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"Let's all do our part and stream":
Understanding authorship and agency in online constructions of K-pop stan identity

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Abstract
This thesis examines the role of authorship and agency in the construction of identity within online K-pop standoms. The construction of identity is understood as a continuous discursive and communicative process, in line with historical research on discourse and identity. During the 21st century, Korean pop music has become a worldwide phenomenon, culminating in the band BTS becoming the first South Korean group to top the US Singles chart. The success of K-pop is often attributed to fan-driven, coordinated campaigns on social media platforms. In a world where the self is increasingly constructed through media, and around media objects, it is important to continuously attempt to gain a better understanding of the implications thereof. To capture the deeply mediatised nature of K-pop communities, this study frames their online communicative practices as authorship, to make visible the relationship between authorship and discourse in expressions of identity on social media. A critical discourse analysis is conducted using the discourse-historical approach, exploring the interactive and discursive strategies of so-called BTS *stans* on Twitter. The combination of authorship and discourse analysis was chosen to capture the initiation and recontextualisation of discourse in the process of communicating via Twitter. The analysis indicates that K-pop stans construct their collective identity through a combination of strategic deployment of discursive strategies and authorial utilising of platform affordances. The construction of collective identity is not one process, but multiple networked and interdependent processes, including but not limited to tweeting and retweeting. Stans of BTS were found to not only construct their individual and collective identities, but the identity of BTS as well.

Word count: 29823

Key words: social media, K-pop, discourse, authorship, mediatisation, critical discourse analysis, recontextualisation, remix, stan, Twitter, BTS

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1. Introduction

It has been argued that in the age of digital society, we increasingly construct our identities around and through media (Duffet, 2013). This is perhaps particularly evident within fandoms.

During the 21st century, Korean pop music, or K-pop, has become a worldwide phenomenon, growing steadily with acts such as BLACKPINK and BIGBANG gaining global recognition, before eventually culminating in BTS becoming the first South Korean group to top the US Singles chart (The Guardian, 2020). The group did so with their hit single "Dynamite", tallying 33.9 million US streams in one week. Among the many factors that have contributed to their success, the power of social media, and the ways in which their fans have utilised digital platforms to support their favourite musicians' meteoric rise, must be mentioned. Indeed, K-pop's success is often in great part attributed to the fan-driven, coordinated campaigns on platforms such as Twitter, TikTok and Instagram. At the time of writing, a Twitter search for "BTS" returns hundreds of posts published in the last minute alone. In an interview with The New York Times, a spokeswoman for Twitter said that BTS were in fact the most tweeted about artist for the last three years as of 2019 (Coscarelli, 2020).

By pushing their fan object, i.e. their favourite artist, to become the first Korean group to reach the top of the US billboard charts, as well as crowdfunding large donations to social justice causes, fans, or stans, of K-pop group BTS have proven that they hold the power to shape global cultural discourse, as well as inspire social and political movements. As emphasised by Coscarelli, (2020) K-pop stan communities have developed efficient tactical practices for achieving their goals of making fan objects go viral, by utilising social media networks. They flood every available medium with messages, images and videos discussing their favorite artists, telling people to stream or buy their music, and to buy their merch. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this passionate affection for their artists sometimes translates to an almost mob-like behaviour, with k-pop stans having been accused of harassing critics and rivals (ibid.). Most importantly, k-pop stans wants you to "stan" their favourite artists.

The term stan, slang for obsessive fans (McCurry, 2020), is often used to emphasise the intensity with which they act, and the communities are sometimes referred to as *fan armies*. Fittingly, the fandom for BTS, currently the most popular K-pop group, is called ARMY (Moon, 2020). The aforementioned fact that BTS were the most tweeted about musicians as

of 2019, suggests that they are successful in their pursuits. To better understand how this community acts and takes shape, this study will attempt to analyse the construction of their identity.

K-pop stans who tweet about their fan object present an interesting case for studying, not only because of their metric impact, but because of how obviously dependent their collective identity is on networked digital media, as evidenced partly by the metric success, but also by the global nature of the standom. Despite being a South Korean band, BTS are topping billboards and "trending" on Twitter all around the world, and it is most often attributed to the collective power of the standom. Then, there is also the duality of the term "stan". Firstly, it refers to *being a stan*, suggesting that it is a description of an identity. Secondly, it also refers to an action, *to stan* an object. Consequently, the role of the stan fits perfectly within the idea of identity as performance (Butler, 1988, p. 519).

Thus, K-pop stans seem to embody two central aspects of mass self-communication; stanning something implies mass-communication, for example in the form of tweets, while identifying as a stan may represent the self, in mass self-communication. If, as Castells (2009) argues, mass-self communication is a defining characteristic of network society, and indeed contemporary society, K-pop stans could provide an ideal example of how individuals and collectives construct their identities online. Even before the Covid-19 pandemic forced fandom activities to leave physical spaces, K-pop fandom was, and remains, a deeply mediatised phenomenon, whose participants rely on the internet and social media to communicate within the group and to promote their fan-object. As the *stanning* of the fan-object in question manifests in social media posts, the authorship of those posts constitutes the social actions through which the K-pop community is constructed. Yet, despite sharing the constructivist leanings of remix culture (Markham, 2013. p. 64), authorship has not too commonly been used as a frame for social media, nor has it been utilised in combination with critical discourse approaches. As such, theories of authorship can provide a crucial understanding not just of how identities are constructed online, but the role and agency of the stans in constructing said identity. The main contribution is therefore a broader understanding of the function and role of authorship on social media platforms, and the potential implications thereof. Subsequently, it may contribute to a re-evaluation of the author-concept in studies of digital media. By understanding identity as a discursive construct

(Hall & Du Gay, 1996, p. 2), this study may also contribute to the field of critical discourse analysis, as it navigates the ever-changing landscape of digital media.

While K-pop standom has been studied extensively, very few if any have examined them as authors. Instead, the literature is mostly focused on broader questions of cultural identity and language. Their use of Twitter has been mapped out and examined in terms of communication networks and patterns, for example by Kim, Heo, Park & Choi (2013), who motivate their choice of K-pop as the object of study by arguing that non-political subjects are more representative of society than political ones.

BTS stans are a global phenomenon. Twitter and Instagram are the western platforms where the group's official page has the most followers, with 33 million on the former and 37 million on the latter at the time of writing. However, a pre-study of fans on both platforms make evident that Twitter is better suited for sharing, remixing and collaborating, through functions such as the ability to retweet and quote-tweet, as well as the option to share both still and moving imagery in the context of a new tweet. Furthermore, the ARMY accounts themselves see a significantly larger number of followers on Twitter than on Instagram, suggesting that the platform is a more important site for networking among stans.

In the ever-transforming, fast-paced world of digital media, the BTS standom represents one of the largest transnational collectives. Understanding how they construct and reconstruct their collective identity may provide insights that can be used to understand many other largely online groups — something that is vital if the field of media studies is to keep up with youth culture in the 21st century.

1.1 Aim and research questions

The aim of this thesis is to study the ways in which K-pop stans discursively construct their online identities, and the practices through which they do it. Subsequently, this thesis is interested in the role of agency, and the platforms, in that process. The analysis is focused on BTS stan accounts from multiple and different countries, more specifically on the interactive and discursive strategies of their activity on Twitter. The interest in this research problem stems from the hypothesis that authorship and online identity construction is strongly dependent on the media through which it is enacted, as well as on the individuals and social groups which thus enact it. Furthermore, the platforms used are believed to often constrain

the users and pose structural limitations on their ability to enact and articulate their agency. The overarching research question is thus: *How do K-pop stans construct their collective identity online?* Identity is understood here as a discursive construct (Hall & Du Gay, 1996, p. 2), constructed through the purposeful deployment of discourse and discursive strategies (See Krzyzanowski, 2010).

In order to better explore the different aspects of online discursive construction, two auxiliary research questions are posed:

1. *How is that process related to their "tweeting" and agency?*
2. *What is the role of the fan object in that process?*

The first question aims to discuss the practical processes by which discourse is initiated and formatted, by examining the simple act of tweeting — writing and posting messages on Twitter — as an example of authorship. The question is also interested in the individual agency of the stans in that process. That is to say, the impact of the platform, individuals, and groups on the authorship process. This stems from Turner-Rahman's (2013) description of remixing, sampling and selection as core strategies in contemporary authorship, and the idea that the platform through which authorship is enacted shapes it as a determinative force (Ruggill & McAllister, 2013). Mostly however, the question refers to the relationship between discourse and digital authorship, aiming to connect the two within the wider process of discursive identity construction. Subsequently, this question is interested in the agency of the individual stan in relation to the determinative force of the platform. In short, the aim is to examine how posting tweets helps construct the identity of the BTS standom.

The second question refers more directly to the influence of the fan object, BTS, on the identity of their stans, primarily examined through lenses of authorship, agency and identity. Assuming that stans are more than mindless consumers (Duffett, 2013), this question further seeks to explore to what extent the relationships between individuals, the standom and BTS can be made visible in this study, and the implications thereof. While the first question focuses on the platform and its affordances, the focus here shifts to BTS themselves. To what extent is the discourse expressed by fans merely repetition of what is constructed by BTS and their record company?

To answer these questions, data in the form of tweets will be collected and analysed through the discourse-historical approach (DHA) to critical discourse analysis (Krzyzanowski, 2018). This is a three-step analytical model that will be presented in the methodology section. Although this approach is most often used in studies of political discourse and discrimination, it also emphasises looking at the discursive strategies by which identity is constructed. As such, using it here may contribute to the further expansion of topics of interest for DHA researchers.

1.2 Thesis outline

The structure of this thesis is as follows: Firstly, a background section introduces and discusses objects of study, K-pop and fandom, placing them in a historical context. Then, the main theoretical concepts employed in this thesis are presented, including mediatization, identity & agency, authorship, recontextualisation and remix. The next section is the literature review, in which previous research and literature related to the research topic is presented and discussed, to position this thesis within wider research on digital media and discourse. This is followed by the methods and methodology section, which is devoted to the presentation of critical discourse analysis, more specifically the discourse-historical approach. The literature review and methods section are positioned as such, because this methodological approach emphasises searching for previously identified patterns and discursive strategies. Furthermore, the methods section includes a presentation of the analytical model that will be used, as well as the empirical data that has been gathered. The section concludes with a discussion of the ethical considerations made in the research process. This is followed by the analysis, and finally a concluding discussion.

2. Background

In order to understand the mediatised context in which contemporary K-pop standom exists, it is important to discuss it historically. This chapter introduces the concepts of K-pop, fandom and identity from a historical perspective, situating the research. Here, the aim is to present information on the object of study — K-pop and fandom — while the literature review (see section 4) focuses more on previous research in line with the theoretical leanings of this study.

2.1 The global K-pop movement

The history of K-pop goes further back than Twitter. According to Kim (2018), the rise of K-pop came about in a time when physical album sales of all genres started to collapse worldwide, and before the digital online music market was fully developed, which presented great challenges to the traditional revenue sources artists used to sustain themselves. Somewhat ironically, she argues, it was because of these challenges that K-pop was pushed to rely so heavily on music videos and other media promotions which became wildly popular, thriving in online spaces such as YouTube. Thus, K-pop thrived in the new media environment brought on by the advent of Web 2.0 (Lindgren, 2017). In its infancy, the genre was, and to some extent still remains, situated in the South Korean globalization pursuit of the 1990s, touted by South Korea's fourteenth president Kim Young-Sam. In 1993, he became the first civilian to assume office after three decades of military dictatorship, and his globalization policy set off dramatic shifts in South Korean society (Kim, 2018). It was in this context that Seo Tae-ji and Boys became what Kim describes as true game changers in the K-pop industry, leaving a lasting impact on the shape of contemporary K-pop. They became icons of a generation of youths who desired a less regimed and oppressed life, signifying the national globalization pursuit by introducing a blend of hip-hop and more traditionally Korean music. Furthermore, the influence of Seo Tae-ji and Boys, according to Kim, is seen in their fandom prioritising visual performances of music rather than lyrics and melodies, focusing on elaborate dance routines. By putting the visual dimension of the performance center stage, the group helped inspire the South Korean music video era. However, as Kim further emphasises, these developments were not unique to South Korea, but emblematic of broader pop cultural trends of the 1990s. Deregulations brought on by the shift in government opened up for cultural import as well as export, and western TV channels such as MTV became accessible in the country.

As the biggest contemporary K-pop act, BTS embodies both the visual focus and the western influence. The music video for their record-breaking single *Dynamite*, is a homage to the American 70s, featuring advanced choreography and multiple outfit changes all themed after the era (Khan, 2020). Most of the group's seven members (V, Jungkook, Jimin, Suga, Jin, RM and J-Hope) spend a lot more time dancing in the video than singing. Although this is the first music video released for the song, labelled "official", it is not the only one. There is also a B-side video, entirely made up of outtakes from the main video, as well as two different choreography videos — one set in a rehearsal space, the other on set and in the outfits from the main video. Add to this videos recorded for American shows and events such as America's Got Talent, MTV VMAs, and The Late Late Show with James Corden — two of which feature new outfits, all of which feature new choreography. Thus, it is clear that the visual aspect, and the cultural significance of music videos, remains relevant in the music of BTS. These live, or simulated live events, are also important to K-pop stans, as they represent points of increased intensity for fans who commonly watch them while texting and tweeting about them (Kim, 2018).

However, not all headlines made by fans of K-pop have been centred around the music. During the widespread *Black Lives Matter* protests of 2020, K-pop fans gained mainstream media attention by coordinating the takedown of a police app used to identify protesters (Romano, 2020). They did so by flooding the app, to which the Dallas police department asked civilians to submit videos of illegal activity, with so-called *fancams*. They did so with the purpose of making the process of sifting through all the videos more difficult. Fancams, videos of K-pop idols filmed by fans, have eventually become a staple of K-pop-fandom. This event gained much attention as an example of an online community connected by their shared love for a musical act coordinating to achieve a political goal not directly related to the object of their fandom. However, the majority of the literature on K-pop does not focus on political action, but rather on connectedness and language.

2.2 Fandom and Identity

The term "Fan", originally an abbreviation of "fanatic" (Duffett, 2013), did not become widely used until the early twentieth century, in the advent of mass consumerism. Similar to how the term stan was conceived as a negative description of an obsessive form of fandom, music lovers of the nineteenth century took the then medical term *musicomania* and jokingly referred to themselves using it according to Cavicchi (2017). Referring to oneself as a fan, a

stan or a musicomaniac highlights another important aspect of fandom that is often the focus of fandom research; *identity*. As Duffett (2013) argues, individuals are increasingly constructing their identities around media products, and fandoms explicitly highlight this phenomenon. However, despite extensive studies, fan and fandom remain loosely defined terms, which may take on different meanings in different contexts. Similarly, all fandoms take on different shapes, forms and practices (Jenkins, 2006) — although some characteristics are more common than others. In the early twentieth century, fandom started being recognised as a youth phenomenon (Duffett, 2013, p. 33), as the population segment of young people became more recognised as such.

One example of music fandom that is commonly cited as game changing, is that around the UK-based band *The Beatles* during the 1960s. This is in great part due to the counterculture which they inspired (Duffett, 2013), also known as "*Beatlemania*". As Duffett puts it, the Beatles' fans positioned themselves outside society, sharing "a generational love of rock songs and alternative social values" (p. 37) that included a commitment to civil rights and anti-war protest. There are two important things highlighted by this example. Firstly, fandom members can inspire each other to rally around political and social issues separated from the music itself. Secondly, positioning oneself outside society, but inside fandom, suggests that the two are separated to some degree. When pop culture was globalised, so was fandom. In June 2020, as the *Black Lives Matter* (BLM) movement swept across the US, BTS donated one million USD to the movement. In just over a day, that donation had been matched by their stans (Turak, 2020), which suggests that there is a global, cultural and social consciousness within the fandom. Although the crowd funding from the stans took off after the BTS donation was made public, fans had already raised 130,000 USD in a matter of hours beforehand (Castrodale, 2020).

Jenkins refers to these global fans as pop cosmopolitans, meaning someone whose "embrace of global popular media represents an escape route out of the parochialism of her local community" (2006, p. 153). This, he argues, is the result of global media convergence, which is to say that the flow of cultural goods around the world is multidirectional and not concentrated around neither conglomerates nor empowered consumers. Thus, fan identity can be understood as a deeply mediated phenomenon (Couldry & Hepp, 2016), wherein the fandom self is continuously maintained through media technology, e.g. Twitter and other social media. As emphasised by Hitchcock Morimoto & Chin, (2017) contemporary music

fandom is often both transnational and transcultural, although the former is not necessarily implicated in the latter. They argue that scholarly conceptualisations of the general fan often fail to encompass the diversity within transcultural fandom. This is to say that fans within different cultural contexts may derive different meaning from the same fan objects, and that their identities are not solely shaped by either their nationality, their culture or their fan objects. Subsequently, online interactions and exchanges are constantly taking place within fandoms, in turn contributing to the fan identity. That fandom is transcultural does not imply that there are no cultural differences within.

Although pop cosmopolitanism is not necessarily concentrated around conglomerates or consumers, consumption remains a central aspect of fandom. Duffett (2013) describes two characteristics of consumption: *economic* and *cultural*. The former simply refers to participating in a financial transaction as a buyer, while the latter refers to a meaningful examination of a media product. Within music fandom, this can for example include albums, concert tickets and merchandise. Thus, when fandoms adopt economic consumption as a common fan practice, they present themselves as a highly profitable and stable market for the pop culture industry. However, as Duffett further argues, the strong emotional attachments that fans form to their fan objects make them more than consumers, partly because there is a cultural interest that is connected to the transaction. As much as fans are consumers, they are also networkers, collectors, tourists, archivists, curators, producers and more. Being a part of fandom is not as much about consumption as fandom is facilitated through consumption (Duffett, 2013. p. 54-55). As Cavicchi puts it, “Music lovers, as witnesses to the beginnings of the commercialization of popular culture in the nineteenth century, were among the first to assume the role of the audience-consumer and to create the strategies many use today for understanding the world of stars, merchandising, and spectacle” (Cavicchi, 2017, p. 124). This is to say that, although consumption is a major part of modern music fandom, fans cannot be reduced to consumers alone.

A common understanding of identity, especially in the context of fandom, is as a performance, constructed through actions. Butler’s (1988, p. 519) claim that gender identity is performative, unstable and instituted through a stylized repetition of acts, presents a popular example of this. In her dissertation *Dressing the Part: Communication of Identity in a Performative Fandom Community* (2017), Sagardia argues that all identity is constituted through performance, including fandom. The performances of fans, she further argues,

highlight how they think about themselves and how they want to be viewed. Duffett (2013) also adopts the notion of performativity, using dressing and gathering as straight-forward examples of fan performances. He also stresses the importance of not reducing fans to their visibility, stating that the engagement with the rest of the fandom may vary drastically. This is to say that while almost everyone is a fan of something, being part of a fandom happens through repeated acting.

Building upon this notion, Sagardia (2017) argues there is both an internal and external part to the role of fan, where self-concepts are developed within, but constructed and expressed to others in performance. This is important, because it emphasises that not all fans express their fandom publicly. Furthermore, performance encompasses both the more visual acts such as dressing in a certain way, getting a certain haircut or being in certain places, as well as the less visual ones such as holding certain views and beliefs. The latter can be seen in the civil rights beliefs associated with fans of *The Beatles* in the 60s, as part of the marriage of lifestyle to music that emerged during this time (Gatten, 2016). Similarly, Gatten argues, psychedelic music and the emerging drug culture represents another example from this time. He describes the *Woodstock Music & Art Fair*, commonly referred to as *Woodstock*, as an important historical moment for popular culture and identity, stating that attending the concerts conveyed that “one was opposed to the Vietnam War, favored the legalization of marijuana, and supported the Civil Rights Movement" (p. 5). In *Subcultures, Popular Music and Social Change* (Osgersby, 2014), Gordon describes how young people who got in to hardcore punk in the 1980s and 1990s often described how the music either informed or reinformed their political views, mentioning skateboarding as a means of getting into the punk subculture of the time. He further references the *straightedge* subgenre of punk — which emphasises abstaining from drinking and drugs — as another example of lifestyle and music being strongly connected, together with veganism being common in the wider punk fandom.

Dressing, or fashion, is a historically visual element of being a fan, or identifying with a certain pop cultural object. Kidd (2018, p. 11-12) cites the example of *lads* in the 70s and gay youths changing their hair, clothes or other aspects of their appearance after coming out as declarations of identity, despite there being no inherent reason to do so. He further argues that fashion serves as a tool for boundary maintenance, in some cases as an act of resistance found in youth culture. Equally important to Kidd are pop culture’s production of rituals, which he

argues generate social solidarity and cohesion between fans. As an example of this, he cites Harry Potter fans coming together at a book release, or standing in line for movies — times and places where fans are brought together by their shared affection for a pop cultural object. As Kidd puts it, "the clothing we wear, the music we listen to, and the television we watch not only constitute our identities, but also help separate our identity categories from others' identity categories" (p. 11). Kidd's definition of fashion is broader than clothes and haircuts, encompassing values, goals and practices as well. Thus, his ideas can be expanded to include digital presentations, such as profile pictures, account descriptions and pinned tweets.

3. Theoretical framework

K-pop standom occupies a very particular and interesting space in the context of media studies. Firstly, as emphasised in the background section, it is a community that is, to a great extent, dependent on technological means of communication and organizing. K-pop standom can thus be seen as emblematic of structuring identity and belonging through media. It is a standom that is constructed and shaped in and through media, using all the tools that digital media provide. Thus, the individual stans who construct themselves, and in turn their community, can be examined through the ways in which they interact with other stans, as well as the wider standom. To analyse the ways in which the identity of K-pop stans is constructed therefore requires a multifaceted framework, that acknowledges both the social construction of the self, and the ways in which the performance of standom as an identity is authored in and through digital media. This section introduces several key theoretical concepts that can be employed to analyse the research problem; the authored construction of standom identity within a mediatized world.

The construction of identity, society and reality, has been a key topic throughout the history of social science, and there exist many different schools of thought on the subject. Although it is important to acknowledge that there thus exists a large body of literature, the scope of this thesis calls for a more measured selection. As such, the selection is more closely focused on the particulars of this research problem, with the literature review section providing a more historical context.

3.1 Mediatization & Deep Mediatization

A central concept in contemporary media studies, *mediatization* has become an unavoidable concept in discussions of society in the digital age. It is an important inclusion, because it emphasises the main difference between K-pop standom today and historical fandoms; the fundamental role of digital media. At its core, mediatization refers to the broader consequences of media, and the proliferation of media contents and platforms, on our everyday life and organization (Couldry & Hepp, 2013). It is the emphasis of media having a material impact on our social, cultural, political and economic existence.

Two of the leading theorists on mediatization, sociologists Couldry & Hepp, adapt the term mediatization as “shorthand for all the transformations of communicative and social processes, and the social and practical forms built from them, which follow our increasing

reliance on technologically and institutionally based processes of mediation" (2016, p.4). They reject the notion of mediatization as a logic or thing, arguing that it is better understood as "the variety of ways in which possible orderings of the social by media are further transformed and stabilized through continuous feedback loops" (ibid.). In their understanding, the social world is a communicative construction. It is *mediatized*; structurally changed by the presence of media within its construction. Fundamental to this idea is the notion that the social world is constructed by humans, through these communicative practices — and those practices are in large part sustained in and through media infrastructure. It is an explicitly materialist phenomenology that acknowledges digital media as well as contemporary data-driven infrastructures. Importantly, the "media" in mediatization does not refer to media in the broadest sense, but specifically "technologically based media of communication which institutionalize communication" (Couldry & Hepp, 2016, p. 32). As broader historical definitions of media include media such as language and money, it can be argued that the social has always been mediatized. However, such a definition would fail to acknowledge the extent to which media technologies have transformed the social through its construction. That is not to say that there is no history of mediatization. On the contrary, Couldry & Hepp outline multiple waves of mediatization, signifying fundamental shifts brought on by new technological affordances. They argue that we now live in the fourth wave, which they label *datafication*, which follows *digitalization*; the third wave, closely tied to computers, the internet and mobile phones.

Beyond mediatization, Couldry & Hepp introduces the concept of *deep mediatization*, referring to the extent to which our everyday reality is interwoven with media — "a much more intense embedding of media in social processes than ever before" (2016, p. 33-34). As such, deep mediatization implies a fundamental shift in the construction of the social world, entangled with the "constraints, affordances and power-relations that are features of media as infrastructures for communication" (p. 7). When we make sense of the world in and through media, our understanding of it will be marked by the mediated processes involved; the construction of reality becomes mediated. Thus, mediatization represents the deepening of our technology-based interdependence (p. 53): Furthermore, Couldry & Hepp argue that the deepening is twofold; it's both the acceleration of technological innovations, and media becoming more important in the articulation of the cultures and societies we live in.

However, the aforementioned interdependence exists not only between us and media technology, but between multiple mediums; devices, platforms, forums and software. To capture the interlinked nature of our everyday media, Couldry & Hepp uses the term *media manifold* — a large universe of "variously connected digital media through which we actualize social relations" (2016, p. 34). They use this term to make visible the position of individuals as social actors within a wider media environment, as well as "the situated complexity" of their media choices (ibid., p. 56).

Central to the theoretical understanding of mediatization are the concepts of time and space. Put simply, technological developments within media have transformed time and space in relation to us, allowing for sustained communication over great spatial distances, and near instantaneous communication at all times. Meaning unfolds in time, and media makes time concrete (Couldry & Hepp, 2016, p. 105). Media communication "extends communication from a mere here and now into a there and now" (ibid., p. 33), enabling communication across space and time. Thus, media communication allows for trans-local meaning making, transforming or removing spatial boundaries. As such, in the context of deep mediatization and spatiality, where we are is not only where our bodies are (p. 91). Two people sitting in a park may for example simultaneously be in different chat rooms, or other interactive spaces. As Couldry & Hepp puts it; "the primary 'where' of the social world may, for many people, be shifting over to the sites sustained by media platforms" (2016, p. 91).

Taking a step back, the translocal and transnational dimensions of mediatization — as well as the general spatio-temporal situatedness of things — ties into another classic concept within sociology; *globalization*. Mohammadi (2013, p. 3) describes this concept as "the way in which [...] relations of power and communication are stretched across the globe, involving compressions of time and space and a recomposition of social relationships". This is, evidently, a concept strongly related to mediatisation, particularly as it relates to time and space. As emphasised by Mohammadi, it is through new means of communication such as satellite communication that these compressions and recompositions happen (ibid.). Still, globalization constitutes a much broader concept than mediatization, the latter strictly referring to changes brought on by technological interdependence. That said, the means of communication are an important factor in the process of globalization — a process that is, according to Bauman, (1998, p. 1) an "intractable fate of the world, an irreversible process". A significant function of this in relation to culture, and by extension fandom, is what

Mohammadi (1997, p. 4) refers to as "shifting zones of cultural influence". Globalization, he argues, is not a process that creates global unity and equality. He is supported here by Bauman, who states that globalization "divides as much as it unites" (1998, p. 2), further arguing that although centres of meaning-and-value production are extraterritorial, the same is not true for all individuals and groups. As such, a breakdown in communication occurs between a global elite and more localised groups, leading to significantly uneven distributions of cultural influence. To illustrate this issue, Mohammadi cites new outlet CNN and the so-called free flow of information, which he argues reinforces the cultural influence of the US around the world. The dissemination of US cultural influence in particular has been cited as a major factor in the development of early K-pop culture.

3.2 Identity and Agency

After establishing the position of media within the construction of reality, the next logical step is to look at the position of the individual actors. Two main characteristics of the self can be identified; *identity* and *agency*. The former refers to the characteristics and attributes that K-pop stans associate themselves with, while the latter refers to the possibilities of making a difference to a pre-existing state of affairs. When discussing the social construction of reality, it is important to also emphasise the social construction of the self. This is to say that we must understand what it is to *be*, not just in a spatial and temporal, but social sense. Subsequently, one must discuss the collectives and groups within which we are as social beings. Within the current wave of mediatization, the self can be understood as embedded in a complex media manifold (Couldry & Hepp, 2016, p. 56).

The social construction of the self was coined by French sociologist Marcel Mauss (Carrithers, 1985), who argued that individuals have always been aware of both their spiritual and physical individuality. However, the mediated construction of the self is fundamentally different from Mauss' original idea in the emphasis that is put on the media manifold in and through which the self is constructed and *maintained*. Subsequently, another popular characteristic of identity is introduced; *performance*. Often associated with Butler's (1988) conclusion that gender, as well as other aspects of identity, is performative, meaning that it is instituted through our acts. Within the mediated reality in which we *are*, the pressure of performance is made greater by the self-presentability of the online world (Turkle, 2011). This is echoed by Papacharissi, who states that *searchability*, a core affordance of networked digital spaces, "encourages sharing rather than withholding information" (2012, p. 4).

Subsequently, the act of being someone has transformed into being a continuously managed project, that is “an external responsibility of the self towards the social world” (Couldry & Hepp, 2016, p. 146). It is possible to go as far as saying that we are required to manage a second body beyond our physical — a body of data. The process of managing these two bodies are not the same, with perhaps the most important difference being that online performance of identity becomes reliant on the hardware and software affordances available. Thus, the construction of one’s data body is filtered through the algorithms of the platforms where self-presentation occurs (ibid., p. 156-161). Subsequently, individuals become dependent on digital infrastructure, with “the operating conditions of digital infrastructures become part of the functioning conditions of the self” (p. 161). This is not to say that the online and offline identity of any individual is fully separated, but rather that they occupy different spaces within the construction of the self. The digital self is particularly interesting for this thesis, because it leaves digital traces, both in the form of images and text, as well as data. Papacharissi (2012) elaborates on performativity in the digital space, stating that “presentations of the self thus become networked performances that must convey polysemic content to audiences [...] without compromising one’s own sense of self.” (p. 1). She further argues that the access to multiple audiences, voices and aspects of one’s own personality to which access is enabled by networked technologies forces individuals to become increasingly self-reflective and self-aware (p. 4). “Performing the self is simultaneously a way of expressing the self and managing its complex webs of relations” (p. 5).

Finally, regarding identity, Hall (1996) understands the construction of identity as a discursive construction. His discursive approach “sees identification as a construction, a process never completed - always 'in process'” (ibid., p. 2), emphasising the dynamic and ongoing nature of identity. Furthermore, Hall stresses the importance of *identification* in this process, understood by him as constructed through recognition of a shared characteristic with another person or group — the natural closure of which is solidarity and allegiance (1996, p.2). In the context of K-pop fandom, a strong emotional connection to the fan object may consequently be seen as one shared characteristic on which identification can occur.

The definition of the collective, and the actors within it, has been widely debated throughout sociology and philosophy, spawning multiple understandings of the concept. Couldry & Hepp (2016, p. 74) makes the argument that “any attempt to understand the construction of the social world through communication is necessarily a theory about shared meaning

production". In this thesis, collectives are understood as *social figurations*. Originally coined by sociologist Norbert Elias, this is a concept that seeks to understand social phenomena like groups not as objects beyond the individual, but as relationships of interdependency (Loyal & Quilley, 2004, p. 5). Within figurations, the interactions between individuals are oriented to each other in an interdependent way, and the boundaries of a figuration are defined by the shared meaning produced by those involved (Couldry & Hepp, 2016, p. 63). "Social figurations" is a particularly useful concept for studying online groups and communities, because they are understood as constantly being in a state of flux and transformation (Loyal & Quilley, 2004. p. 5), two qualities often associated with the internet and digital media. Furthermore, Elias' concept of figurations acknowledges the different relative positions of actors within a figuration, taking into account their relative power, while he also argues that the level of control and insight over the figuration remains low (Loyal & Quilley, 2004, p. 7). This is to say that although social figurations are constituted of individual actions, the actors within them are not in direct control of their nature. In the context of mediatization, this leaves room for the impact of media in influencing or even shaping the figurations. Importantly however, "as long as one party to a relationship has a function [...] for another, he or she is not powerless, however great the discrepancy in power" (ibid.). Moreover, figurations lend themselves well to digital media, because the power relations within are understood through practices of communication (Couldry & Hepp, 2016, p. 68). Similarly, the technological interdependence that is central to deep mediatization somewhat resembles that between actors within figurations. Fan cultures, and other online communities, can therefore best be understood as figurations of figurations, to best capture their ever-changing and dynamic nature.

In *The Mediated Construction of Reality* (2016), Couldry & Hepp updates the concept of social figurations for the era of deep mediatization. They argue that the concept can be used to understand both something as "small" as a Twitter thread, and something as large as "the whole interlinked ecology of platform-based message circulation" (p. 65). As such, online K-pop standom can be understood as a figuration, with the wider K-pop standom being a more macro level figuration, and the Twitter specific section of the standom being more of a micro level example.

Furthermore, Couldry & Hepp present two angles from which to approach contemporary figurations; *power* and *belonging*. The former, they argue, must be analysed at three levels:

“The positioning in the actor-constellation, the practices that support power-relations, and the inscription of power in the media ensemble” (p. 68). The second, belonging, has further parallels to standom. In a situational sense, it can constitute a shared orientation to common interactions, like a crowd at a concert or a sporting event, or an online gathering in a chat room. In these situations, a situational belonging may be created through a deep feeling of communitization, which can be likened to the sense of community stemming from K-pop standom, as members orient themselves to their fandom object and to each other. This is to say that the spatiality of these figurations has been changed by the mediation of time and space brought on by mediatization, where figurations can be based entirely out of digital communication. One noteworthy consequence of this is that access to particular media ensembles can define group membership, as membership is “enacted through appropriating its media ensemble” (p. 173). Finally, the concept of *imagined collectivities* can partly be used to explain online standom, although Morimoto & Chin (2017) have advised some caution in doing so. These are collectivities who are addressed simultaneously, despite not being in personal contact with each other (Couldry & Hepp, 2016, p. 176).

Because of the influence of media on the construction of the self and collectivities, it is important to analyse the agency of those involved, both human and nonhuman. As a concept, the nature of agency has been at the core of both philosophy and sociology, with many of the fields’ great thinkers contributing to its surrounding discourse. One of the most prominent contributions was made by Anthony Giddens, in his formation of Structuration Theory, in which human agents were given a prominent role (1984). “To be a human being is to be a purposive agent, who both has reasons for his or her activities and is able [...] to elaborate discursively on those reasons” (Giddens, 1984, p. 3). However, terms like “reason”, Giddens argues, have to be treated with caution as not to extricate human action from “the contextuality of time and space” (ibid.). Developing a stratification model of the agent, he presents three components of actions; reflexive monitoring of action, rationalization of action, and motivation of action. (p. 4). The reflexive monitoring is understood as actors continuously monitoring the flow of their own activities, as well as the social and physical aspect of the context in which action is taken. Rationalization is understood here as the process of maintaining a theoretical understanding of the reasons for any taken activity, which should not be confused with being able to specify those reasons discursively — although actors are expected to be able to explain most of their everyday actions (p. 6). The third aspect, motivation, is perhaps the most distinct from the other two. It refers to “the

potential of action, rather than to the mode in which action is chronically carried out by the agent" (ibid.).

Notably, according to Giddens, most of what we do every day is not directly motivated — agency refers more to the wants that prompts action rather than the grounds of action. Moreover, he argues, far from all motives are conscious, with unconscious motivation being a significant feature of human conduct. As such, agency in Giddens' words "refers not to the intentions people have in doing things, but to their capability of doing those things in the first place" (p. 9). Another concept central to much of the literature on agency is *intentionality*, which Giddens defines as a characteristic of acts which the individual acting knows or believes will have a particular outcome, utilizing that knowledge to achieve said outcome (p. 10). Lastly, Giddens argues that there is a strong connection between the concept of agency and that of power. In short, being an agent means being able to deploy a range of causal powers, including influencing the causal powers of others (p. 14).

Consequently, agency is lost when an individual loses the capability to make a difference to a pre-existing state of affairs. Some notable criticism to the constructivist and postmodernist lines of thinking about agency comes from realists such as Archer, who argues that "constructionism [...] impoverishes humanity, by subtracting from our human powers and accrediting all of them — selfhood, reflexivity, thought, memory and emotionality — to society's discourse" (2000, p. 4). This is to say that the environments in which we are embodied within the world are much bigger than "society's conversation", meaning that the construction of identity, and agency, cannot be fully attributed to discourse. In a more specific response to Giddens, she argues that his theoretical focus on accounting for the properties and power of the environment in analysing the properties and power of the actor, may prevent analysis of their interplay. To Archer, concepts like society, language and discourse are too narrow to encompass the ways in which agency emerges through human beings' relations with the world (p. 6-7). In short, it's a critique of a perceived dichotomising between self and society. To counter this, Archer frames agency in relation to *internal conversations*, arguing that it is through these that actors "monitor, displace and re-order the priorities according to different emotions" (p. 200), emotions which are understood by her as commentaries on our human concerns. These are divided into three different emotional clusters, each relating to a separate object of emotions; *natural order*, *practical order* and *discursive order* (p. 198-199). The first one concerns our physical well-being, emerging in the relations between body and

nature. The second one, practical order, concerns how we live and work in the practical world. Here, what is emphasised is subjects' relation to objects, seen as performative concerns. Lastly, the discursive order more closely resembles discourse-based ideas of agency and the social, as it focuses on sociality and subject-subject relations (ibid.). However, Archer's focus on embodiment is muddled when introduced into the digital sphere, particularly when we act or perform anonymously or under pseudonym, as has shown to be commonplace within K-pop standom. This is particularly true in regard to physical well-being, a concern that is not equal for natural and digital bodies. The practical and discursive orders thus relate more obviously to the topic of this thesis, as they can be understood in terms of social figurations and discursive constructs.

Because the actors within these figurations are not purely human, the concept of *cyber-material agency* provides an important emphasis on the transformation of agency through mediatization. This concept is used to emphasise the sociomaterial alliances between people and technology, such as hardware, software and platforms, by and through which action is taken (Galis & Neumayer, 2016, p. 2). Therefore, the aforementioned role of media within the construction of the self and figurations, can be understood in terms of nonhuman agency. Furthermore, the concept of cyber-material agency avoids ascribing total agency to the likes of software and AI, which Gunkel (2016, p. 76) states may otherwise be done to allow its creators to shirk responsibility. One of the approaches presented by Gunkel, characterised by a hybrid understanding of human and nonhuman agents, proposes a distribution of agency across a network of human and machine components (2016, p. 84), somewhat resembling the aforementioned cyber-material agency.

3.3 Authorship

If identity is understood as constructed through performance, the self-presentation of K-pop stans through their social media posts can be considered an important building block in that process. The concept of *authorship* is thus used here to examine the process of creating a tweet, or discourse through tweets.

Barthes' *Death of the author* (1977) and Foucault's *What is an author?* (in Foucault & Bouchard, 1977), constitute the foundation for most contemporary theory and research on authorship. In their work, authorship is intrinsically linked to the idea, role and function of

the *author*, as well as the *reader*. In short, *authorship* refers to the production of cultural texts. In most common understandings, as in Barthes' and Foucault's, authorship is a process.

Centered mostly, although not exclusively, on authorship in literature, *Death of the author* is not so much a call to eliminate the author from their works, but rather to separate them. Stating that ordinary culture is "tyrannically centered" on the author, Barthes argues that it is the language, not the author itself, that speaks. "To write is, through a prerequisite impersonality [...] to reach that point where only language acts, 'performs', and not 'me'" (p.143). Importantly, it is the derivation of meaning from the text that is at the core of Barthes' argument, stating that by giving a text an author, we are imposing a limit on the text in terms of our explanations of it. He critiques what he believes to be common practice within criticism, which is to focus on the person, life, tastes and passions of the author — an understanding of text as the author confiding in us, the reader. To Barthes, the author and his book do not stand automatically on a single line, divided into a before and after. He does not believe in the author as something that exists before the text, but as someone who is born simultaneously with the text — not the subject to the text as a predicate.

Although Barthes argues for the separation of author from text, it is impossible to separate Bartes' understanding of text from his understanding of the author. "The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture [...] the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any of them." (p. 146). This is to say that there is no one meaning, no one message straight from the author, and that texts as spaces are multi-dimensional, where a variety of non-original writings blend and clash. He further expands on this understanding of the text, stating that the multiple writings that make up the text, drawn from many cultures and entering into "mutual relations of dialogue, parody and contestation" (p. 148). Thus, by removing the author as Bartes suggests, we can move from *deciphering* text to *disentangling* it. This, he argues, is necessary precisely because there is no one meaning to decipher. This differentiation emphasises the core of what Barthes believes authorship to be. The multiplicity of writing (understood here as the creation of any cultural text, not just literature) is not understood by Barthes to have a single meaning to be deciphered, but as a complex web of cultural material to be disentangled. However, although the author does not capture the multiplicity of meaning according to Barthes, the reader does. "The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up writing are inscribed

without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination" (p.148). Concluding his essay, Barthes states that the birth of the reader must come at the cost of the death of the author.

While *Death of the Author* is written as a critique of literary criticism, Barthes' recollection of the author, or rather the side-lining of the author, is grounded in his idea of what constitutes authorship. What he labels writing, or construction of text, can thus be taken to represent authorship. Although the author is not the owner of the text, he is responsible for *constructing* it. Authorship, in Barthes' mind, is collecting and bringing together multiple non-original texts, that do not become one as much as they enter into a space of dialogue and contestation. To *author*, is thus to collect and construct, not to imbue with meaning. Subsequently, the language of a text can produce meaning which the author is unaware of, to be disentangled by the reader.

Believed by many to be a response to Barthes' essay, Foucault's lecture *What is an author?* (1977) further ruminates on the relationship between author, text and reader. Setting out to reevaluate the author's *function within discourse*, Foucault states that even in studies of the history of a concept, literary genres and branches of philosophy, these concerns tend to assume second position to what is seen as the fundamental role of the author. Furthermore, he calls for a re-examination of the space left behind after the author's disappearance or death. In doing so he poses the question; what is the name of an author? According to Foucault, the name of the author possesses both a descriptive and a designative function. He uses the name of *Aristotle* as an example, explaining that when we refer to Aristotle, we are using the name to mean a series of descriptions — "The author of the *Analytics*, or the founder of ontology, and so forth" — while simultaneously referring to the person. He concludes his ruminations on the name of an author by suggesting that it serves the function of classification, which we use for grouping together texts to differentiate them from others, or establishing relationships among them. As Foucault argues, the name of the author functions to characterize "a particular manner of existence of discourse".

The *author-function*, Foucault argues, is not universal in all discourse. He outlines historical changes in attribution and authentication, stating that there have been further differences within different fields such as science and literature. It also serves the function of appropriation, which is to say that texts, in the broader sense, become property within

frameworks of legal codification, a function that has become more evident through systems of ownership and copyright. Another central aspect of Foucault's author-function is that it is understood as the result of a complex operation to construct a rational entity, the entity that we refer to as author, and not spontaneously formed through the simple attribution of a discourse to an individual. In Foucault's view, the aspects we designate to an author are projections of our way of reading, further varying according to historical and cultural context.

However, Foucault suggests that there is a distinction between writing and authoring in our culture, as he states; "a private letter may have a signatory, but it does not have an author; a contract can have an underwriter, but not an author; and, similarly, an anonymous poster attached to a wall may have a writer, but he cannot be an author." This is not to say that only certain modes of production constitute authorship, but rather that the discursive function of the author within our culture is exclusionary, highlighting the process of constructing the entity of the author.

Importantly, within discourse, Foucault argues that in the process of writing a book, a person may become the author of much more, such as a tradition or a genre, in which new authors may proliferate. As an example of this, Foucault cites Marx as being the author not only of *Communist Manifesto* or *Capital*, but "an endless possibility of discourse". As Foucault admits that the author-function may be expanded to other mediums, such as music, a more contemporary example can be found in Seo Tae-Ji & Boys being the authors of the genre of K-pop. Similar attribution is possible for the American pop and hip-hop artists who inspired the early K-pop groups of the 1990s'. In short, this means that a number of characteristics, signs and structures from the works of Marx and Seo Tae-Ji have been put into circulation, along with a number of differences. "They cleared a space for the introduction of elements other than their own, which, nevertheless, remain within the field of discourse they initiated." (Foucault, 1977, 132).

As with Barthes' work, Foucualt here presents, or perhaps presumes authorship to have a certain nature. Firstly, authorship is a process of construction as much as creation, where pre-existing discourses may be reactivated or rediscovered, where "new" discourse bears the mark of that which came before it. Secondly, and subsequently, authorship emphasises intertextuality, as shared discursive elements lead to the inclusion of works into the author-function. Lastly, and importantly in the digital age, authors do not simply author their

own works, but share some authorship in the works made possible through theirs. This somewhat collaborative notion of authorship will be further explored in the following section.

3.4 Authorship in the Context of New Media

Because the identity of K-pop stan is understood as a mediated phenomenon, authorship must be understood in relation to the digital media and tools in and through which it occurs. Thus, this section presents the transformation of authorship in the digital context of new media.

Beyond Barthes and Foucault, contemporary authorship studies have increasingly shown an interest in *new media*, understood here as creative works that use ICTs. As pointed out by Chris & Gerstner (2013), "Contemporary media authorship is frequently collaborative, participatory, non-site specific, and difficult to assign individually" (p. i). Intensified mediatisation has brought with it changing relationships between author, reader and text, through alterations in authorship. It can thus be argued that new media authorship is a mediated process.

Among the big changes brought on by new media, the internet and digitalisation, is the proliferation of user-generated content, particularly on social media platforms. Recalling the *attribution* aspect of Foucault's (1977) author-function, Andrejevic (2013) argues that the authorship of user-generated content is contradictory, particularly in terms of ownership. User-generated content is divided into two categories by Andrejevic; deliberately crafted, and captured by applications, both of which can be used for commercial purposes. Using Twitter and Facebook as examples, he states that they are "procedural author(s), crafting the rules that users follow as they participate in creating more interactions that generate more data, which can in turn be used for tailoring advertising and services" (p. 135). *Procedural authorship is* understood here as being the writer of both the text, as well as the rules by which the text appears. Through this form of authorship, platform affordances become the frames in which the process of authorship takes place. The concept of affordances refers to a characteristic of a medium that offers the possibility for specific action (Gibson, in Couldry & Hepp, 2016). Texts are thus created with and through a mediated set of tools (Turner-Rahman, 2013). The software, or platform, is one of the primary determinative forces in new media authorship (Ruggill & McAllister, 2013).

While the intellectual rights to a tweet may be attributed to the person behind the account, the data it generates legally belongs to the platform should they wish to sell it. Emphasising this dual ownership, and the platform's privileged position within that relationship, Andrejevic (2013) states that if Twitter wanted to sell a book of your tweets, they could. This is to say that authorship as a designation is moved from the creator to the platform, in the commercial sense. Although the data is in this view authored in collaboration between the platform and the person making the tweet, the data is only attributed to the platform. According to Andrejevic, this system is built on the idea that this data is non-authored information, for legal and economic purposes. Thus, it can be argued that surveillance capitalism is at odds with scholarly discourse on authorship, the former vying to reinstate the author for the sake of commerce. This has further implications for digital consumption, as data generated through consumption may have a material impact on the product that is being consumed. However, as Andrejevic notes, referring to generating data as participation may be misleading, particularly as brands frame this process as empowering customers. The data collected from consumers may not be all that different from the data generated in focus groups, or other forms of market research, except for the amount of data and the process in which it is generated. Thus, collaboration here does not guarantee equal participation. Furthermore, Rose (1993) argues that the modern notion of the author is, as a cultural formation, inseparable from the commodification of literature, proposing *proprietorship* to be the distinguishing characteristic of the modern author. This is to say that the author is viewed as the originator of a text, and therefore the owner of the commodity that is the text, an understanding that followed the invention of copyright. However, as made evident by Andrejevic (2013), new media authorship has changed the relationship of authorship and ownership. Additionally, as argued by Guertin (2013), copyright was not invented to protect authors, but rather to guard the corporate interests of publishers. "The author is dead; long live the rights holder" (Andrejevic, 2013, p. 132).

However, new media authorship is not only a collaboration between platform and user, but between users as well. This is emphasised by Ruggill & McAllister (2013), who use the term *mass collaboration* to refer to "the organizational practice by which many loosely organized individuals work independently but collectively on a single project" (p. 139). This is exemplified by platforms such as Wikipedia and Youtube, where users add to growing libraries of texts and information. Turner-Rahman (2013) adds to this by describing new media authorship as a conglomeration of interactions between "authors, audiences, software

interfaces, production methods, various included media, and even material artefacts" (p.152), and Ajdarevic (2013, p. 133) refers to this form of authorship as networked. On a macro-level, organizational institutions further create boundaries for what is deemed acceptable. Ruggill & McAllister (2013) illustrates this using the example of ratings boards for video games, but The Federal Trade Commission in the US and the European Union may fill similar functions for example in antitrust cases against for example Google (Scott, 2017) and Facebook (Smith, 2021). However, some may argue for a clearer differentiation between tools and authors, which Ruggill & McAllister acknowledges, stating that this is in large part due to the role of designation. Citing a "cult of celebrity", as well as cultural and financial uniqueness, they acknowledge that it may seem impractical to attribute the title of author to the manufacturers of the graphics card that a video game runs on. Nevertheless, they refrain from a purely mediumic understanding of these forces, referring to them as *authorial forces*.

Guertin (2012) also proposes a collective model for digital authorship, referring to the digital as the *third space of authorship*. The first space, she argues, is the oral storyteller, who "transforms lessons, history, wisdom and traditional tales" into communal events (p. 7). The second space is the romanticised solitary genius, which is core to the notion of text as property. The third space proposed by Guertin, is a "fluid site for the construction and reconstruction of authorship, a collaborative zone" (p. 7).

Perhaps one of the most strikingly mediatised forms of authorship is what Turner-Rahman (2013) refers to as *abductive authorship*. This is an understanding of authorship that encompasses *trial-and-error*, collaborative relationships, *auto-theoretical works*, experimentation and iteration. According to him, processes of trial-and-error are central to much of new media authorship, making the potentialities of a work visible. This is to say that authors make errors in the process of creating, and learn not to make the same error again, which Turner-Rahman believes is particularly true with new media. Working with and through new software and hardware requires experimentation, thus texts are influenced by the errors made in the process of experimentation. This also places some emphasis on iteration within digital authorship. "Trial and error relies, in part, on the abundance of accessible, manipulatable, existing media, including that relating to individual production" (p. 155). Although not unique to new media, the ease with which errors can be corrected transforms the creator's understanding of the potentialities of the work, thus shaping the final work. Therefore, something as simple as the "undo" button represents something very fundamental

to new media authorship; the re-opening of options. Subsequently, the abundance of communities and forums where users share tutorials and methods with each other, become as valuable as the works themselves. As works are consumed, fueling new experimentation that takes the new information into account, these works may be extended beyond the original text. As Turner-Rahman further argues, "one person's error is another's potential solution" (p. 156), meaning that there is no one true solution to any error. These new processes of authorship may also include *auto-theoretical* works, dynamic texts that provide evidence of their creation and reveal traces of the creative experience. Subsequently, these works may also serve the purpose of informing the creations of others, encouraging further sharing of methods.

The conceptions of authorship laid out by Barthes and Foucault can be traced through those in new media, possibly representing a mediatisation of authorship. Similar to how Foucault argued that the authorship of one text may extend to include many future works, the authorship of a tweet may generate data that in turn influences the conception of new media products. The role of programming languages in digital text is not too dissimilar from the language described by Barthes — both are, in some way, determinative for discourse.

3.5 Recontextualisation & Remix Culture

To fully grasp the importance of authorship in the construction of the mediated social and identity in the digital age, the concepts of *recontextualisation* and *remix culture* provide a valuable framework. Although the two concepts may at times seem similar, they are not interchangeable. As discourse is central to many notions of authorship, the idea of the remix can be seen as a form of the more traditional concept in critical discourse analysis; recontextualisation. Originally proposed by Bernstein when exploring educational discourse, recontextualisation refers to the movement of texts and practices from the primary context of discursive production to the secondary of discursive production (1990, p. 183). A recontextualised text "has changed its position in relation to other texts, practices, and positions", "been modified by selection, simplification, condensation, and elaboration", and "been repositioned and refocused" (p.58). Recontextualisation is here introduced as a third context of discursive production, in which positions, agents and practices are "creating, maintaining, changing, and legitimizing discourse, transmission and organizational practice" (p. 184). The primary context on the other hand, refers to the development and positioning of the text or practice. This is where new ideas and discourses are "selectively created",

developed, modified, or changed. In the secondary context, texts, practices and discourses are selectively reproduced (p. 183). Importantly, Bernstein argues, "those who produce the original discourse, the effectors of the discourse to be recontextualized, are not agents of its recontextualization" (p. 187). This is to say that although discourses are being brought together in this field, the agents are more often not. Lastly, a text is always *decontextualized* before being recontextualised (p. 58).

Elaborating on Bernstein's work, Krzyzanowski describes recontextualisation as spatio-temporal diffusion, as well as the creation of horizontal discourse orderings (2016, p. 314). This is to say that beyond being a means for relocation discourse in space and time, it is a "strategic process of establishing a certain hierarchy of discourses" (ibid.). Thus, power becomes an important aspect of recontextualisation, as recontextualisation becomes a tool for creating and sustaining hegemonic discourse. This is exemplified and emphasised by Krzyzanowski as he presents the recontextualisation of neoliberalism as a key tool in supporting "the spread and solidification of neoliberal tendencies in contemporary societies" (p. 318). Thus, the concept of recontextualisation represents an important concept for tracing the inherent role of power in the act of remixing.

As the means of distributing messages, as well as the means of construction, has changed through technological development, so have the potentialities of social construction. On a micro level, a tweet may for example consist of more than text; there may be an image, a video or "gif" attached. There may be a different tweet that is quoted. Perhaps there is a poll, asking for other users to interact, or a link that leads somewhere else. In addition to the affordances of individual platforms, finding images and other units of information to publish and distribute is also made easier through services like google image search, presenting everyone with a plethora of material. What we create and share, and how we create and share, has been studied extensively within the field of media studies. These developments have ushered in what Markham refers to as a *remix culture*, in which much of digital communication consists of messages produced by "unhooking cultural units of information from their origins" (Markham, 2013. p. 64). An important product of remix culture, according to Markham, is that our experiences of social reality are remixed by our interactions with social media networks. "I gain a particular understanding of the world, remix it again, and distribute this to others" (Markham, 2013. p. 64-65). To understand the ways in which the mediated social world is continuously constructed thus requires an understanding of how its

parts are remixed, and the implications of remixing discourse to construct new discourse. Linking the two core concepts, it can be argued that remixing is a form of recontextualisation, primarily associated with processes of recontextualisation reliant on technology.

The idea of remixing has been prevalent in authorship long before it came to be known as such. For example, it bears a strong resemblance to Barthes' description of authorship as collecting and constructing using other non-original texts. Turner-Rahman (2013) echoes this idea in explicitly describing remixing, sampling and selection as core characteristics of new media new media authorship. One way in which the intertextuality and connectedness of digital texts is emphasised is through the notion of *hypertext*, understood by Andrejevic (2013) as digital texts that are linked to other texts, often through hyperlinks. Hypertext is a form of metadata which each text is associated with, that helps locate them through their URL. In short, hypertext integrates texts into the wider internet.

3.6 Constructing a Theoretical Framework

Lastly, for the above presented theoretical concepts to be effectively employed in the analysis, the construction of a cohesive framework is required. The application of said framework will be expanded upon in the analysis section.

As much as it is a highly relevant concept for any inquiry into any social practices that happen in and through digital media, mediatization forms the contextual backbone of this framework. This is to say that mediatization, and deep mediatization, is an important analytical lens through which the rest of the concepts must be viewed and understood. Understanding the construction of identity as a process, the natural end goal of this process is the collective identity of BTS stans, ergo; what it means to be a BTS stan. Thus, it is important that the framework captures the intricacies of this process as it happens in and through the chosen social media platform. It is this process of discursive construction and performance that the rest of the framework is built around. Rather than a linear flow of acts and agents, this thesis understands this process as a complex web of mediated human-to-human and human-to-non-human interactions, in which text and discourse is recontextualised and remixed in and through software. Consequently, concepts relating to identity, agency, authorship, recontextualisation, and remix culture are, in this model, located within the aforementioned web.

In conclusion, social interactions that take place in and through social media are necessarily mediated, and subsequently produce deeply mediatised constructs of the social, collectivities and the self. Constructing the messages (in this thesis; tweets) that make up these interactions entails a form of authorship, in which text, cultural material and discourse is being continuously remixed and recontextualised — a collaborative process in which agency, cyber-material agency, and authorial and other determinative forces interact to influence it. This conceptual understanding will be further expanded on in the analysis section of this thesis.

4. Literature review

This chapter aims to provide a summary of the academic discussions surrounding the intersection of media and the social, the construction of identity, and music fandom. Together, these three areas form the context in which this study operates; they all represent different aspects not just of being a fan, but being in general, in the digital age. Due to the limited scope of this thesis, the aim is not to provide a deep and comprehensive dive into these topics. Instead, this section presents an introduction, with the purpose of situating the research within the wider field of media and communication studies. This chapter reviews the literature to make visible patterns and findings that are of interest to the methodological approach of this specific study (see chapter 5).

4.1 A history of music fandom and celebrity culture

According to Cavicchi (2017), while fandom is often characterised as a result of twentieth century mass consumer culture, its origins have more to do with "shared modes of participation in older systems of commodified leisure" (ibid., p. 110) than consumption through electronic media. He argues that the basis of modern music fandom in America was formed during the 1850s, emphasised by the increase in taverns, theatres and concert halls. After the American civil war, concert programmes changed from lists of song titles to multipage documents filled with advertisements. Subsequently, performers were commodified and advertised, managed by entrepreneurs who saw a new market developing. Thus, the understanding of music shifted from public rituals and private pastimes, where music had more of a social function, to something that was sold as the main event, encouraging an attachment to the music rather than to what the music enabled (Cavicchi, 2017. p. 111). One consequence of this shift was that listeners became more aware of the personal qualities of musicians, which Cavicchi argues follows patterns of romantic ideas of core individuals taking hold at the time, leading to an idealized identification with the performers. "Many stars of the nineteenth century [...] inspired music lovers to understand their listening experiences as part of a continuing and reciprocal relationship with a specific performer" (ibid., 2017. p. 113). Subsequently, he argues, music lovers started to describe listening as a highly physical experience, evoked by the voices and the dexterity of the performers, meticulously recording their experiences.

One of the most striking shifts during this time was that music lovers extended their fan experiences outside concerts, gathering to catch glimpses of their stars wherever they could.

Ferris & Harris (2011, p. 13) emphasises the mediated nature of fandom by stating that "there would be no fame if there were no fans, and there would be no fans if there were no media, whether print or electronic." For example, the development of photography helped consolidate the rise of famous individuals as celebrities, with portraits of singers and actors forming the base of the merchandising industry (Duffett, 2013. p. 30). Music fandom in particular was spurred on by the late nineteenth century invention of sound recording, and the early twentieth century invention of airwave broadcasting (ibid.,). While music fans had earlier extended their experiences through writing about performances and seeking out performers outside concerts, these developments allowed the music itself to extend beyond live performances. However, by the turn of the twentieth century, media was no longer only a tool for promotion for artists, it had become a tool for communication among fans. One such example is the fan journal The Golden Comet, circulated by the fan club of actress Jeanette MacDonald, founded in 1937 (Duffett, 2013. p. 32). Emphasised by this fan club starting a therapy fund for a fellow club member who lost his leg, this may serve as a predecessor to the online communities formed within fandoms today. The video cassette recorder (VCR) presented the next technological leap for music fandom, and fans began to record performances to view at their leisure, creating a temporal shift. They started creating mashups, which they would share with each other at, for example, conventions. Furthermore, the start of tv channel MTV in 1981 inspired fans to experiment with making their own music videos, although limited by the domestic video technologies of the time (Duffett, 2013. p. 39). Through satellite and cable TV, popular culture was globalised, making it possible for fans around the world to access products foreign to them, as seen with the example of MTV inspiring the visual focus of early K-pop (Kim, 2018). However, it wasn't until the widespread adoption of broadband services that fans began to see some access to the means of mass distribution, which had previously been reserved for broadcast and distribution companies. Around the turn of the twenty first century, fans started uploading, downloading, streaming and sharing digital media, with video uploading sites such as Youtube presenting easy access to all kinds of user footage. Subsequently, media piracy flourished online, with the recording industry struggling to fight back against fans enjoying free music. Through the internet, fan communication and community was first mediated by early message boards and forums, and later platforms for uploading and distribution (Duffett, 2013, p. 40-43).

These foundational aspects of early music fandom are important, because they are also reproduced in contemporary music fandom. Similar to how VCR technology allowed fans to

experiment with making their own mashups and music videos, fancams are now an important part of K-pop standom, and the internet and social media are used to coordinate and communicate among fans, similar to how journals were circulated in the past.

4.2 The digital is social and the social is digital

Today, social media is at the heart of much of our daily communication. We live in what Lindgren labels a *digital society* (2017. p. 3). This is a term used to emphasise the increasingly digitised and mediatised nature of society and the social, in which we are, almost all the time, connected. Through smartphones, computers and tablets, most people are only ever a click away from the social network services and platforms that now form the basis of much of everyday social interactions (Ito, in Lindgren, 2017). Similarly, Couldry & Hepp (2016, p.50), outlines a transformation of the internet from a network for specialist communication to "increasingly banal space for the conduct of life itself". Although the term social media is contested, with some like Papacharissi arguing that all media are social by definition (Papacharissi, 2015), as they all foster communication. Thus, it is important to acknowledge that the term "social media" describes a particular set of possibilities or affordances for social behaviours.

Importantly, media has always been that which we experience society and the social through. "Media are at the centre of how we, as groups and individuals, relate both to society at large — as a structure — and the many social activities that happen within it — as a setting for our lives together" (Lindgren, 2017. p. 5). As such, media represent the structures within which we act and interact, presenting both possibilities and limitations. It is within these structures that we perform the social actions that ultimately constitute society (ibid.). Digital society then, is a society defined by the possibilities and limitations of digital media. This is referred to by Castells as a social structure that is increasingly "constructed around (but not determined by) digital networks of communication" (Castells, 2009. p. 23).

Castells uses *network society* to describe the networked nature of the social. This is often considered, in great part, a product of new developments within information and communication technology, *ICT*. Central to network society, is a shift towards *mass self-communication* (Castells, 2009. p. 85). Particularly associated with forums and social media platforms, this term refers to the ability for self-generated messages to reach a global audience. It is, for example, difficult to imagine a homemade video reaching millions of

people around the world in a matter of days before the existence of YouTube, which now happens regularly. Although this can not be purely attributed to software development — mobile phones with cameras have certainly made it cheaper and easier to produce video — those videos would not likely be able to reach mass-audiences without the access to platforms for publishing them. In network society, mass communication is no longer predominantly one-directional, and everyone is potentially both receivers and senders of information. It is important to note that these two labels, digital society and network society, are not at odds with each other. They both describe the intersection of digital media and the social. Thus, it is perhaps unsurprising that much of contemporary debates surrounding the internet and digital media is focused around *social media*. Although there exist many competing definitions of the social, Lindgren argues that Weber's concept of social action is well suited to examining social media platforms. Referencing Weber's concept of social actions — "actions oriented to the past, present, or expected future behaviour of others" (Weber, in Lindgren, 2017. p. 34) — Lindgren argues that many popular features of social media platforms such as sharing, messaging, liking, subscribing, and so on, can be considered social actions. For example, the expected future behaviour of others when posting a message to Twitter, is likely for them to read it. But as Lindgren points out, that is not to say that all actions taken by, or in groups are social.

Today, the central position of social media in society is undoubted yet remains a widely debated topic. This is highlighted by recent debates surrounding the spread of misinformation on Twitter, particularly in relation to the 2020 US presidential election and the global Covid-19 pandemic (Ovide, 2021). The idea that social media platforms help shape our social and economic structures is further echoed in the growing public concerns with the power afforded to the corporations that own the social media platforms (Canon, 2020). While there is no academic consensus as to exactly what extent the platforms influence our communication, most media scholars agree that it is significant (Lindgren, 2017). As one of the larger social media platforms, particularly for politics, Twitter has thus frequently been the object of both academic studies and media coverage. Launched in 2006 as a short messaging for groups, and later transformed into a microblogging service, where users could post short messages called *tweets* for anyone to read, Twitter has exploded in popularity since, becoming one of the world's leading social media platforms (History, 2020). In February of 2019, right before Twitter stopped providing numbers on how many monthly users the service had, the number was reported as being 321 million (Kastrenakes, 2019).

Although the number was declining even then, and recent efforts to remove accounts that actively spread certain misinformation — for example the Qanon conspiracy theory (Booker, 2021) — has likely made that number shrink even more, it is safe to assume that it is still considerably high. Here, it is important to remember that the number of users does not necessarily equate to the number of people reached by the content uploaded to the platform, as made evident by the news reporting surrounding tweets posted by former US president Donald Trump. Before his account was suspended for inciting violence following the storming of the US Capitol, most major news outlets regularly exposed readers/viewers to whatever he was tweeting. This is one of the core features of the aforementioned network society; very little, if anything, is confined to its context of origin. There are many other examples of how Twitter is being used by political actors. For example, as highlighted by Krzyzanowski (2018), the platform is used extensively in politico-organizational communication by politicians within the European Union (EU). Notably, his analysis shows that using Twitter has brought some modernization to EU political communication patterns, and that deep seated political practices and discourses are also being sustained in the use of Twitter. Twitter discourse may thus perhaps be seen as an extension, or acceleration, of existing practice and discourse. However, and more importantly for this thesis, Twitter is home to many other groups and communities, political and non-political.

4.3 Twitter and Identity Construction

In *Without you, I'm nothing: performances of the self on Twitter*, Papacharissi (2012) examines individual performances of the self on Twitter, with a particular focus on trending topics. She argues that ICTs such as Twitter saturates the self with ever-expanding networks of people, relations, and performance stages. Her study centered around how the self is performed in organically generated trending conversations on Twitter, and which performative strategies become prevalent in that context. *Networked selves*, she found, "assemble via practices of authorship, listening, and reaction." (p. 13). This is understood as the expressive and connective tendencies of late modernity, through which the notion of self has been transformed. These tendencies, Papacharissi argues, have been further augmented by platforms like Twitter, with ever-expanding networks of people, relations, and performance stages saturating the self (p. 3). These performances are necessarily *polysemic*, for the networked architecture creates a need to convey content to multiple audiences, actual and imagined, as individuals claim agency and negotiate power within social structures (p. 2).

In this study, two main trends/elements emerged; *play* and *affect*. Play was used by individuals to craft performances that adapted and expanded the semantic confines of Twitter and the platforms' 140 character-limit, which has since been changed to 280 characters. Moreover, it was interpreted by Papacharissi as a strategy to engage and reverse social norms through performances, inviting experimentation similar to how role-play and role modeling is integrated into daily rituals (p. 3). The other element, affect, is here emphasised as an important part of "the expressive and connective gestures afforded via Twitter" (ibid.). This is primarily expressed through gestures that infuse the storytelling of the self with emotive impressions. These gestures facilitate emotional release, exhausting tension and leading to action. Moreover, practices of expression and connection are, through these gestures, edited into the performative context of Twitter. "Ultimately, it is the potential for deliberate improvisation [...] that appeals to those performing the self on Twitter — and in most everyday contexts" (Papacharissi, 2012, p.14). It is a duality of improvisation and planning, based in both print and oral storytelling traditions, that results in an authentic, mediated performance of the self.

The focus of Papacharissi's study is primarily semantic, looking purely at tweets and the text therein. However, the affordances of Twitter allow many more options, most importantly the retweet function. While she provides an important perspective on how the authorship of tweets is used to construct and reconstruct identities, a more complete understanding of a K-pop identity construction requires the analysis of all practices therein, retweets and quote-tweets included.

A different perspective on discursive identity construction on Twitter come in the form of McGlashan's (2020) study on discourse practices among the followers of the Football Lads Alliance (FLA), in which he focuses on following as a discourse practice. This is partly done in response to what he argues is a somewhat problematic tendency for linguistic studies to focus on pre-selected hashtags, subsequently limiting the access to "a potential variety of topics, sentiments and discourses within a community" (p. 313-314). Moreover, McGlashan's study includes not only discursive practices in tweets, but also in the descriptions, or user biographies, of the FLA followers. The FLA was a British protest group that claimed to oppose all extremism, self-identifying as a movement primarily organised through social media platforms. Despite this stance, they were found to have links to multiple actors, organisations and ideologies that do have links to extremist ideological positions (p. 308).

The stated aim of McGlashan's study was to understand "how followers' identities — and their understanding of these identities — are evidenced by and contingent on a range of discursive practices" (p. 312-313), by identifying what identities the followers appear to represent, construct and aggregate around (p. 311). His theoretical understanding of collective identities see them as "constructed through both membership and the kinds of shared linguistic and discursive repertoires evident in texts produced by that membership" (p. 313). One of his more interesting findings in relation to this thesis is a trend whereby social actors are referred to in terms of an activity, such as *supporter* and *holder* (p. 316-317). This shares some similarity to the term *stan*, as a pre-study of K-pop Twitter showed that the term was often used as a verb. Furthermore, McGlashan found identity to also be constructed through exclusion of certain topics from user biographies, which he takes to suggest that positioning certain groups and discourses together makes them appear related. The articulation of an anti-EU stance together with Islam and immigration is one of the examples he presents of this, part of a strategy of disidentification common in McGlashan's findings (p. 322).

In conclusion, McGlashan suggests that following is an understudied form of identification, arguing that this approach promotes a consideration first of discourse rather than text (p. 325). Both tweets and user biographies are examined as having elaborate relationships, and can potentially be understood as intratextual. Most importantly, McGlashan makes evident the contradictory nature of the discourse in official FLA statements, and the discourse of their following. This may both suggest that it is difficult for an organisation to control the narrative of its followers, or that the ideological inconsistencies of an organisation may not be visible by studying the organisation's texts alone.

Both Papacharissi (2012) and McGlashan (2020) study examples of construction of identity through Twitter, around certain topics or issues. In doing so, they inadvertently emphasise the importance of social media in that process, as well as the importance of studying this specifically. What is however absent in both, is the separation of Twitter's two most notable functions; tweets and retweets, with particularly the latter being overlooked in much of the literature.

5. Methodology

As emphasised in the previous chapters, the discursive construction of identity in a digital world is a complex phenomenon, in constant flux and transformation. In this chapter, the methodology with which the analysis is to be conducted will be presented, starting with the historical background of the approach before presenting the particulars of this study. This is followed by a presentation of the data, before concluding with a discussion of the ethical considerations made for this thesis. Seeing as the construction of identity is understood here as a discursive process, critical discourse analysis (CDA) was chosen as the primary method of analysis.

5.1 Critical Discourse Analysis & the Discourse-Historical Approach

Grown out of linguistic approaches to text and discourse, the main interest of CDA is to "research the role of language in shaping society", with an emphasis on the incorporation of social theory (Krzyzanowski, 2010, p. 67). It is a theoretically and methodologically diverse practice, given its interest not only in the use of language, but the context of language use. As Krzyzanowski puts it, "CDA does not constitute any homogenous research trend but is seen rather as a group of research traditions" (ibid., p, 68). As suggested by the term "critical", CDA, generally focuses on linguistic aspects of power and inequality, within the language of real or "common" people. Furthermore, CDA focuses on dialectical relationships between particular discursive events and the situations, institutions, and social structures which frame them (Fairclough & Wodak in Krzyzanowski, 2010, p. 67). In Fairclough & Wodak's understanding, discourse is socially constitutive "both in the sense that it helps to sustain and reproduce the social status-quo and in the sense that it contributes to transforming it" (ibid.). As a group of research traditions, CDA is necessarily interested in Foucauldian understandings of power — as ways of "creating and sustaining inequality between different social groups and individual members of society" (Krzyzanowski, 2010, p. 73).

Within the contemporary landscape of CDA there are five main approaches, or trends; the *Discourse-Historical Approach* (DHA), the *socio-cognitive approach*, the *British systemic-functional trend of CDA*, the *Loughborough Group*, and the *German trend in CDA* (p. 69). These can further be divided into two groups according to Krzyzanowski (2010, p. 70); core, and peripheral approaches, with the core group constituted of the DHA, the socio-cognitive approach and the systemic-functional trend. It is the former, DHA, that will be employed in this study. Through their development, the three core approaches have

maintained common research foci, as well as relevant theories and methodologies. Unlike the peripheral approaches, they have demonstrated a continuous commitment to CDA in their approach, with an added emphasis on bridging the gap between linguistics, humanities and the social sciences (ibid., p. 70). True for all of CDA is that the range of research foci have been greatly expanded recently, branching out into fields such as sociology, history and political science (p. 71). With its focus on K-pop standom, this thesis necessarily works in the fields of media studies and sociology.

Of the core approaches, DHA has the broadest array of research foci. It examines "the role of discourse in (re-) producing and sustaining racist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic attitudes, as well as on various constructions of individual and collective (cultural, political, institutional/organisational, gender) identities" (Krzyzanowski, 2010, p. 69). Founded in the late 1980's, the approach has evolved and spread, becoming an internationally recognised method of research. Constructed for a study on the emergence of anti-Semitic stereotypes in (semi)public discourses in a 1986 Austrian presidential campaign, it has since been used to analyse a wide range of topics (Reisigl, 2017, p. 44-46). The contemporary areas of interest for DHA include inter alia discourse and discrimination, discourse and identity and discourse in the media. Analysis within DHA is considered a "multidimensional project incorporating theory, methods, methodology and empirically based research practices that yield concrete social applications" (ibid., p. 48).

At the core of all CDA lies the concept of discourse, explained by Fairclough & Wodak (in Krzyzanowski, 2010, p. 67) as a form of social practice, constituted by language in speech and writing. They further state that discourse is "socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned — it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people." Elaborating on the particular understanding of discourse within the DHA, Reisigl (2017, p. 51-52) presents ten features of the concept: (1) "Discourse is a socially constructed as well as constitutive semiotic practice." (2) It represents, creates, reproduces and changes social reality. (3) Each discourse constitutes a communicative and interactional macro-unit, transcending single units of text or conversation. (4) Thus, a discourse is composed of specific groups of semiotic events such as texts and conversations, with these semiotic units serving specific purposes in social contexts. They are produced by somebody, distributed by somebody and received by somebody. (5) These discursive units relate to specific semiotic action patterns, e.g. genres. (6) The

discursive units are intertextually linked by macro-topics that diversify into "various discourse topics, subtopics, content-related argumentation schemes (topoi), etc. (ibid., p. 52). (7) Discourses are situated within fields of action, e.g. political and economic. Within these fields of action, which form the frames for discourses, the discursive units are functionally connected. (8) Discourses contribute to the constitution of social order, through organising, (re)producing and transforming social relationships, social positions, identities, etc. as part of dispositifs — "goal-oriented complexes or networks of discourse, knowledge, power and subject constitution" (ibid.). (9) Discourses develop around social problems, which in turn become the starting points for argumentation. This is both a verbal and cognitive pattern of problem-solving, surrounding claims of normative rightness and truth, dealt with from different perspectives. (10) DHA puts a particular emphasis on discourse undergoing historical changes relating to social change.

Drawing on a model originally devised in Reisigl & Wodak (2001), Reisigl (2017) presents five analytical questions with which to approach discursive features and strategies within DHA (see Table 1), each corresponding to a respective discursive strategy. This is not a fixed list, and Reisigl emphasises that some modification is required for each research object (p. 52-53). The list includes *nomination*, *predication*, *argumentation*, *perspectivisation*, and *mitigation and intensification*. Nomination refers to the discursive construction of social actors, objects, phenomena, events, processes and actions. Predication refers to the discursive characterization of the above. Argumentation refers to "persuading addresses of the validity of specific claims of truth and normative rightness" (ibid.). Finally, mitigation and intensification serve the purpose of modifying the illocutionary force of utterances.

Discursive strategies	Questions to approach discursive features
Nomination	How are persons, objects, phenomena, events, processes and actions named and referred to linguistically in the discourse in question?
Predication	What characteristics or qualities are attributed to social actors, objects, phenomena, events, processes and actions mentioned in the discourse?
Argumentation	What arguments are employed in discourse?

Perspectivisation	From what perspective are these nominations, attributions, arguments expressed?
Mitigation and intensification	Are the respective utterances articulated overtly, are they intensified or mitigated?

Table 1 Questions for discursive features in DHA (Reisigl, 2017, p. 52)

Another key notion of critical discourse analysis is context, with discourses frequently being understood as text in context. Breaking down context into a macro-, meso- and micro-dimension, Reisigl (2017, p. 53) introduces four dimensions of context within the DHA. (1) The immediate, language internal co-text and co-discourse, "thematic and syntactic coherences, lexical solidarities, collocations, connotations, implications, presuppositions and local interactive processes". (2) "The intertextual and interdiscursive relationship between utterances, texts, genres and discourses". (3) Social factors and institutional frames of a specific context of situation, e.g. degree of formality, level of education and identities. (4) Particularly important for DHA, broader sociopolitical and historical contexts are integrated into the analysis, focusing on fields of action and history of the discursive event (ibid., p. 53).

One of the core ways in which DHA is used, exemplified by Reisigl, is in critical analysis of how different social actors talk and write about the past, in comparison with semiotic representations of truth and normative rightness (p. 54). Notably, while Reisigl's account of DHA emphasises the historical focus of the approach, he also states that this is not the case for all DHA research (ibid., p. 44). This is, for example, emphasised in Krzyzanowski's (2018) study of social media and the politics of the European Union. Lastly, Krzyzanowski (2010, p. 78) explains context as an abstract concept that "grasps the dynamic relation between physical setting and discursively-funded (social) actions undertaken therein by different individual and collective actors". This is to say that contexts are intersubjective constructs, (re)produced and maintained by its participants — not natural, but socially constructed.

5.2 Methods and Analytical Procedures

In this thesis, the empirical data will be analysed through the lens of critical discourse analysis (CDA), using a slightly modified version of the model used in Krzyzanowski (2018). The aim of this analysis is to examine the authorship processes through which the identity of

BTS stans is constructed, by making visible which themes and topics are being communicated and how. To account for the networked nature of Twitter communication, the analysis in this thesis will be divided into two main areas; *interactive strategies* and *discursive strategies*. The first represents a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches, in which the interactions with other actors and themes are studied. The latter follows the usual two-level approach in DHA found in e.g. Wodak & Reisigl (2001) and Krzyzanowski (2010, p. 81), beginning with an *entry-level analysis* and concluding with an *in-depth analysis*. Although devised to analyse political communication, this model is chosen here because of its focus on self-construction of identity and digital interaction, by means of combining interactive and discourse analysis (see Krzyzanowski, 2018).

The first area, interactive strategies, can loosely be described as "Twitter behaviour". It focuses on tracing the interactions of the sampled BTS accounts, both in terms of personal mentions and interactions, as well as thematic mentions and interactions (Krzyzanowski, 2018, p. 288-289). Who interacts with who and how do they do it? In Krzyzanowski's study, the aim of this area is to make visible the extent to which the "analysed Twitter presence is in fact self-constructed [...] or whether it relies on social media content produced by other actors" (ibid.). In this thesis, the aim of this area is to examine the extent to which BTS stans rely on content produced by others in their digital performances, with a particular focus on content produced by accounts directly affiliated with BTS. This can further be understood here as the role and prevalence of other actors within the authorship process. Moreover, this area of analysis explores whether there are any tendencies or regularities within these interactions, with an added focus on potential differences between individual stan accounts and community accounts. As such, in contrast to the second area of analysis, this area is necessarily more quantitatively oriented.

Personal interactions are signified by the use of "@" followed by the name of the account that is being interacted with. For example, in tweet 1720, account @seokjinbit tweeted:

"BTS made Coldplay so proud with their song cover they went and promoted the cover in ALL their social media accounts DO A COLLAB NOW WE WANT A COLLAB I BEG @BTS_twt @coldplay".

Personal mentions on the other hand, refers to the mentions of names and proper nouns without the use of "@". An important factor to note here is that in recent years, Twitter has made it possible to respond to a tweet without including the username of the account you are interacting with. Therefore, the tweets containing personal interactions do not equal every tweet that constitutes interaction, but those that *emphasise* the interaction via the use of "@". Thematic mentions and interactions are understood as non-personal references through hashtags, "#" and weblinks. For example, on February 17 and 18 many of the sampled accounts included "#HOBIBirthday" in their tweets, in reference to one of the band member's birthday. In accordance with the above, all signifiers of personal and thematic interactions were noted during the collection of the data.

The second area of analysis centers on *discursive analysis*, or, analysis of *discursive strategies* (Krzyzanowski, 2018), focusing on Twitter discourse of the sampled BTS accounts. Here, the analysis is conducted using DHA, as outlined in the previous section. This approach is particularly useful here, as it "examines, inter alia, the role of discourse in (re-)producing and sustaining [...] various constructions of individual and collective (cultural, political, institutional/organisational, gender) identities)" (Krzyzanowksi, 2010, p. 69), thus here making evident the ways in which K-pop stans discursively construct their individual and collective identities. The approach taken here features the two previously mentioned levels of analysis in DHA — *entry-level*, and *in-depth*.

The entry-level analysis, also known as *thematic analysis*, concerns the analysis of key themes and topics, thematic threads and areas within the data, as well as the semantic meanings of the analysed texts. The key analytical categories used are *discourse topics*, understood as summarizing the text and specifying its most important information (van Dijk, in Krzyzanowski, 2010, p. 81). Notably, DHA makes a distinction between text topics and discourse topics. This is particularly important here, as a pre-study of K-pop stans on Twitter revealed that the output of the K-pop stans almost exclusively concerned their fan object, in line with Duffett's (2013) suggestion that individuals are increasingly constructing their identities around media products.

In this thesis, the corpus of media within which the discourse topics are identified, is constituted of the tweets that were collected during the research process (see section 5.3). The DHA advocates for an inductive approach "by means of decoding the meaning of text

passages [...] and then ordering them into lists of key themes and sub-themes" (ibid.). As emphasised by Krzyzanowski, this requires repeated, thorough readings of the text. DHA is a flexible and problem-oriented approach (Reisigl, 2017, p. 47), which Krzyzanowski (2010, p, 81) takes into account stating that accounting for different types of texts and media requires a diverse approach. Krzyzanowski (2010, p, 74) also argues that the tools and categories of DHA must be elaborated for each analysis, with the researcher recursively moving between theory and empirical data. As Reisigl (2017, p. 48) puts it, DHA considers discourse analysis to be "a multidimensional project incorporating theory, methods, methodology, and empirically based research practices". It recognises that topics are strongly linked to the genres of the texts — in this case, tweets. Thus, after the interactive strategies had been mapped, the tweets were first revisited to inductively identify topics and themes, which were then examined through the lens of the theoretical framework.

The second, in-depth level, is the analysis of "discursive strategies in tweet texts & supporting images, figures, videos, etc" (Krzyzanowski, 2018, p. 298), focused here on personal construction as well as the strategic recontextualisation of ideas and discourses. *Strategies* are here understood, using Reisigl & Wodak's (2001, p. 44) definition, as "more or less accurate and more or less intentional" plans of practices that actors adopt to achieve a particular aim. *Discursive strategies* constitute "systematic ways of using language" (ibid.). Examples of aims related to this case include the music fandom goal of supporting favorite artists.

One of the ways in which Reisigl & Wodak find discursive strategies to be used is in *self- and other-presentation*, i.e. to construct the identity of the self and the own collective, and to construct other groups as the other. They locate these strategies at five different levels of complexity; *reference*, *predication*, *perspectivation and involvement*, *intensification or mitigation*, and *argumentation* (ibid., p. 45-46). Most notable for this study is *reference*, or *referential strategies*. These are strategies by which social actors are constructed and represented, e.g. through membership categorisation, tropes, metaphors and synecdoches. In short, these constitute identifying by naming. The way many BTS stans refer to themselves as "ARMY" is a good example of this. Synecdoches were given extra analytical attention in this thesis, given that the studied accounts were found to extrapolate features of internal as well as external actors to represent their collectives. The categories used by Reisigl and Wodak were developed more specifically to study discrimination, and as such cannot be adopted

wholesale for this model. However, their categories can still be used to understand the construction of social actors and collective identities, as those are not necessarily inherently discriminatory. Still, all the categories laid out in Reisigl & Wodak (2001, p. 48-52) were used as points of reference when conducting the analysis, to ensure a thorough exploration of strategies.

Because of the affordances of retweeting and quote tweeting that are characteristic of Twitter as a platform, strategic recontextualisation is a core concept of this analysis. Understanding retweets and quote tweets as a mechanism for spatio-temporal transportation of digital content, the analysis takes note of the primary context from which content and discourse is transported. Here, the collected data evidently represents the secondary context, where the retweets, links, images, videos and audio are given meaning through the reader. Furthermore, these discursive strategies are understood in this area as strategies of authorship, allowing for an analysis of the strategies used to collect, compile and construct text and content into tweets and discourses. Lastly, prototypical tendencies were drawn from existing literature (see chapter 4), and tested to see if they were represented in the text. As a point of reference, Krzyzanowski (2018, p. 290) uses the struggle between political and democratic discussions and the tendency for those discussions to have a neoliberal framing within the EU, when studying political communication. In this thesis, one example was a tendency to frame economic support for BTS as a responsibility of the standom, echoing the mass consumerism with which early fandom coincided. This is for example seen in tweets 1832 and 1900, both posted by @sorafirstlove:

"In order to boost our streams before BE essential drops, we must all be streaming BE from top to bottom & Dynamite focused playlists. Prepare your devices, premiums, playlists etc. Let's all work hard to make this another success. We got this ARMY!! #BeEssentialToday @BTS_twt".

"We know our boys are always working. So we too must stay consistent & do our part. Soon they'll drop new music etc, but we must continue working hard on BE. Stream across all platforms. Switch between playlists regularly! More streaming, buying, views & promoting. GO ARMY!!"

5.3 Empirical data

The empirical data for this thesis consists of 2783 tweets posted to Twitter by 10 BTS-focused accounts between February 18 and February 24, 2021, including retweets and quote-tweets. All tweets made by these accounts during this timeframe were collected in the form of screenshots, with links to the original posts. The accounts were selected based on multiple factors. First, during a pre-study of BTS Twitter, two different forms of BTS focused accounts were identified; individual stan accounts and community accounts. In order to better capture the width of the networked K-pop standom, as well as the interactions and functions of different accounts, five accounts of each type were chosen for study in this thesis. All dates and times are in GMT+1.

The community accounts are understood as accounts that explicitly represent a grouping within the wider fandom, such as regional ARMY branches. Four of the accounts are regional ARMY accounts from Sweden (*@ArmyBase_Sweden*), Denmark (*@btsdanisharmy*), Germany (*@ger_unite_bts*) and The UK (*@UKBTSARMATION*), while the fifth one is the main branch of ARMY, based in Korea but with a global aim. The more globally focused ARMY account, *@BTS_ARMY* was chosen because a networked understanding of K-pop fandom must emphasise positions of power between actors, and how these influence/reflect one another. Thus, differences between the global ARMY account and local ARMY accounts were identified as of interest to the study. The regional accounts were chosen based on three qualifiers; *Language*, *followers* and *activity*. As the accounts are regional, they primarily write in a regional language. In order for the data to be examined in a correct and cohesive manner, it was decided that translations would have to be made, and as such accounts were limited to languages in which the author of the thesis is sufficient. As such, all excerpts from the data that appear are translated by the author. Followers were identified as a metric that suggests a certain influence within the network, with their posts reaching more users by default. As it is unthinkable to survey the entirety of ARMY accounts, surveying the most influential ones may provide more representative data. The consequences of this will be further discussed in the background section. Lastly, the qualifier activity refers to the cadence of the tweets, how often they post. This was chosen in order to generate enough data to support the analysis. For example, the Norway ARMY account was dismissed, as it was not posting actively enough to generate sufficient data. Because they were very explicitly labeled as regional ARMY accounts, these accounts were generally easy to identify. All accounts

were identified using Twitter searches for “ARMY”, combined with the names of countries whose languages are understood by the author.

Individual stan accounts are understood as accounts run by single individuals who present themselves as stans or fans of BTS in their names or account descriptions. It refers to accounts that express themselves as members of the fandom, but not representatives of other members. In the selection, these were limited to accounts that either only, or primarily, cited BTS as their fan object, as some accounts were dedicated to multiple pop cultural products. Because there are many accounts of this type, some difficulties arose in the sampling process. Thus, the same three qualifiers of *language*, *followers* and *activity* were also applied here, although language took on a slightly different character as fans often tweeted in english, despite being based in non-english speaking countries. As Twitter account searches for combinations of “BTS”, “ARMY”, “fan” and “stan” mostly returned community accounts, the approach was expanded to include going through accounts who responded to the last five tweets posted from the official BTS account. This method was motivated by the idea that interaction with official BTS communication suggests a dedication to the fan object, as well as a certain level of fandom activity. To avoid only selecting accounts who were active in their responses to these particular tweets due to being in favorable time zones, multiple tweets spanning several hours between them were looked at. Five accounts were identified through the search method, and 30 accounts were identified through reading Tweets in response. All accounts were then put into a single document, where they were thoroughly examined in relation to the aforementioned qualifiers, before being compared amongst each other. Based on the results of this exercise, 5 accounts were chosen for data collection, bringing the total up to ten accounts.

On February 19, BTS released a new album called *BE Essential Edition*. As stated by Coscarelli (2020), K-pop stans habitually aim to support their favourite artists by making songs and albums go viral. Thus, the period before and after the album release presents a valuable case for study, and the stans would likely be active, thus generating large amounts of potential data. The timeframe is a revision of the original timeframe, which consisted of a period between February 16 and February 26.. All tweets posted each day would be collected the day after, being saved as a screen capture, accompanied by a link to the tweet. However, after collecting tweets for 4 days, the total amount passed 500 from five of the accounts alone. It became evident that the number of tweets would be too many for the scope of this

thesis. As such, the time frame was adjusted to February 18 and February 24. The number of tweets collected each day varied, although there was a large peak on February 18. This was likely due to this being the birthday of one of the band members, J-Hope, as many stans tweeted about him to congratulate him and mark the occasion. As promoting individual band members as well as the group is a common part of BTS standom practice, these tweets were deemed to be of as much interest as those directly relating to the album release. As this thesis understands authorship as networked and cooperational, the entirety of the tweet output. Thus, this coincidence may prove fortunate as it may highlight potential differences in standom of individual members compared to standom of the fan object as a whole, that may not have been as evident otherwise. The only exception was made for tweets posted late on February 17, referring to J-Hope's birthday, as these were made when the date changed to February 18 in South Korea.

All tweets were given a reference number in order of collection, that was later put into a spreadsheet. Additional information, including whether a tweet was a *retweet* or a *quote tweet*, date of publishing and whether it was directed at a specific user, was added to the list with reference numbers. The reason for this dual document approach is to collect the tweets in a format that is easy to survey, while still being able to reference the tweets as they originally appeared. Screenshots are necessary as tweets may be deleted.

5.4 Ethics and Limitations

This section contains a description, as well as a discussion, of the ethical considerations taken during the research process, and why they were taken. Moreover, this section includes a discussion of the limitations of the study. The two topics are combined here, to emphasise that eventual limitations also present ethical concerns for the validity of the study.

Despite the amount of contemporary research that focuses on actors and communities on the internet, there remains a distinct lack of nationally or internationally adopted answers to the complex and dynamic challenges with which internet researchers are faced (Kozinets, 2015, p. 133). As such, Kozinets (ibid., p. 134) stresses the importance of adaptability, including the formation of own guidelines. This is echoed by Lindgren (2017, p. 239), who argues that internet research requires constant and continuous reconsideration of privacy, consent and authenticity, to make possible inductive responses to any encountered issues. Here, the abductive nature of DHA (see sections 5.2 and 5.2) proves beneficial, as it emphasises

continuous movement between the different stages of the research. Lindgren further emphasises that, although online communication and personas may appear disembodied, online experiences are in fact always tethered to offline experiences (ibid., p. 237). This is one of the core assumptions around which the ethical considerations in this thesis are structured.

The second assumption is that much of the internet, and social media in particular, constitutes a "public-private hybrid" (Kozinets, 2010, p. 71). This is to say that although that which is published on Twitter is publicly accessible, it may not be considered private by those that use the platform. While this is obviously true of closed communities or groups to which entry must be granted, Kozinets emphasises that this may be equally true of some publically available communication. As Kozinets (2015, p. 132) further argues, the public understanding of private and public has further shifted as debates around privacy have entered the public consciousness. It is important to keep this hybridity in mind, not just concerning ethics, but in terms of validity and limitations as well.

One of the key issues that need to be assessed here is that of *informed consent*, the attainment of which may be difficult or impracticable online, as noted by the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) (2019, p. 10). One of the ways in which the risks associated with not being able to secure consent can be mitigated, according to their ethical guidelines (ibid.), is to take steps to anonymise the data, to prevent it from being easily identifiable. Because two different types of accounts were identified during the gathering of data, this issue was approached differently for the two. Firstly, as expressed in the previous section, the community accounts are considered representative of a group, and are not identifiable as individuals. Because the accounts chosen here each represent the standom within a specific country, they were initially assumed to be public facing. Here, the DHA approach proved beneficial, as continuously going between theory and data allowed for constant reevaluation of ethical issues. As the findings indicated that a primary function of the community accounts was to distribute information, both internally and externally, it is assumed here that they consider themselves public facing in their communication. Thus, the use of their data in this thesis is more easily justifiable.

The individual stan accounts on the other hand, provided a different challenge. The decision to include the names of the individual accounts was driven by multiple factors. First, the lack

of “real life” personal information found in their accounts would make it significantly more difficult to identify them offline. In one tweet, one of the stans referenced having a personal account (see section 6.2), thus positioning the stan account as not being personal in the same sense. Secondly, the chosen accounts were specifically those for their significantly high follower counts, indicating that they, to some extent, understand the reach of their tweets. Thirdly, in overviewing the data, the accounts were found to be appropriating a formal discourse associated with new outlets when presenting information (see section 6.3), suggesting that they too are interested in distributing their messages in a public facing matter. Lastly, the names of the accounts all directly or indirectly reference BTS, meaning that they too provide an important means of self-representation. Thus, the names are ultimately considered to be relevant for the analysis, with the risks of providing identifiable information being low. The two-document approach explained in section 5.3, in which only one of the documents has the names of the accounts and the other has the categories and code, has the added benefit of requiring access to both documents to even begin a process of identification.

Although the studied community of K-pop stans did not as a whole constitute individuals in a sensitive position e.g. minorities or LGBTQ+ members (AoIR, 2019, p. 17), the possibility of some of the fans being minors was taken into account. To mitigate the risks around this, it was made sure that none of the accounts were identifiable as such, helped by the aforementioned lack of discernible personal information. Given the often negative depictions of fans highlighted by Duffett (2013), it is particularly important to continuously reflect on the research and writing process, in order to make sure that all portrayals are fair and well backed up.

Another question highlighted by AoIR is the safety of the researcher when studying potentially hostile online communities, citing “Gamergate” as an example (2019, p. 11). Although there are recent examples of music fandoms harassing critics (see Jackson, 2020), the low profile of this thesis, on account of it being MA level, suggests that the risks here are very low.

Going back to the internet as a public-private hybrid, one unavoidable question is whether or not what has been captured in the data constitutes *authentic* self-representation (Lindgren, 2017, p. 237). One of the pitfalls identified by Lindgren is indeed remixed content, as well as analysing tweets that “might be generated for fun [...] or to persuade or mislead” (ibid., p.

238). One of the benefits of using DHA here, focusing on discursive strategies, as it allows for an understanding of even that content to be considered as part of the wider construction of identity. Furthermore, the aforementioned explicit distinction between the stan account and the personal account, makes it even more valid to consider the entire body of stan account tweets as constitutive of the discursive construct. This is to say that generating tweets for fun or to mislead quite explicitly constitutes a strategic use of discourse. This is further supported by the theory of authorship deployed here, the implication of which is that the authoring of these tweets, regardless of intention, can tell us something about identity. Indeed, the core proposition of Barthes is that meaning is imbued by the reader, not the author. Still, it should be kept in mind that this thesis necessarily concerns third-person explanations (see Martin, 2011) only, and does not allow for the subjects themselves to give their explanations. However, given that the focus here is on the construct, and not necessarily the authors themselves, this is not considered a significant issue here.

All this is not to say that this study is without its limitations. Due to the limited time and scope of this thesis, the findings should be considered more indicative than representative of the BTS standom, and future research will be required to confirm the findings. Although the studied standom is an evidently global one, this is not to say that it is a homogenous one. Despite accounts from multiple countries being studied, one cannot rule out the possibility of there being significant differences in other countries.

As pointed out by Duffett (2013), although many fans are voca, one must remember that there are also many fans who are not. This is one of the reasons that this study uses the term stan, to focus on the active fans who perform the standom identity in a public-facing manner, which is for example made evident through the focus on trends and charts. As such, the DHA approach helps mitigate those limitations. Lastly, because of the group's origins in South Korea, language was a possible issue going into the research. However, due to the global form which the standom has taken, and the prevalence of translations (see section 6.3), this was not particularly difficult to deal with. Still, it should be kept in mind.

6. Presentation of analysis

In this chapter the findings of the analysis are presented according to the levels of the DHA analytical model. First, the interactive strategies of the BTS stans will be laid out, before the focus shifts to the discursive analysis. Here, the chapter is divided into one entry-level, and one in-depth level section.

6.1 Interactive strategies

The analysis of the interactive strategies of BTS stans on Twitter shows that out of the 2783 tweets collected between February 18 and February 24, roughly 50 % were regular tweets (1403), 45 % retweets (1262) and 5 % quote-tweets (118), (hereafter referred to as Ts, RTs and QTs) meaning that around 50 % of the output contained content from other accounts than the one from which it was collected. However, a separate analysis of individual stan accounts and community accounts show important differences between the two. The individual stan accounts were significantly more active within the timeframe, tweeting and retweeting a total of 1909 times, compared to a total of 874 from the community accounts. Thus, roughly 69% of the total tweets collected originate from individual stan accounts.

Furthermore, the distribution of Ts, RTs and QTs differed significantly between stan accounts and community accounts, the former mostly publishing Ts and the latter focusing on RTs. The tweets collected from the individual stan accounts consisted of roughly 60 % Ts, with that number being roughly 31 % for the community accounts. On the other hand, around 38 % of the stan account output were RTs, while community account output was 61 %. The analysis revealed QTs to be an underused feature, the number being only 2 % for stan accounts and 8 % for community accounts. Even when they were used, they did not always fill a significantly different function than that of RTs. However, despite the differences in ratios, there were no significant differences in the types of accounts from which tweets were retweeted and quote-tweeted. As previously stated, RTs and QTs obviously represent the transporting of content from a primary context to a secondary context, and is thus to be understood as a form of recontextualisation. Considering that these include approximately half of the sampled data, it is evident that the concept, or strategy, of recontextualisation is significantly prominent within the Twitter output of BTS stans. Additionally, the differences shown here hint at individual stan accounts and community accounts having different roles, or functions, within the social figuration of BTS standom.

Account	Ts	RTs/QTs
Total	50 %	50 %
Individual stan accounts	60 %	40 %
Community accounts	31 %	69 %

Table 1 Distribution of Ts and RTs/QTs.

Taking a closer, more qualitative look at the internal and external actors within the interactions, it is evident that a slim majority of the interactions are internal, with the external mainly consisting of brands and media outlets such as *MTV*, *Samsung* and *Consequence of Sound*. Internal interactions are most broadly understood here as interactions with other stan and community accounts, as well as the official BTS and Big Hit accounts — all those that primarily revolve around the group and its members, either as stans or representatives. External interactions are understood as all interaction outside the aforementioned. Big Hit is the name of the record label to which BTS are signed.

These interactions are divided into two major categories: Containing personal mentions and RTs/QTs. Approximately 56 % of the RTs and QTs were external, with the internal number being 44 %. Importantly, every external interaction except a single one concerned tweets about BTS or Big Hit, thus keeping even the external interactions to the internal topic. Although the split is relatively even, it is significant to note that the primary context is more often external than internal, the implications of which will be further explored in the analysis of discursive strategies. However, further analysis reveals that the individual stan accounts were more often retweeting and quote-tweeting external accounts, with roughly 60 % of their RTs/QTs being external. The split between internal and external was smaller for the community accounts, with approximately 51 % being external, bearing in mind that a greater part of community account output consists of RTs/QTs than that of individual stan accounts.

Out of the external RTs and QTs, television and media outlet MTV was the one most commonly interacted with, counting 212 RT/QTs spread across the main MTV account (@MTV), as well as regional accounts (e.g. @MTVUK & @MTV_Germany). The MTV RTs and QTs all concerned the MTV Unplugged live performance that BTS took part in on February 23, with these tweets mostly consisting of scheduling information and commercials for the event. Similarly, both the clothing brand *FILA* and the technology manufacturer

Samsung ran ad campaigns featuring BTS during the collection of data, which were also retweeted and quote-tweeted by most of the accounts. Examples of the media outlets include American music magazines *Billboard* and *Rolling Stone*, as well as the business magazine *Forbes* and NBC's *The Today Show*. Here, as with the brand accounts, all tweets feature either BTS or Big Hit, in news stories, features or videos. Importantly, not a single one of the external RTs/QTs feature any criticism toward the group or its fandom, but rather present them in a very positive way, often referencing their good looks and musical talent.

Account	**Internal RTs/QTs**	**External RTs/QTs**
Total	44 %	56 %
Individual stan accounts	40 %	60 %
Community accounts	49 %	51 %

Table 2 Distribution of Internal and external RTs/QTs.

When it comes to direct personal interaction in the form of @-mentions, a total of 548 tweets had direct mentions of another account, and the split between internal and external interactions is much greater than with RTs/QTs. It is important to note here that a single tweet can have multiple personal mentions, meaning that the total of tweets containing external, and those internal, does not equal the total number of tweets with personal interactions. The analysis shows that within their 441 tweets that included personal mentions, individual stan accounts relied heavily on internal interactions. Of the 441, 440 were internal, with only 2 being external. The community accounts were only slightly less one-sided in their output, amounting to 98 personal mentions, and 22 external out of a total of 107. As such, a pattern emerges in which RTs and QTs are the primary strategies for external interactions, while personal interactions are mostly reserved for internal use. Of the internal personal mentions, one of the official BTS accounts (@BTS_twt) was by far the most common, while the external mentions were mostly composed of the different MTV accounts. As with RTs/QTs, all the personal MTV mentions concern the Unplugged performance in one way or another, cementing it as a dominant topic.

As Couldry & Hepp (2016, p. 65) states, there are most often figurations within figurations, and not every actor within are in the same position of power. As such, the internal

interactions can further be divided into official BTS communication and stans. Of the total of 772 internal RTs/QTs, approximately 37 % (287) come from official BTS accounts, with further analysis showing significant differences between individual stan accounts and community accounts. Here, the differences between individual stans and community accounts are relatively small; approximately 45 % for individual stan accounts, and 47 % for community accounts. The rights holders of the fan object having a prominent role within fandom is to be expected, and this finding is in line with previous studies in the field. Furthermore, its role as a primary context for recontextualisation by the standom is here suggested to be significant, although this is but one example of recontextualisation.

This is in contrast to the direct personal mentions, where a clear majority of personal mentions constitute mentions of official BTS accounts, for both individual stan and community accounts. For individual stan accounts, approximately 96 % of the personal interactions were with official BTS accounts, with that same number being 85 % for community accounts. Evidently, this affordance serves a particular and similar function for both types of accounts; direct interaction with the fan object. Importantly, these personal mentions of BTS are rarely in response to tweets from the official accounts. Although these direct mentions are an obviously accepted toll within the standom, it is difficult to interpret a specific reasoning for this other than a show of support, and a link to take anyone who comes across the tweets to the official account.

Regarding thematic/issue specific interactions, the use of hashtags (#) was shown to not be very prominent. Out of a total of 357 tweets containing #s, the individual stan accounts published 266, and the community accounts published 91. These were primarily made up of two types of hashtags; general BTS ones, and event related BTS ones. Examples of the former includes #BTS and hashtags using the names of individual members of BTS, such as #V, #JIN and #JUNGKOOK. These were most commonly attached to tweets containing news or media concerning the members or the group. The event related ones referenced events such as the MTV Unplugged live performance by BTS, e.g. #BTSMTVUnplugged and #BTSonMTV, as well as the birthday of group member J-Hope (also known as Hobi), #HappyHobiDay and #JHopeDay. This also included stan organised events, like a listening party organised by the British Army account, in which #BEEUKPARTY was used to label the tweets by those participating in the event. Notably, this listening party coincided with the release of a new version of a BTS album, the *BE Essential edition*, which is in line with the

aforementioned goals of both pushing songs up the charts by streaming them, as well as making BTS trend on Twitter. As such, the use of hashtags is seemingly a strategy for both coordination and congregation, seemingly in line with stated goals, further emphasising the strategic nature of the practice.

6.2 Themes & Topics

The entry level analysis of the key themes within the discourse reveals that the analysis was strongly focused on internal BTS-related topics, further supporting the findings in the previous section. Out of 2783 tweets, a single one concerns something other than BTS or Big Hit, the record company to which the group is signed. Although viewed here as an outlier, it is worth noting that this was a tweet asking for help to locate a missing child in Sweden, retweeted by @ArmyBase_Sweden;

"// missing child 12 year old Zipporah has been missing from Linköping, Sweden, since the 22nd of January 2021. There has been ZERO media coverage surrounding her disappearance and there are no updates surrounding her whereabouts."

Furthermore, the analysis showed that the distribution of different BTS-related topics and issues discussed were, in most part, very similar between the individual stan accounts and community accounts. In line with the findings of the previous section, BTS-related events were among the most obviously discussed topics by stan and community accounts alike. This began with the birthday of J-Hope, which although it fell on the 17th of February, one day before the timeframe in which the data was collected, remained a prevalent topic for multiple accounts. This was partly due to the differences in time zones between the researcher and the stans, as well as between the stans themselves, and partly due to accounts retweeting and quote-tweeting tweets relating to J-Hope's birthday on the 18th. Moreover, the release of the *BE Essential Edition* album on February 19th was an even more common topic, both in the days leading up to and during its release. Lastly, the live performance by BTS on MTV Unplugged was the most discussed event, both by individual stan and community accounts. Beyond these three, several smaller events were discussed, e.g. live streams, interviews, tv-appearances, although it was mainly the discourse around the larger events that were signified by a hashtag. This event-focused discourse was particularly common in the Twitter discourse of community accounts, where it made up a significant majority of the output. One particular event that stood out was the listening party coordinated by the UK Army account,

which was unique in that it was a stan-created event surrounding a more general event. Subsequently however, this also meant that this topic was exclusive to this account, not mentioned by any of the others sampled.

Interestingly, the three big event related topics each correspond to a different aspect of fandom and identity presented in previous research. The birthday of J-Hope is best understood as a showing of *affect*, emotional release described by Papacharissi (2012). It is an event centered around the showing of affect and emotion towards a member of the fan object, thus strongly reminiscent of the affection shown by music fans throughout history. The BE Essential album release highlights another aspect commonly cited in relation to K-pop and other modern music fandoms; *charts* and *trends*, with trends being used here to encompass both. In fact, trends represent a topic in themselves that can be seen in relation to all events, although the charts aspect is naturally mainly tied to music related topics. As such, this topic can also be understood as success or progress, with information about current trends commonly being shared in relation to most events. Moreover, other announcements and releases of things like new merchandise and music videos were also treated similarly. Lastly, The MTV Unplugged live performance is an event topic that originates as much in an external brand as it does in BTS. It is emblematic of a way in which the discursive boundary between BTS and the brands affiliating themselves with BTS is blurred and constantly shifting. Although treated here as a BTS event, it is undeniably as much a MTV event. What is emphasised here by the analysis, is the nature with which social figurations are in a constant state of flux (Loyal & Quilley, 2004), where topics and actors such as the brands can flow in and out accordingly.

Furthermore, the spread of event related topics differed somewhat between stan accounts and community accounts. Although the main topics were similar, the analysis revealed a greater variety within the Twitter discourse of individual stan accounts, where smaller events were discussed to a greater extent. One example of this is the event of BTS member Jungkook dying his hair blue, which became the topic of multiple tweets and retweets from multiple accounts. This finding corresponded to a broader pattern of stan accounts giving more time and space to smaller events than community accounts. Furthermore, although events were significant topics for the individual stan accounts as well, there was more variation in their Twitter discourse in general. Two less prominent topics, only discussed among stan accounts, were non-BTS fans, and fans of other K-pop groups, as well as BTS stans — both naturally

quite explicitly related to performativity and identity. In fact, these topics were exclusively shared among stan accounts, with some variation of opinion. Tweets concerning the more reflexive topic of BTS stans were mainly identified by the use of words such as ”we”, “Army(s)”, and “us”. Similarly, the topic of the other, those who are not fans/stans of BTS, is signified by terms such as “antis, K-pop stans and K-pop multilords”. These include both direct interactions with those belonging to the different groups, as well as mentions of them. Another tweet that is to be considered an outlier due to it being the only of its kind, although still relevant to this analysis, is one in which one account apologises for accidentally tweeting something from the stan account, that was meant for a personal account. It is noteworthy, because it emphasises that these accounts may not represent the entirety of one's data body (Couldry & Hepp, 2016), implying that the stan account is but part of a greater body of work, although the relations of the parts are not visible. Part of the boundary maintenance (Kidd, 2018) associated with fandom and subculture performed here, is thus the separation of the offline body from the digital stan body, suggesting that multiple identities may be maintained at once. Lastly, some of the stan accounts actively discussed BTS and Big Hit (BH) as separate topics, as emphasised by one account;

“one day this fandom is going to learn to stop associating everything BH does with BTS [...] its just getting tiring now lmao”.

This was one of the few points of internal contention, particularly between different stan accounts, the strategies of which will be explored further in the next area of analysis. For now, it should be emphasised that the community accounts all treated BTS and Big Hit as a singular topic, while some of the stan accounts did not.

The last major topic, most prominent within individual stan account discourse but still present within community account discourse, is one understood here as *interdependency*. This term, borrowed from Elias’ (Loyal & Quilley, 2004, p. 5) concept of social figurations, is used here to signify the practice described by Cavicchi (21017, p. 113) whereby music fans understand their relationships with performers as being reciprocal, through their listening experiences. However, the reciprocal relationship communicated between stans and BTS is not centered on listening, but rather frames listening as a tool for helping BTS place high in the charts. Moreover, by referring to listening as streaming, stans are highlighting an important way in which their practice is deeply mediatised. Streaming is an explicitly technology-dependent

practice, and as a unit, “streams” are more obviously commodified than “listens”. As one user puts it:

“MTV is promoting BTS’ unplugged heavily. A huge group deserves this level of promo, and it’s what they’re getting. So let’s all do our part and stream via official links, utilise free trials if needed etc. They’re expecting a huge audience and ARMY are huge enough, let’s show up”.

As evidenced by this tweet, the reciprocal relationship between BTS stans and BTS is extended beyond listening, to include making them trend, a more directly discursive practice. The term interdependency is chosen here specifically because of the explicit mentions of stans doing their part, or helping, portraying themselves as intrinsic to the success of BTS, as well as having a responsibility towards them — charts and trends both corresponding to exposure and capital gain. What is further suggested in this tweet, is a strong intentionality, a central characteristic of Gidden’s understanding of agency. It is evident that there is a desired outcome identified by stans, and that knowledge of streaming and trending is purposefully utilised to achieve said outcome.

The general homogeneity in the topics is, to some extent, in line with how the accounts present themselves, and highlights an important difference with this object of study in relation to that of Papacharissi (2012) and McGlashan (2020). In contrast to the aforementioned, these accounts are explicitly constructing their identities around a single object, their fan object.

6.3 Discursive strategies

In contrast to the homogeneity of the topics, a more in-depth analysis shows some significant difference in the discursive strategies through which the discourse around them is constructed and reproduced, between the individual stan accounts and community accounts. Although too general to fully be considered a key strategy here, it is worth noting that a significantly large portion of the tweets were identified as attempts to *inform* other stans about BTS-related topics. That is to say that many of the tweets contained information about BTS or BTS-related events, presented in a clear and plain manner, which may be interpreted as there being an expectation for BTS stans to be well-informed about their fan object.

The first discursive strategy identified by the analysis is the *strategy of formalisation*. This term is used here to reflect a tendency to move away from personalisation, instead using a formal language that invokes a degree of professionalism, commonly found in, for example, news outlets. Some of the accounts often included a topic within brackets at the top of the tweet, to frame the topic of the tweet. For the community accounts, this was the main strategy for presenting information, often including a link or screenshot of the source of the information. One example of this can be found in a tweet made by the Swedish ARMY account (@ArmyBase_Sweden);

".@BTS_twt cover of Coldplay's 'Fix You' is currently trending #35 on Swedish Youtube"

Included in this particular tweet is a screenshot of the video from YouTube, where the amount of views, likes and dislikes is visible, along with text verifying the statement. In some cases where the sources were other other tweets, these were either quote-tweeted when the information was shared, or retweeted right before or after the information was shared, spatially placing it near. Subsequently, the community accounts evidently make use not just of the affordances of Twitter as a platform, by including links and images, but of *recontextualisation*. In its most obvious form, recontextualization is employed here to transport information, in the form of text, from one (digital) space to another. Given the semi-chronological nature of a Twitter-feed, it can be argued that the content is also transported in relation to time. However, the discourse-historical approach to analysis further shows that the formalisation of content, or discourse, is in no small part done by adopting a more formal discourse, at times transported from the Official BTS accounts (See example 1). The analysis revealed no distinct patterns between internal and external topics, subsequently showing that the information was treated the same regardless of origin. Moreover, the aforementioned emphasis on providing sources for the information presents another example of BTS stans strategically appropriating a professional discourse.

(1) @ger_unite_bts
New TikTok Video with Jin and J-Hope on the official channel
TikTok
vm.tiktok.com/ZMeFJmHWn/
#BTS #방탄소년단 @BTS_twt #BTSARMY
@ArmyBase_Sweden

MTV Unplugged with @BTS_twt will air on MTV SWEDEN (TV) the 24/2 at 03:00, that is the night of tuesday to wednesday
Rerun: 21:05 wednesday 24/2
@UKBTSARMATION
*Pre-recorded Performances of Dynamite & BTS "Fix You * cold play cover will be available to watch on @MTVUK YouTube Channel <3*
YouTube link: youtube.com/c/MTVUK

Notably, the formalisation done by the community accounts suggests a positioning of themselves not just in relation to the fan object, but to other stan accounts. In formalising their language and adapting discursive strategies of professional communication, they are constructing themselves as sources of information, rather than identifying with individual stan accounts. This is supported by a distinct lack of *personalisation*, possibly suggesting an understanding of themselves partly as representatives of BTS rather than stans. In some cases, e.g. a tweet by the German ARMY account, a less formal tweet contained a signature, to indicate that this tweet was the work of an individual, and not the community account. This tweet was published after a formalised tweet, and expressed affect, a topic that was much more common among the individual stan accounts. Moreover, neither the community accounts nor individual stan accounts show any significant difference between internal and external topics conveyed through information, treating them as somewhat equally relevant. This is also true for the actors with which they interact in conveying the information.

Strongly related to information, and prevalent within both community and individual stan accounts, is the *strategy of translation*. Emphasising the globality of the standom, the use of this strategy followed two main patterns; *local to global translation* and *global to local translation*. The former is understood here as translation of information into English, mainly but not exclusively from Korean, while the latter is the translation of Korean and English into other languages e.g. Swedish and German. During the data collection, it became evident that the Korean language inhabited a dual role within BTS standom. Although it is the primary language of the band, used in their lyrics and their official communication, it is not necessarily the primary language of the stans. As such, it transgresses the boundaries of local and global, making the role of translation important for the stans. Moreover, the strategy of translation showed further variation between individual stan accounts and community accounts, as well as local differences between community accounts. Here, the analysis

revealed that the community accounts based in non-English speaking countries were selective in their choice of language. For example, when presenting information on how to watch the MTV Unplugged performance in Sweden, the Swedish ARMY account tweeted in Swedish. However, when tweeting information about BTS trending in Sweden, they tweeted in both Swedish and English. This was different from both the Danish and the German ARMY accounts, who were also selective in their choice of language. The Danish account only tweeted in English, except for direct interactions with Danish stans, and hashtags such as "#TillykkeHobi", translating to Happy Birthday Hobi. The German ARMY account on the other hand, translated everything into German, while also exclusively tweeting in German. Thus, translation is revealed to be a context-dependent strategy, by which the local accounts may address the local and global standom selectively. Indeed, this selective pairing of strategies to topics confirm that they are just that: strategically deployed.

For both the Swedish and Danish ARMY accounts, information about local trends was translated into english. This selective application of translation further corresponds to a core feature of recontextualisation; the creation of a hierarchy of discourses. In selectively deciding what information from the local context is made available to stans in a global context through translation, they are indicating what information and which discourses are considered relevant or important for the global standom. Subsequently, the prevalence of translation of local trends can be understood as a progress report, indicating to the wider standom that Danish and Swedish stans are doing their part. Another inference to be made from this pattern is that translation is used to coordinate local standom practices, in turn ensuring cohesion within the standom. This is further understood here as one way in which community accounts are constructing a shared orientation to common interactions, an integral characteristic of the concept of figurations.

This is not to say that the strategy of translation was found only within the output of community accounts. Indeed, two of the individual stan accounts were found to commonly utilise it, one of them once referring to themselves as a translator. However, the major difference between the two types of accounts lies in the temporal and spatial embeddedness of the strategy. For example, during a livestream with BTS, one of the stan accounts provided continuous translation of most of what was said, while the community accounts tended to translate official statements, more easily identifiable as information (see Example 2). Further made evident here is the difference in topics translated between community and individual

stan accounts, far less selective in their translation. Moreover, the analysis also revealed a tendency for community accounts and individual stan accounts alike to in part rely on individual stan accounts performing the role of translators, as well as community accounts dedicated to BTS related translations, to distribute the translated information to the rest of the standom. Here, recontextualisation is again strategically deployed to provide a function for the standom.

(2) @choi_bts2

Jin said J-Hope loves cucumber pickles (with Pizza) and J-Hope said "yes pickle is amazing! @BTS_twt

@ger_unite_bts (QT: @BigHitEnt)

[TRANS]

[Artikel] #BTS will make a guest appearance in tvNs Variety Show, "You Quiz on the Block" — Ep. 99 airing on 24.03.21.

Note:

It will be hosted by Yoo Jaesuk & Jo Seho. BTS will speak, do quizzes and other things for 100 minutes.

Two of the most strongly linked strategies are *constructing BTS as the most important/successful K-pop band*, and *constructing ARMY as a global and successful standom*. The former is in no small part done by selectively defining key areas of progress, most often in the form of charts and trends, and then referencing the progress in these areas. This is also done through selective recontextualisation — by only retweeting and quote-tweeting positive discourse about BTS, such as good reviews, positive chart/trend performances and displays of affection. In fact, the topic of affect was often found in relation to the strategy of constructing BTS as successful, together with topics of charts and trends. Another key characteristic of this strategy is that it is mostly external-oriented, at times deployed in response to external accounts or topics. For example, one account argued that the Spotify Viral 50 charts were not a legitimate measure of success, in response to stans of other K-pop groups celebrating their success. As they put it:

"nah bc the amount of times ive seen kpop stans pull out Spotify's Viral 50 charts like anybody actually cares about that charts when it is only based on the # of times a link to a

song has been shared on SNS and doesnt at all count the stream…. IM GONNA SCREAM YALL STVPID"

A historically significant aspect of this strategy is the pure showings of affect for BTS and its members, ranging from fanart and fancams to declarations of love and devotion. This is what was in the last section described as affect, focusing specifically on displays of affection for the group — although the analysis showed that this was sometimes directed towards other stans as well. This practice is perhaps the most obviously linked to the strategy of constructing BTS, in that it entails nothing more than telling and showing them, and everyone else, how great the stans think they are (see Example 3).

(3) @sorafirstlove
I'm just so glad we still got to see those performances they worked so hard on.
We appreciate you @BTS_twt
#BTSonMTV #BTSUnplugged
@pjmsmiley
HES SO PRETTY IM CRYINGGHG
@seokjinbit
once some of yall stop looking at BTS through yall kpop-colored lenses the world will be a much better place
the way its so OBVIOUS that OP is a kpop multi lord pls do everybody a favor and leave BTS alone, go back to your fashion ambassador kpop faves lmao

On the other hand, the *construction of ARMY as a global and successful standom* is primarily twofold. First, it builds off the construction of BTS as the most important K-pop group, if not the best music group in general, with the argument being that stanning the best group makes you the best stan. Secondly, it entails framing the success of BTS as the success of the standom, the argument being that if the stans are credited for constructing the best group, they are the best stans. Indeed, these two strategies often congregated in relation to the topic of interdependency, being used to construct an interdependent relationship between BTS and ARMY, in line with the reciprocity discussed in the previous section.

Moreover, these strategies were found to follow the patterns of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation. Most evidently, people and groups were being referred to by

specific terms, signaling the use of referential strategies. Although the terms used to designate non-BTS stans are seldom derogatory in themselves, the context in which they are used makes it obvious that they are indeed used as such. One such example is “kpop multi lord” (see example 3), used to reference someone who is a fan of multiple K-pop bands, which is here argued to be a bad thing. Similarly, the terms “antis” and “manager armys” were used to signify people who actively dislike BTS and BTS stans who think they know best how BTS should handle their business respectively. Referential strategies were being used to present other K-pop bands negatively, such as “fashion-ambassador faves” in example 3. What becomes evident here, is that similar strategies are being used in constructing the identity and the standom and BTS, the implications of which are twofold. First, it highlights a wish for cohesion, for the stans to be a representation of BTS, and for BTS to be representative for the standom. Second, it suggests that the stans construct themselves not just around the fan object, but *through* it. By constructing that which your identity is structured around, you necessarily participate in the construction of your own identity.

Lastly, and only within the individual stan accounts, the *strategy of constructing BTS as separate from their record label Big Hit* represents the only identified strategy that stands in opposition to other members of the standom. This is to say that although the community accounts were found to treat non-BTS related information about Big Hit the same as BTS related information, two of the individual stan accounts expressed an explicit desire to separate the two. Discourse concerning the relationship between BTS and Big Hit was found to be focused around events, in particular the announcement of a new “boy band” being announced by Big Hit (see example 4).

(4) @seokjinbit

one day this fandom is going to learn to stop associating everything BH does with BTS, its just the same old conversations over and over and over again, all this arguments and in the end BTS are still left unaffected and securing their bags. its just getting tiring now lmao

@seokjinbit (RT: userbfty)

all imma say is [...] we keep stressing how the boys ≠ the company but then anything the company does gotta b discussed at length -which is understandable but. goddamn.

@choi_bts2 (RT: @Kpop_Herald)

JUST IN: @BigHitEnt is planning to debut a new boy group and air the audition program globally in partnership with @UMG set to air in 2022, according to the two companies' joint media conference.

Here, while expressing a dissatisfaction with a perceived tendency within the standom, the introspective nature of this strategy is emphasised. It simultaneously entails both outlining the perceived current state of the issue, where stans care too much about Big Hit, and presents an ideal scenario, in which the standom's attention is reserved for BTS only. Notably, this practice of using events as discursive springboards for reflecting on the standom follows a wider pattern of even non-event related topics mainly being discussed in relation to events. Moreover, this strategy can further be understood as demarcation of the fan object, showing clear parallels to the boundary maintenance described by Kidd. Essentially, demarcation is employed purposefully to construct a cohesive idea of the BTS stan. Unfortunately however, the emphasis on interdependence inadvertently creates situations where economic support and/or some form of labor is expected of the stan. This is particularly evident when comparing tweets that call for streaming, which is in fact a (in)direct way of creating capital for BTS, or Big Hit, and tweets supplying information on how, where and when to stream. From this, it can be interpreted that stans are expected to act on the information, with the inadvertent expectation being that they will act on the information about other products and merchandise as well (see Example 5). Here the lack of demarcation between internal and external may create an expectation not just to help distribute the marketing of external brands, but to consume their products as well.

(5) @pjmsmiley

DONT FORGET TO STREAM

@ArmyBase_Sweden

BE (Essential Edition) by @BTS_twt has been released!! It's available for purchase at Bengans:

BE (Essential Edition):

bengans.se/sv/artiklar/bt…

BE (Essential Edition) + Weverse Gift:

bengans.se/sv/artiklar/bt…

@UKBTSARMATION (RT: @fila_korea)

FILA X BTS

NOW ON COLLECTION
2021.2.21 Coming Soon
D-2
[...] #FILA #BTS #ON

Overlooking the discursive strategies identified within the data, the analysis suggests that different accounts construct "toolboxes" of discursive strategies that correspond to a specialized function within the figuration of the standom. This was emphasised by the amount of specialised BTS standom accounts that were retweeted and quote-tweeted, such as those focusing on translation, creating GIFs, and keeping tabs on the charts. Moreover, some of the strategies are dependent on the others to be deployed in order to be utilised. In order to be effectively distributed, some information must be translated. In order to meaningfully construct ARMY and BTS to the stans liking, information must be made available for selective distribution. However, this selective choice of topics and discourse highlight a problem possibly attributed to the affordances of Twitter as a platform: the digital practices of BTS seemingly create something of an echo chamber, whereby topics are selectively transported into the standom to be remixed and recontextualised, flowing between different accounts and discourses. As the accounts with the highest follower counts, often being the community accounts, having the widest inherent reach, these may become gatekeepers, or at least unevenly powerful. Similarly, through the tendency to treat all BTS related information, official and brands included, the power of BTS in influencing the discourse is strengthened.

7. Concluding Discussion

The above analysis indicates that the BTS standom employs a wide range of strategies to continuously construct and reconstruct their collective identity on Twitter. Some key differences between the two kinds of accounts were identified, with the individual stan accounts being significantly more active. The analysis of interactive strategies showed that the Twitter affordances of retweeting and quote-tweeting were commonly utilised, particularly so for the community accounts — amounting to half of the total output. Albeit by a slim margin, these RT/QTs were mostly found to be external, although the split between internal and external was small with the community accounts. As forms of interactions go, RTs/QTs were significantly more often used than direct and thematic interactions, although it is notable that the analysis found the direct interactions to be overwhelmingly internal-oriented, with official BTS accounts by far being the most common recipient.

Moreover, the entry-level analysis revealed that very few of the tweets concerned non-BTS related topics. Given that all the topics were BTS-related, it is perhaps unsurprising that no significant differences between community accounts and individual stan accounts were found here. Most commonly, the topics were centered around events such as releases, live appearances and a birthday, thus clearly positioned in space and time. All the events, bar a single one, were created by either BTS & Big Hit or external actors. The three most commonly discussed events each corresponded to different aspects of fandom and identity. However, there were also two prominent non-event related topics, one of which reflexively concerned the identity of the standom, and one which centered on the perceived interdependent relationship between the stans and BTS. The latter was often found in conjunction with discussion of trends and charts, as well as more explicitly material references to capital. All in all, the range of topics strongly support the notion that identity as such is constructed here through and around a fan object.

Lastly, the in-depth analysis showed that despite the somewhat constricted map of topics, stans of BTS deploy a wide range of discursive strategies in the process of discursively constructing their collective identity, many of which are interdependent of one another. The presentation and dissemination of information was found to be central to much of the communication and found in relation to most of the identified topics. This was further seen in the, particularly for community accounts, common strategy of formalisation, by which the formatting of content followed the logic of news media and other professional institutions.

Similarly, a strategy of translation was commonly used to make the global dissemination of discourse possible. This was particularly prevalent with the community accounts, and followed patterns of both local to global, and global to local translation. The strategies that were most obviously focused on the construction of the collective identity concerned not only the construction of ARMY as a global and successful standom, but also the construction of BTS as the most important and successful group. This was, in great part, done by retweeting and referencing positive news, reviews and opinions about BTS, which often highlighted the standom's role in the success. It was furthermore found to follow pre-established patterns of self- and other-presentation (see section 5.2), further including more referential strategies. Finally, supporting the topic of interdependency, the construction of the standom as well as of BTS were shown to be interlinked, whereby an independent or reciprocal relationship was expressed — a relationship that is then used to argue the importance of the standom. Indeed, interdependence is the key term in understanding the many actors, processes, topics and strategies, through whose relationships of interdependence the discursive construction occurs.

7.1 Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to examine the hypothesis that digital authorship is dependent both on the media through which it is enacted, as well as the individuals and social groups that enact it. To do so, this study looks at the construction of collective identity carried out by so called stans of the K-pop group BTS. Moreover, the aim was also to test the validity of framing the online construction of identity as digital authorship. The following research question was posed: How do K-pop stans construct their collective identity online? Furthermore, two auxiliary questions were posed:

1. How is that process related to their "tweeting" and agency?
2. What is the role of the fan object in that process?

To answer these questions, the discourse-historical approach to CDA was successfully used to map out both interactive and discursive strategies deployed by BTS stans on Twitter, according to the model devised by Krzyzanowski (see section 5.2). The analysis indicates that K-pop stans construct their collective identity through a combination of strategic deployment of discursive strategies and authorial utilising of platform affordances. As further suggested by the analysis, they discursively motivate the identity which they want to construct, and purposefully deploy discursive strategies to construct it. They construct it

collaboratively in multiple senses, in which the platform plays a big part. Most importantly, they construct it around the idea of a reciprocal and interdependent relationship between the stans and BTS.

As further suggested by the findings, the construction of collective identity is not one process, but multiple networked and interdependent processes, located at different levels of context. At a macro level, the collective identity is constructed in and through a globalised context. Here, to construct a global collective is to utilise the recomposition of social relationships that globalisation brings, (Mohammadi, 2013, p. 3) to construct networked, transnational relationships between stans of BTS. These relationships are constructed and maintained through digital and social media, which is utilised for the translation and dissemination of information. In short, this is a process of trans-local meaning making (Couldry & Hepp, 2016, p. 105), through mediatised networks of communication. The focus on translation highlights that this is a standom constructed around taking something local and transporting it to a global context, rather than making it global. This is to say that while the standom is global, it discursively constructs BTS as a South Korean localised cultural phenomenon, often by including the original South Korean text in the translations, either in links or as images. With all this in mind, it can be inferred that this process follows Bauman's (1998, p. 2) description of the effects of globalisation, by which meaning-production is extraterrestrially located while individuals are not.

Furthermore, the analysis shows that the construction of K-pop stan collective identity is a deeply mediatised process, evidenced by the communicative means by which their identity is constructed and maintained. Whether it is through the focus on streaming as a measure of success, the translation and transnational dissemination of information, or the prevalence of audio-visual content, the presence of media has evidently brought structural changes to the process of construction, thus aligning it with the definition laid out by Couldry & Hepp (2016, p. 32). This is not to say that the BTS standom is fundamentally different in its goals compared to historical music fandom — as has been argued by Duffett, (see section 2.2) consumption has long been a central aspect of music fandom. However, the ways in which consumption is facilitated, and constructed as a central aspect, is necessarily dependent on communication through media. In short, media is evidently important in the construction and articulation of BTS standom. This is further supported by the glimpse into the BTS stan *media manifold* offered by the analysis, in which links to and screenshots from online stores

and platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Spotify, and TikTok are very common — forming a manifold in which the self is embedded (Couldry & Hepp, 2016, p. 91). Another important aspect of these processes that constitute the construction of identity is that they are continuous, as highlighted by the prevalence of event related topics in the data. The construction is responsive, in that as new events are introduced, the standom constructs itself in relation to that event, both directly and thematically.

Moreover, the analysis revealed three different levels of discursive construction; the construction of the self, the construction of the collective, and the construction of the fan object. The construction of the self was mostly done through presentation and performance, by including signifiers in the account names, through expressing affection towards BTS, and through contributing to BTS' success in the charts and trends. To this end, the significantly larger number of tweets published by the individual stan accounts is in line with the need to continuously manage the self (Couldry & Hepp, 2016, p. 146), and being encouraged to do so by the networked digital space (Papacharissi, 2012, p. 4). Similarly, the increased pressure of the online world to perform the self (Turkle, 2011) may further explain the intensity in the output. What is evident, is that by focusing on the discursive strategies that support the construction of identity, the analysis emphasises the idea of identity as performed.

To understand the construction of the collective identity, the concept of social figurations proves beneficial, particularly in its focus on relationships of interdependency (Loyal & Quilley, 2004, p. 5). Indeed, interdependency is a key concept not just here, but in the analysis at large. The analysis of the interactive strategies shows how stans selectively interact with other accounts in interdependent ways, forming the networks in which shared meaning production occurs (Couldry & Hepp, 2016, p. 63). This framing of the standom can further help explain the external interactions, as it allows for them to be viewed as selectively allowing external accounts to participate in the shared meaning production around BTS. As this was mostly done in relation to event-topics, it can be seen as the external actors being temporary members of the figuration, to help construct the standom through the event. However, this raises questions about the inclusion of brands and brand discourse in the collective, with the possibility that in utilising them to promote BTS, stans are essentially helping them with their marketing. Furthermore, any conceptualisation of this figuration must necessarily include the platform itself, Twitter, to emphasise the technological interdependence brought on by the deeply mediatised nature of these practices (Couldry &

Hepp, 2016, p. 68). In terms of *belonging* (see section 3.2), the analysis suggests that stans of BTS orient themselves both towards BTS and each other. *Power* (ibid.) on the other hand, is a bit more difficult to assess. What can be said however, is that as a procedural author, (Andrejevic, 2013, p. 135) Twitter has the power of crafting the rules of participation on their platform, inevitably granting them significant power over what is communicated and how. In order to effectively support the figuration, some stans, e.g. the community accounts, were shown to take on particular roles in the standom, by focusing on certain discursive strategies — most commonly translation and formalisation. This can be viewed as an example of the relative positions that actors occupy within the figuration (Loyal & Quilley, 2004, p. 7).

Lastly, there is the discursive construction of the fan object, which is perhaps the most unique to K-pop standom, and further emphasises the interdependent nature of the many processes which constitute discursive construction. Many of the arguments used to construct the standom positively, are based on a positive idea of BTS, around which the collective identity can be constructed. This is done partly by positively describing BTS, and showing affect for BTS, but also by constructing BTS in relation to other K-pop groups. One of the most pervasive arguments here is the trends and charts, which are used as a metric for comparison. Most notably, the construction of the fan object further highlights the interdependent nature of the processes, as stans discursively construct BTS in order to be able to construct themselves through and around BTS, while BTS is dependent on their standom for exposure and capital gain.

One way in which the somewhat elusive concept of power can be traced through the analysis is in the use of recontextualisation. Looking at the primary context from which discourse is being decontextualised, a pattern in which the discourse is often transported from the official BTS accounts to then be repurposed by the stans emerges. As such, it can be argued that the prevalence of BTS initiated discourse limits the control that stans have over their collective identity, by way of sustaining a hierarchy of discourse that is favorable for the fan object. However, as this in large part stems from the affectionate relationship that stans express towards their fan aboject, it is unlikely unique to the BTS standom. Still, this could indicate that there is an inherent power imbalance in online fan communities.

Furthermore, the analysis makes evident that tweeting — digital authorship — and individual agency are indeed strongly related to the construction of identity. As suggested by the

analysis, K-pop stans selectively deploy discursive strategies, by using the affordances of the platform(s), in the process of constructing their collective identity. In doing so, they are evidently acting as agents, as the analysis found them to express both intent and motivation (Giddens, 1984, p. 3). In this process, authorship can be seen as the practical means of online discursive production.

Here, the tweets are given all the signifiers of contemporary media authorship. They are, most often, products of collaboration, the result of networked relationships of actors, platforms, and discourses (Chris & Gerstner, 2013). They all carry the name of the account that constructed them, but remain difficult to attribute to the individual authorship of one user. The affordances of retweeting and quote tweeting, as well as the inclusion of images and links, highlights this. By including content produced by others, with tools provided by the platform, the texts necessarily become dependent on those others. When digital affordances are being utilised, authorship is enacted.

However, looking at authorship only at the level of tweets does not make visible the extent of authorship as a whole. In line with Foucault (1977), K-pop stans also author a space in which other stans can expand on their work. As made evident by the analysis, authorship of tweets that translate and disseminate information is a key part of the standom, and this allows for other stans to act on and use the information in their processes of authorship. Thus, the aforementioned relationships of interdependency between stans are being solidified, as the digital authorship through which meaning is constructed become dependent on abductively remixing (Turner-Rahman, 2013) and recontextualising content that has been authored by someone else.

Similarly, the intertextuality of the tweets must be emphasised. This intertextuality is both thematic, topical, and most importantly, an affordance of the platform and digital media more broadly. Even by just including the term BTS, stans are contributing on the long list of tweets that will appear using Twitter's search function. Furthermore, keeping in mind that all the stan accounts present themselves as such using their account name and user biography, all tweets that they publish obtain a thematic link to the fan object — essentially, they are linked in their shared orientation towards the fan object. Through these mediatised intertextual links, they form a larger text, through what Ruggill & McAllister call mass collaboration (2013, p. 139). From this, it can be argued that the collaborative authorship of the larger body of text

that is BTS stan discourse on Twitter, in turn authors the space in which discursive strategies can be enacted. By this understanding, the authorship of tweets may, through the process of mass-collaboration, ultimately constitute the authorship of the collective identity. This is perhaps the most obvious encapsulation of the relationship between authorship and the construction of identity. The discursive construction of K-pop stan identity is initiated, and made possible, through processes of authorship.

As authors in the digital space, stans of BTS have to manage the complex web of determinative forces and discourses, while still retaining some individual agency. This is in line with Papacharissi's (2012, p. 4) argument that self-presentation is a networked performance, in which one must adjust to different audiences without compromising one's own sense of self. Similar to how it has proven difficult to assign individual authorship in the case of K-pop stans on Twitter, it is difficult to conceptualise the individual agency of each stan in that process. Even if the authorship of tweets results in the construction of collective identity, the act of agency does not necessarily go beyond the authorship of the original tweet. Evidently, agency is strongly related to the process of discursive construction of identity, although not necessarily in an individual sense. Going by Giddens' (1984, p. 4-6) model, it is clear that charts and trends are reflexively monitored, and their attempts to make BTS trend are rationalized by the interdependent relationship between stans and BTS. However, as Giddens further argues, agency ultimately refers to the capability of action rather than the intentions, the nature of which is obviously influenced by the affordances of the platform. This is all to say that authorship, identity and agency cannot be articulated and expressed with complete freedom, as it is to varying extents constrained by the collaborating authors, media affordances, and relevant discourses.

While this is not completely novel knowledge, the findings of this thesis may shine a light on the complex networks of actors in which identity is constructed online. The implications of this, in line with Markham's description of remix culture (2013, p. 64), is that the process of constructing identity is filtered through media. Even more importantly however, is the implication that it is not only media technologies that shape the construction of identity, nor is it discourse and social factors. Instead, this thesis suggests that the two are equally important, entering into relationships of independence in which individuals act as agents. The discourse historical approach to critical discourse analysis was found to be effective in conceptualising the relationship between discourse and platform affordances, by utilising Krzyzanowski's

(2010) model. This model proved particularly useful in making visible the strategic nature of authorship, whereby specific affordances are used to communicate specific discourses. Thus, this thesis advocates for a methodology that combines the analysis of discourse with analysis of the technological networks of media in which it is communicated. However, given the limitations of this study, one should be careful not to generalise too extensively from these results. Conducting further similar studies are important for confirming the wider validity of these findings. As this research has been exclusive to the platform of Twitter, comparative studies on other popular social media platforms constitute a logical next step, whereby a more specific understanding of how specific platform affordances interact with and shape discursive practices. To this end, it is important that similar models are tested in research on different communities, with an additional focus on the offline, "real world" practices of its members.

In a world where we increasingly construct ourselves through media, and around media objects, it is important that we continuously attempt to gain a better understanding of the implications thereof. The obvious success of BTS, and the role of their fans therein, suggest the existence of some real collective power within, the construction of which could be useful for activists and researchers alike. In the words of one stan, it doesn't take a genius to know that there are others who yearn to have what they have.

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