as their musical style. The two early BTS members, Kim Namjoon (RM) and Min Yoon-gi (Suga), who began their musical careers as underground Korean Hip Hop singers and songwriters, also influenced this musical style. Hip-hop music has been used to resist political, social, economic, and racial injustices against various marginalized groups in society since its inception. The way they dress is influenced by a Hip Hop culture that ultimately combats dominance. The hip-hop style was developed by individuals who, despite having limited resources, desired to be acknowledged for their individuality. Gold chains and ostentatious jewel are currently fashionable. Hip-hop accessories also symbolize resistance to the dominant social class. As Whitley emphasized, the ornaments worn by and for initiates 'to flaunt' were adorned with hints of savagery and irreverence, symbolizing the wearer's courage and lack of fear. As a result, in 2013, BTS consistently displayed masculinity through their clothing, much like the pioneers of hip-hop music.

At the beginning of their career, BTS's music videos frequently exhibited a resistant and rebellion attitude. For instance, the song *No More Dreams* (2013) shows the BTS members dressed in black with chain accessories and gothic makeup, accompanied by a provocative choreographer giving thumps down and hostile facial expressions. Still, in the same music video, graffiti that reads BTS, No More Dreams, and Hip Hop is found on school walls and other locations. In the end of video, BTS engages in unruly behaviour by destroying the facilities, which their actions cease because police helicopters have bounded them.

Since the 1970s, when the Punk music genre was born in England and its lyrics frequently satirized the authorities, music as a medium of resistance and social criticism has been widely practised. BTS's performance in the music video for *No More Dreams* (2013) is more closely associated with Punk music. As a form of resistance to the consumerism of the younger generation, BTS appears to adopt the eccentric, dark-dominated Punks fashion as a form of dress. The members of BTS also wear chain necklaces, typically a sign of solidarity among punks. These symbols appear in the *No More Dreams music video* (2013). Even one of the BTS members, RM, a.k.a. Kim Namjoon, uses the Mohawk hairstyle, which signifies anti-oppression among punks, in the music video. It should not come as a surprise that masculinity is central to the (self-) definition of some music styles, especially those that emerged directly from a predominantly male youth subculture, such as Rock 'n' Roll, Heavy Metal, and Punk Rock (Lay, 2021). As a boy group from an agency that was unpopular in Korea at the time, BTS chose a musical path that brought resistance music to the forefront. In order to carry out this resistance, they must repeatedly demonstrate their masculinity as strong, courageous, rocky, and unrivalled in their music videos and song lyrics.

The music video displays masculinity by demonstrating the men's strength, bravery, and fighting prowess through more than just the men's attire. However, it is also present in their song lyrics.

Table 1 List of BTS's Song with Old Masculinity

Release Year	Tittle	Lyrics
2013	No More Dreams	<p><b>Don't worry</b> about university, I'll go somewhere even if it's far away</p> <p><b>Stop telling me</b> to switch the path, hey, take care of your own business</p> <p>Adults and <b>parents cram us with dreams</b> stuck in place</p> <p>The No. 1 dream job, a government employee?</p>
2013	We are Bulletproof Pt. 2	<p>Amid all that, I broke the limit of myself</p> <p>Meanwhile, some are luckily picked up by an agency</p> <p>And being forced to rap as they can't sing</p> <p><b>Such a waste</b> to call you a rapper</p> <p>We go hard, <b>we have no fear</b></p>
2013	N.O	<p>A good house, a good car, will <b>these things bring happiness?</b></p> <p>Then how <b>do you explain my unhappiness?</b></p> <p>Outside, there are so many kids like me, <b>living the life of a puppet</b></p> <p>Who will take responsibility?</p>

The lyrics on BTS's debut album emphasize opposition to the South Korean education system. Since their youth, the younger generation of South Korea has been subject to numerous demands. In South Korean films and dramas, this intensely competitive education has also been criticized at length. Like those, BTS's music aims to encourage the youth to pursue their dreams and ideas rather than fulfilling the dreams of others. Through their music, BTS would encourage the younger generation to explore their talents further, even if they were not born into a fortunate family. The musicality of BTS appeals to the younger generation of Korea because they share the same sentiments as the group's lyrics.

However, with the 2014 release of the song War of Hormone, BTS's old masculinity became even more apparent, as the song contains mesogenic lyrics and discriminates against women.

*Girls, you make me cough, your clothes, they're see-through.*

*Girl, I keep my place in front of my computer every night because you are luring me.*

BTS song lyrics objectify women because they portray women as the source of men's hormonal conflicts. It is as if women are responsible for men's feelings of insanity, panic, sweating, acne, and inability to control their hormones. Hormones in men and women are naturally occurring substances that cannot be stimulated or caused by external factors. Hormones are chemical substances produced by specialized cells of the endocrine glands to influence the body's work process system. Consequently, hormonal changes in humans are caused by the biology of the human body and not by external factors. Age, genetic disorders, certain medical conditions, exposure to toxins and radiation, and biological clock disruption can affect human hormones. Even though BTS stated in the interview

that they wanted to remove the song from their hit list, the lyrics of War of Hormone, which discriminated against women, were a form of hegemonic masculinity dilemma, and it must be acknowledged that BTS was trapped in this condition.

This part presents results/findings and analysis of the findings. Figures or graphs can also be presented here to support your findings. We suggest that you mention supporting instrument(s), in forms of illustration, figure, photograph, table, and graph. Each instrument must be orderly numbered and given a title, followed by source from which you make the citation. Should the instrument is the result from the author's analysis, please write: 'source: author's analysis.'

In addition this part also contains reflection/discussion according to the research findings. In presenting the discussion, use a comprehensive explanation in order to elaborate the whole data found during the research. By doing so, you can fill gap of knowledge. Findings that rely on meaning construct tends to present a theoretical framework, so there will be an unnecessary repetition as it has been presented in the research methodology.

### *New Masculinities of BTS*

The last journal stated that BTS began to expand overseas massively after a pandemic in 2020. After the pandemic, BTS release an album 'Butter' and the single song 'Permission to Dance' in the Movie Clip. Not only experiencing hegemony masculinity or old masculinity, but BTS has also experienced a change in the concept of 'New Masculinity'. It is called relationship-oriented masculinity, emotion-centred and driven by humility (Yoo, 2020). This masculinity describes how the personnel want to express the expressions such as The joy, sadness, and even anger found in MVs, including the lyrics of the songs *Fake Love* (2018), *Boy With Luv* (2019), *Life Goes On* (2020), and *Permission to Dance* (2021). Some examples of song lyrics that describe their cheerful expressions are as follows:

Table 2 List of BTS's Song with New Masculinity

Release Year	Title	Lyrics	Emotion
2018	<i>Fake Love</i>	"For you I pretend like I'm happy when I'm sad"	Sadness
		"I'm so sick of this fake love, fake love, fake love. I'm sorry but it's fake love"	Disappointment
2019	<i>Boy With Luv</i>	"I want to know everything, how was your day, tell me. What makes you happy, please chat me"	Happiness
2020	<i>Life Goes On</i>	"One day the world stopped, without any warning. Spring didn't know what to wait, it didn't even appear a minute late"	Sadness
2021	<i>Permission to Dance</i>	"I wanna dance, the music's got me going, Ain't nothing that can stop how we move, yeah. Let's break our plans and live just like we're golden. And roll in like we're dancing fools"	Joy

Table 2 shows that BTS shows a change in masculinity from hegemonic masculinity to soft masculinity. The table shows the form of expression given by BTS, not only one

emotion but a variety of emotions shown. Like the song *Fake Love*, which shows feelings of disappointment and sadness. The song 'fake love' talks about someone who finds true love, but in the process of love, he realizes that what he felt from the start with his partner was just a lie. The song *Fake Love* here is very different compared to the early era of BTS debut. It is packed with differences not only from the lyrics of the song, which express the emotional feeling of sadness and disappointment compared to highlighting the expression of 'bad boy' and in the MV it highlights the personal Jin BTS shows sadness through expressions of depression and crying.



Picture 3 Jin BTS – *Fake Love* (2018)

Another form of BTS expressing the 'soft masculinity' side is shown in the MV in the image of facial expressions, body gestures, clothing accessories to property arrangements in the BTS song MV. The MV *Boy With Luv* shows the bright side of a man with expressions, faces, and body gestures that are cuter, as depicted in V BTS that looks cuter in the depiction of these facial expressions. Not only that, the hair colour shown is not neutral but a bright colour, such as blue. Even more feminine clothing accessories, such as necklaces and rings with brighter colours (picture 4). Other indications are also seen in the accessories used by all other BTS personnel, clothes dominated by the colour pink, and the dance movements are getting softer and more flexible (picture 5).



Picture 4 BTS – *Boy with Luv* (2019)    Picture 5 V BTS – *Boy with Luv* (2019)

The pictures above are similar to the statement by Jung (2011, in Putri & Mintarsih, 2020) that men's ability to express outward emotions is an embodiment of an ideal "new man." Their vulnerability shows "tender charisma," a hybrid of masculinity and femininity—manly charisma and feminine tenderness. The change in male charisma exposed by BTS turned into a 'good boy' man after the rise of the Hallyu trend in South Korea and even shot up on the global scene (Putri & Mintarsih, 2020).

Unlike in the early years, BTS debuted with the dominance of the 'bad boy character and led to hegemonic masculinity; from 2015-2021, BTS shifted to the image of 'Good Boy'. The image is determined in the MV Clip, one of which is the song *Permission to Dance* the



song, which was created in 2021, talks about an invitation to everyone to say goodbye to covid-19 and invites everyone to return to happiness after facing dark times in the past pandemic Covid-19. In this MV, BTS personnel are depicted with colourful costumes and accessories, and the layout of the place and property has elements of bright colours, cheerful facial expressions, and energetic dance movements that still show flexibility. The style depicts soft masculinity by combining the sides of femininity and masculinity, which is imaged through the MV *Permission to Dance*.



Picture 6 BTS – *Permission to Dance* (2021)

John MacInnes argues that masculinity initially exists as a fantasy about what men should be like, a chimerical construction to help people make sense of their lives (MacInnes, 1998b, 1998a). The influence of cultural, historical, and geographical context, feminism, and the gay rights movement can influence the construction of masculinity, and sexuality is no longer considered fixed and innate (Beynon, 2002; Lanuza et al., 2014). Men are acculturated into masculinity, which consists of social codes of behavior that they learn to reproduce in culturally appropriate ways, according to Beynon (2001). MacInnes also predicted that the only difference between men and women would be anatomical; consequently, the end of masculinity as a significant step toward global equality rights is imminent, both in the real world and in the analysis (MacInnes, 1998b, 1998a).

The old man-ism concept symbolizes by “male toys” (fast cars, motorcycles, guns, tanks, steel, and helicopters), action devices, adventure, competition, and aggression (Beynon, 2002). In contrast, new man-ism emphasizes men who are more caring, sensitive, domesticated, and expressive (Beynon, 2002; Villamarín-Freire, 2022). The media then perpetuates these two ideas via photographs, images, cinematic, plots, and narratives (Beynon, 2002). Therefore, masculinity is culturally constructed and rapidly changing. The evolution of the concept of masculinity has finally created opportunities in the entertainment industry as a commodity. The media also benefits as a medium that perpetuates the concept of masculinity (Johnson et al., 2008; Prividera & Howard III, 2006). If it relates to business profits, then every effort is also made to obtain ever-increasing profits, to the point where the authenticity of masculinity is sometimes disregarded. Indeed, the media businessman is more concerned with the profit and loss of the entertainment products they produce (Croteau et al., 2006; Waschková Císařová & Metyková, 2015). As Beynon (2002) coined the phrases “new man as nurturer” and “new man as a narcissist,” these phrases describe the modern male. The “new man as nurturer” voluntarily supported the women’s movement and assumed a full domestic role, elevating their and their fellow men’s consciousness and fostering a more caring, sharing, nurturing man. In the meantime, the “new man as a narcissist” is linked to commercial masculinity and innovative advertising (Beynon, 2002). Beginning in the 1980s, the commercial exploitation of men as sex objects grew into a multi-billion-dollar industry. Post-industrialism and the emergence of “image industries” such as advertising, media, promotions, public relations, and entertainment propelled the new man as a narcissist (Beynon, 2002; Lanuza et al., 2014).

In addition, the image as a 'Good Boy' is also seen based on the issues that BTS has consistently brought to ARMYs. It is related to self-love, the importance of tolerance for diversity between races and genders, and no longer discussing misogynistic things or the songs having patriarchal power. As evidenced when BTS members were invited to the 2018 UN General Assembly session in New York, RM, a leader of BTS members, campaigned for 'Speak Yourself', which is a message about inviting the younger generation to love themselves, to find their voice. Moreover, he dared to show himself to the world. In his speech, RM also reminded us that the youth generation does not have to worry about their country of origin, skin colour, or gender in expressing themselves (kompas.com, 2020). Even in 2021, BTS was invited to the 76th UN general assembly 2021. In this case, BTS was appointed as the envoy of the President of South Korea, Moon Jae In, representing future generations and cultures. In his speech, Jin, RM, Suga, J-Hope, Jimin, V, and Jungkook brought a story from a generation affected by the pandemic and, in his speech, offered enthusiasm and hope (CNN Indonesia, 2021).

Unlike the previous year, during BTS's image of hegemonic masculinity, the songs that were created contained many songs that were 'rebel' and full of criticism and were against the government system. Meanwhile, when BTS aimed at soft masculinity, BTS was more inclined to bring songs about self-love and did not aim at fighting the government system. In 2021, BTS was appointed as South Korea's public diplomatic envoy.



Picture 7 BTS on UN General Assembly 2018 and 2021

The selection of BTS as representatives of young people in this UN session speech is a form of popularity that Big Hit Entertainment has formed. Hence, it is also an opportunity for BTS to show soft masculinity globally. Putri & Mintarsih (2020) state that popular culture plays a significant role in introducing a new form of masculinity through K-Pop and shaping the representation of gender identity.

### **BTS for Expose New Masculinity Genuinely?**

From 2015 to 2021, BTS represented different new masculinity when they first debuted. Nevertheless, the question is whether the new masculinity that BTS has discussed to ARMYs and the public is purely their identity or is it just a corporation/agency creation to attract audiences according to popular culture trends following the commodities of the music industry.

The music video, concert and blog revolve around the members' feminine appearance, grooming practices, and emotional expressions (Daily Vox 2018; Bennett 2020, in Kim G., 2022). The alternative practice of masculinity offered by BTS is an identity discourse because it follows market commodities. Even the discourse of masculinity identity offered is not the real identity. This BTS's documentation data via Twitter @BTS\_twt spanning 2013-2021 shows the person's appearance, practice, and expression leading to hegemonic

masculinity. The author takes several examples of images that show that each member's image shows the masculinity side that has power from the form of appearance used, photo poses, and written captions, as written by @bts\_twt on June 19, 2015, and attaching Jungkook's photo, as follows:

"Will catch you, illuwa."

In the picture on Twitter, Jungkook is still wearing black earrings, black clothes, and a 'macho' man's facial expression.



Picture 12 Jungkook on Tweet @bts\_twt (source: twitter.com)

It's the same with posts via Twitter @bts\_twt on May 27, 2020, and on September 13, 2021, which show that the post depicts BTS personnel, such as Suga (post dated May 27, 2020) portraying a 'bad boy' man after he finished filming the MV 'daechwita'. Meanwhile, in the post on September 13, 2021, Jimin and RM showed their sides as macho men by showing their stocky bodies and macho male facial expressions. The display of the expression 'macho man as a symbol of male power becomes the imagination of women (Ibrahim & Akhmad, 2014) about the appearance and body attractiveness of the BTS personnel.



Picture 13 Suga on Tweet @bts\_twt (source: twitter.com)



Picture 14 RM and Jimin on Tweet @bts\_twt (source:twitter.com)

From some of the documentation photos that they uploaded via social media via Twitter social media, it shows that this is a form of complex masculinity, namely that BTS personnel deliberately focus on masculinity and good looks on the attractiveness of the male body and physical (Ibrahim & Akhmad, 2014). In fact, in that vulnerable year, BTS imaged a man



with a soft masculinity identity in their song MV. Ibrahim & Ahmad (2014) stated that in the order of masculinity, it remains hegemonic even though the term soft masculinity indicates things that are feminism, so it is seen only as a ploy or trick of hegemonic masculinity. This statement is in line with the contrast shown by BTS personnel in the MV shown to the audience, namely the change in soft masculinity identity with the identity of BTS personnel still attached to the hegemonic masculinity they display through social media.

The existence of contrasting identities shows that the soft masculinity displayed by BTS is not their respective identities. Instead, a culturally idealized version of the meaning of masculinity is constructed by the market and consumer culture (Ibrahim & Akhmad, 2014). This cultural construction is also supported by media that create culture, namely through media helping to create cultural experiences that are part of social practice (Burton, 2012). BTS built this identity anomaly because of the demand for consumer culture and the media to support the identity anomaly. In short, that agency, media, and market trends are interrelated to influence the formation of the identity of BTS personnel that the public can consume, and the identity of masculinity that is formed is not their own identity.

### **BTS as a Potential Commodity**

Big Hit Entertainment initially appeared to provide alternative music distinct from other agencies. In its development, however, it became identical to another gigantic agency because of BTS. Executive Director of Korean Cultural Center New York, Yun Jeung Jo, emphasize that they are genuine. They demonstrate that their lives are comparable to ours. They are identical to us. They would never achieve this level of popularity otherwise<sup>1</sup>.

Big Hit Entertainment recognizes that each member of BTS possesses the power of a Midas hand, as anything touched by a BTS member will sell well on the market. Sales tickets are always sold out offline and online. The official merchandise at the Weverse shop, a particular application for the Big Hit agency, also sells out in less than seven days. Moreover, as a promotional event following each concert, BTS members will use the merchandise to attract more fans to purchase it. The managerial party also prohibits BTS members from uploading personal photos that contain the logo of a competing brand with which they are not affiliated. Even if unintentional, the BTS management is aware of the marketing effect on the brand. The rules established by the BTS management have limited the freedom of each member and compelled them to exercise restraint before pressing the camera keys. In actuality, if BTS members genuinely enjoy using a brand due to the quality of the product, fans will appreciate their sincerity in sharing products they genuinely enjoy.

Compared to when they are in Indonesia and become brand ambassadors for Tokopedia or Go Food. That activity is only for marketing transactional purpose since they lives in South Korea, so they will not use these e-commerce applications in their daily lives. These brands' research indicates that both brands want BTS as their brand ambassador because the customer wants it. Thus, BTS utilizes the brand due to market demands and not because BTS members authentically enjoy the product.

The relationship between BTS and ARMY can be categorized as either idol-fan or seller-customer. In the past, BTS frequently greeted their fans on social media due to a lack of funds to pay for television or radio airplay. However, BTS is now communicating with ARMY through vlogs; only subscribers can view the videos. ARMYs who do not subscribe can only view the video snippets on social media without understanding its full context. Members of BTS do not desire this type of transactional relationship. Notice how one of the BTS members, Jimin, responded to an ARMY who claimed to have used an illegal website to watch a BTS concert. Jimin responded with a warmth that he would continue to

<sup>1</sup> CNBC (2019, July 10). *How BTS Became A Major Monet*



love the ARMY regardless of the outcome. In this entertainment industry, the relationship between BTS and ARMY has hit a wall of capitalism. Due to transactional activities, the relationship between BTS and ARMY must be limited to the benefit of capital owners, who derive certain advantages from the situation.

## Conclusion

BTS emerged from the Korean industry, where entertainment was too manufactured. However, BTS tried to fight against the industrial system using a different strategy. BTS's agency, Big Hit, allows each member to write their song, which is sometimes a social critique of the government and culture in Korea. BTS conveyed their criticism through song lyrics emphasized through music videos and vlogs that they made with hegemonic appearances. At the beginning of his career, BTS was attached to Hip Hop and Punk music affiliated with hegemonic masculinity. However, now BTS's global prominence creates irony because although it is suspected that the music creates new masculinity that is female-friendly, it is not necessarily the true identity of masculinity. Due to the prevailing system and regulations, some members have to hide their true identities even more to avoid societal controversy. The masculine identity that they appear in their music is not the full one because many interests support them in expressing their masculine identity.

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