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Transmedia storytelling in the music industry

The case of BTS

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Abstract

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This case study research examines the impact of transmedia storytelling on the global reach of Korean-pop (K-pop) group BTS (Bangtan sonyeondan) and how narratives within the transmedia storyworld can motivate the audience to seek individual and social change. This study is inspired by the rise of BTS in the global music industry. The group came with a solid brand image, highlighting sincerity and authenticity that captivate audiences worldwide. BTS consistent messages—that intersect with sustainability issues—about the importance of loving oneself, equality, social justice, anxiety, and wellbeing are communicated through multiple platforms and travel across language and cultural barriers. To understand the context, this study uses the concepts of transmedia storytelling and audience engagement by Jenkins (2006, 2007, 2012, 2014), Gambarato (2019), Broesma (2019), and Askwith (2007), to name a few. The method used to conduct this research is the analytical and operational model of transmedia design by Gambarato et al. (2020). The findings are that transmedia storytelling —with spreadability, drillability, extractability, and immersion characteristics—is an effective communication strategy that significantly influences the global reach of the group. Further, the camaraderie between BTS and ARMY generates fan activism—an epitome of individual change due to the fondness to BTS, as the act of identification and the attitude of giving back to the intimacy that BTS members provide to the fandom.

Keywords: Transmedia storytelling, transmedia music, audience engagement, fan activism, social media, BTS, social change, sustainability, ARMY.

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1. Introduction

Transmedia strategies have been used in the creative industries, including the music industry, for many years to attract more audiences. Jenkins (2014) argues that behind brand logic, the idea of transmedia in the entertainment industry is an effective tool to intensify audience engagement. A study by Brembilla (2019) examined some artists such as Spice Girls, Beyonce, One Direction and Björk, who have applied transmedia storytelling as a marketing strategy and how this strategy could generate economic value. However, to the author's knowledge, there has not been a study exploring transmedia music holistically involving several extensions and its repercussion to the individual and societal change. Therefore, the author attempts to explore the answers through the case of the Korean boy band *Bangtan Sonyeondan*, known as BTS, by analysing multiple extensions, both fictional and non-fictional.

BTS themselves, is a staple of the entertainment world, congregating fans worldwide in a mutual relationship. One of the reasons BTS is loved by many is that they are a natural storyteller, and the stories they share in transmedial way such as television, radio, and social media are personal, somewhat controversial, yet relatable. BTS initiates conversations about social inequality, the dilemma of youth, sustainability, discrimination, racism, and mental health. BTS is able to reach such heights while other previous artists or boy bands could not; Davis (n.d.) writes, "It's engagement on a scale no Western artist has ever achieved, despite decades of radio promotion and the best retail strategy" (para. 8). BTS influences can be seen through their far-reaching narratives that are translated into multiple languages and how they have created a high level of fan engagement in which the forms of the engagement would be analysed further in this study.

As mentioned earlier, this study focuses on BTS's transmedia storytelling and how it contributes to BTS's global reach and motivates fans to strive for individual and social change. While some studies have been conducted involving BTS (Park et al*.,* 2021; Blady, 2021; Lee et al*.,* 2021), there are only one study (Lazore, 2020) that concentrate on their multiple extensions of BTS's transmedia storytelling. For the theoretical underpinnings, this thesis relies on the notions from scholars including Jenkins (2006, 2007, 2010, 2012, 2014), Freeman and Gambarato (2019), Pierre Lévy (1997), and

Askwith (2007), to name a few. To analyse the case of BTS, the transmedia design analytical and operational model by Gambarato et al. (2020) is applied.

The first chapter of this study explains who BTS is and how sustainability issues become their agenda, followed by why this study is being conducted and an overview of the previous research that have been done on this topic. Research findings of transmedia storytelling related to BTS and social change are explored, including how this study fills the gap. Chapter four, the thesis presents the theoretical framework concerning transmedia storytelling, audience engagement and fan activism. The latter chapter describes the methodology along with the chosen materials and why the study focused on those transmedia extensions. The study followed by conducting the analysis of four case studies, and in chapter seven, the conclusion of the study is presented, along with the limitation of the thesis are assessed.

1.1. Background

1.1.1 Who is BTS?

BTS is a native Korean boy band that tops music charts worldwide and was named TIME's Entertainer of the Year 2020 (Bruner, n.d.) and Wall Street Journal's Music Innovator 2020 (Jeong, 2020). BTS have solidified their status as one of music's most influential groups, not only for their unique, genre-bending sound, but also for the messages of positivity and hope they convey to their fans. According to the Billboard charts, BTS is the first and only group in music history with four No.1 debuts on the Hot 100: *Dynamite*, *Life Goes On*, *Butter* and *Permission to Dance* (Basbas, 2021). Their recent accomplishments include winning the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI) Global Recording Artist Award of the Year 2020, Global Album All Format Chart, Global Album Top Sales with two albums at top 2 (Map of the Soul:7 and BE) and a Grammy nomination for Best Pop Duo/Group Performance 2021.

BTS, which comprises seven members—RM, Suga, J-Hope, Jin, Jimin, V, and Jungkook—, have gained influence not only in the music industry but also in the social,

cultural, economic, and even political spheres. Their fan base, known as Adorable Representative M.C. for Youth (ARMY), has been called the most powerful in history by Cable News Network (CNN) (Seo & Hollingsworth, 2019). This is because ARMY boosts stats on YouTube and music streaming sites by ensuring that songs are listened to many times. BTS recent song *Butter* has broken many records, including for the most viewers for the premiere of a video on YouTube (Suggit, 2021) as well as charting at #1Billboard 100 for nine weeks and as the biggest song debut in Spotify history (Rolli, 2021). In addition, the fandom has organised causes, such as planting trees, animal rescue, including donating more than US$1 million for #BlackLivesMatter and the most recent one is helping India to tackle the Coronavirus crisis (OneInAnArmy, n.d.). ARMY is highly organised and operates similarly to a professional organisation: from mobilising charity to sharing knowledge about the message behind BTS lyrics or narratives offered by BTS (Moon, 2020).

1.1.2 BTS and sustainability issues

In 2019, the United Nations (UN) acknowledged BTS as a "Global Sustainable Leader" (Koreaboo, 2019). Their *Love My Self* campaign (launched in 2017 and renewed in March 2021), along with United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), successfully raised over $2.98 million to end violence against children and youth (UNICEF, 2021). Henrietta Fore, UNICEF Executive Director, said that BTS helped promote the mental wellbeing of young people through their music, especially during the Corona pandemic (UNICEF, 2021). This campaign also led to the #ENDviolence bill Youth Manifesto, which calls on governments, schools, and similar institutions to stop violence, make students feel safe at school, and commit to kindness and mutual respect (UNICEF, 2019).

Back in September 2018, BTS was invited to speak in front of the UN General Assembly, and RM, the leader of the group, delivered a "powerful speech" (Wang, 2018). In the speech, which was directed to the youth, he said, "No matter who you are, where you come from, your skin colour, your gender identity, just speak yourself" (Wang, 2018, para. 7). The UN invited the group back in 2020 to address the pandemic crisis and deliver a "heartfelt message" to young people (UNICEF, n.d.). Forbes magazine wrote, "BTS's status is not just one of the biggest pop artists, in the world,

but agents for positive social change" (Rolli, 2020, para. 4). This time, all seven members shared their thoughts and encouraged young people to maintain perseverance and optimism, "Life goes on, let us live on" (para. 2). In July 2021, South Korean President Moon Jae-In appointed BTS as his diplomatic envoy (Teh, 2021). The duty involves promoting international cooperation in solving global challenges such as improving the environment, eliminating poverty and inequality, and respecting diversity (para. 4).

Furthermore, embracing their diverse fans and promoting inclusivity, BTS incorporated sign language into their choreography in their latest single *Permission to Dance*, which was praised by many, including the deaf community and the World Health Organisation's Director-General (WHO) Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus (Ji-eun, 2021).

Even though BTS has been campaigning sustainability issues, the band's members are still vulnerable to unsustainable practices, including racism and xenophobia. The oldest member of BTS, Jin, explained in an interview with *Variety* that: "When we are abroad or in other situations, we have also been subjected to prejudice. We feel that prejudice should not be tolerated; it really has no place" (Davis, 2020, para.4). The most recent racist attack towards BTS members was received in February 2021, when a German radio host Matthias Matuschik called BTS a "crappy virus that hopefully there will be a vaccine for it soon" (BBC, 2021, para.8) and said that BTS should be sent to North Korea for 20 years. A year earlier, the band was accused of being coronavirus carriers in America (Rolli, 2020). Later in March 2021, BTS released a statement on Twitter with the hashtags #StopAsianHate in response to increasing violence against Asians, particularly in the United States.

1.1.3   BTS transmedia storytelling

The BTS agency Big Hit Entertainment (the company name is changed into Hybe Labels as per March 2021) was a small company with limited resources and no support from the major media industry. Knowing they couldn't compete with the big entertainment agencies; they chose a frugal way to promote the band –through social media. Through various social media platforms, such as Twitter and Weibo, BTS members regularly upload content such as blogs, unedited stories, selfies and vlogs that

make the band seems sincere, personable and authentic. BTS and ARMY are building a network that feeds off each other. "This self-produced content was intended as an alternative to television but added a narrative layer all its own" (Jeeheng, 2019, p.33).

Further, due to their high visibility on social media, BTS's storytelling has expanded and become an integral part of the band's existence. Through rich storytelling, BTS have established a considerable presence across multiple media platforms. Their audience engagement has successfully led other record labels to rethink the way they build and maintain a fanbase (Davis, n.d.). Recently, Universal Music Group (UMG) announced their strategic partnership with Big Hit. This collaboration was the result of UMG's admiration for Big Hit's ability to create content that generates broad reach and global fan engagement (UMG, 2021). In early April 2021, Big Hit announced it had merged with Ithaca Holdings, a music agency that manages Justin Bieber and Ariana Grande, among others, intending to increase global reach and release exceptional content (Halperin & Frater, 2021).

2. Aim & research questions

Aforementioned, the global dominance of BTS in today's music industry has garnered many questions as to how a group from a formerly small entertainment label in South Korea could achieve such height and created such a ripple impact in the social sphere. Today, most media properties use transmedia extensions to gain notoriety, from a feature film to a video game to a television series. Thus, what sets BTS's transmedia storytelling strategy apart from others? In correspondence to that question, the aim of this study is to better understand transmedia storytelling in the music industry and delves into its effect and enduring impact in related with sustainability issues through BTS as a case study. Ideally, the research's findings will demonstrate the vital contribution of transmedia storytelling to the music industry from the lens of social sustainability.

This purpose leads to the following research questions (RQs):
RQ 1: How do transmedia storytelling strategies contribute to the global outreach of BTS?

RQ 2: How can BTS transmedia storytelling strategies motivate fans to seek individual and social change?

3. Literature review

As discussed previously, to the author's knowledge, transmedia music and its relationship to individual and social impact have very rarely been thoroughly studied or barely documented. The most recent study related to transmedia music was conducted by Brembilla (2019) which we will discuss later in this chapter. However, with the rise of Korean pop music (K-pop) in the global sphere, especially BTS, a relatively recent study (Lazore, 2020) focuses on storytelling, audience engagement, and fandom in the music industry. Concerning BTS and its fandom as an object of studies, there have been numbers of works relating to that, including the ones from Lee et al. (2021) and Park et al. (2021) in which we will be explored below.

3.1 Transmedia storytelling and transmedia music

Transmedia storytelling, a concept to be discussed in the next chapter, refers to the communication strategy to develop distinctive instalments of a story and spread it across multiple media platforms, engaging the audience throughout the process (Gambarato et al., 2020). This study is specified to analyse BTS, hence the literature review of transmedia storytelling is chosen in the topic that intersect with BTS and its fandom –or artist and audience relation. Accordingly, Carlos Alberto Scolari (2009) conducted a study entitled *Transmedia Storytelling: Implicit Consumers, Narrative Worlds and Branding in Contemporary Media Production*. Scolari mentions that transmedia storytelling encompasses changes in the production and consumption processes and that the creators of transmedia storytelling see business opportunities as the new generation of media consumers develop the ability to handle the flood of stories and become hunters of information from various sources. In his study, Scolari elaborates on the semiotic perspective of transmedia storytelling, stating that "the brand is a device that can produce a discourse, give it meaning, and communicate this to audiences" (p. 599). In addition, Scolari highlights that through transmedia storytelling, the brand introduces a set of values that consumers have the choice to accept or not. Scolari work demonstrates that the consumer has an active role whether to adopt the

value that introduced through multiple media. This study, subsequently, will delve into the active participation of the audience and to look at how the fans give meaning to the messages convey by BTS.

Cameron Cliff (2017) conducted a qualitative study *Transmedia Storytelling Strategy: How and Why Producers Use Transmedia Storytelling for Competitive Advantage*, highlighting why transmedia storytelling is an eminent tool to help brands compete better. Cliff states, "an understanding of and focuses upon the audience is central to a successful transmedia strategy, regardless of whether it is being conducted by a big media conglomerate or a small independent studio" (p.192). Cliff's statement on understanding the audience will develop further in this thesis, and what kind of strategies that the producers and the artists employ to engage the fans and whether the focus upon the audience will create impact.

Scolari's (2009) and Cliff's (2017) studies mention the role of the producer, brand, audience or consumer, which can be integrated into this study. However, Scolari's theoretical framework is leaning toward narratology rather than the holistic elements of the transmedia storyworld in which this study is conducted. Meanwhile, Cliff's (2017) analysis delves more into the producer side and does not explore further the audience side.

Regarding transmedia music, this particular area has not been explored as much, unlike in the transmedia storytelling projects that initiated from the film, such as *Star Trek*, or from books, such as *Harry Potter,* where several studies can be found. There are two studies that the author could find on transmedia music: Paola Brembilla (2019) and Courtney Lazore (2020a). Brembilla focuses on several artists in her study, as mentioned previously, while Lazore exclusively analyses BTS, which she perceived as a brand. Brembilla (2019) writes about *Transmedia Music: The Value of Music as Transmedia Asset* and limits herself to the case of Western artists who have minor language and cultural barriers concerning their audience. This work adopts Brembilla's suggestion that the analysis of transmedia music requires a multi-layered perspective that links various considerations, including commercial, creative, cultural, and foregrounding dynamics. In her work, Brembilla analyses the boy band One Direction (1D), which ruled the music industry before the BTS era. Her analysis leans towards

the commercial value and commodity value of 1D, which is reflected in transmedia projects. In addition, she examines the cultural value of the fan base by counter-narrativising the relationships between 1D members and the fandom supports of the LGBT community. Brembilla's study is an asset to this thesis because it gives perspective on how previous boy band that also used transmedia storytelling was able to encourage audiences to actively respond and make an impact. What makes this study different from Brembilla's work is the cultural layer and barrier that BTS has. As mentioned earlier, BTS faces sustainability challenges such as equality and inclusivity. In addition, BTS outreach and social impact are more immense than that of 1D. Moreover, Brembilla's study does not focus on individual and social change.

Lazore (2020a) study titled *Success Story: How Storytelling Contributes to BTS's Brand* addresses the transmediality of BTS. In her analysis, Lazore identifies that good storytelling is necessary to engage audiences, and in the case of BTS, storytelling has played a crucial role. Her study focuses on the transmedia storytelling extensions of BTS, including music videos, concept albums, Bangtan Universe, and documentary films. Lazore's research findings suggest that storytelling is crucial in promoting brand authenticity and sincerity. Moreover, she also mentions the essential role of the story for brand. Although Lazore analyses BTS's transmedia storytelling, the extensions analysed in this study differ as well as the goal and framework of the study. Lazore's studies focus more on branding, whereas this thesis examines the impact of transmedia music on sustainability using different materials, which are discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. Nevertheless, the outcome of this thesis can ideally show whether there is coherence between the transmedia storytelling extensions of BTS by contrasting both analyses.

3.2 Audience engagement, fandom and social impact

There are already a number of studies looking at BTS fans and audience engagement, including the recent collaborative work by Park, Kaneshiro, Santero, and Lee (2021) entitled *Armed in ARMY: A Case Study of How BTS Fans Successfully Collaborated to #MatchAMillion for Black Lives Matter*. The empirical study by Park et al. explains the collective efforts and collaboration of fans for a social cause. In the study, a survey design was aimed to measure the effectiveness of fan collaboration and collect the data

on how ARMY member's perceive the fandom as a community. The survey was conducted through Twitter. In addition, Park et al. (2021) explored the relationship between global fandom and social media and mentioned briefly the transmedia storytelling produced by Big Hit, which enables fan participation (fan-created story) and content expansion. Park et al. study demonstrates fan mobilisation through Twitter and how the fandom utilises social media to organise a cause. However, there was no further investigation or explanation concerning participatory issues. In retrospect, this thesis will analyse the fandom participatory culture as it is presumably one of the crucial parts of audience engagement.

Blady and Lee et al. (2021) conducted a study on BTS and its impact on mental health. Blady's research focuses on the BTS album –the process, the album content, the concept of the album, and interviews. While Lee et al. explore how BTS music can support the listener's mental health. Blady (2021) identifies that Big Hit's concept of "Music and Artist for Healing" "has facilitated this organic growth in their body of work" (p. 118). His study entitled *BTS from N.O to O.N and Beyond: Innovation on Effective Mental Health Messaging and Modelling* concludes that "BTS has organically transformed traditional idol activities and creative production into integrated and effective mental health and wellbeing platforms for themselves and their fans" (Blady, 2021, p. 142). Lee et al. (2021) state that BTS's music supports fans' mental health through various mood regulations that affect audience behaviour. Both Blady and Lee et al. study go hand in hand in demonstrate the social sustainability impact of BTS through their music, which how this thesis will be developed. Although, both Blady and Lee et al. don't specifically analyse BTS transmediality, however the result findings from Blady and Lee et al. can be the added value of this study to strengthen the arguments of the individual and social impacts of BTS transmedia storytelling.

3.3 Research gap

Based on the literature presented above, it appears that there is a limited number of studies that focus on transmedia storytelling in the music industry (Brembilla, 2019; Lazore, 2020a). Nevertheless, both studies tend to view transmedia storytelling from the financial perspective and hardly focus on producers. Of course, the economic value of transmedia storytelling projects cannot be denied; as Brembilla (2019) has noted,

every project, predominantly in the entertainment industry, requires capital and aims to generate profit, as producers also need to sustain the business. However, this study focuses on the impact of BTS transmedia storytelling on sustainability that has not been explored. Therefore, it is crucial to highlight the individual and social impacts without neglecting the other nuances that circled the music industry as forementioned. Further, this study also explores both from the producer and the consumer side, beyond, it is not simply the connection between the artist and the fandom, but it includes the agency that drives the artist. This holistic approach is possible to analyse by applying the methodology developed by Gambarato et al. (2020), which will be explained further in Chapter 5.

Due to the nature of the entertainment industry, this study does not declare whether BTS, as a global superstar, practices a sustainable lifestyle. Instead, analysing the selection of BTS's transmedia storytelling extensions—those that precisely address individual and social change—may open up further discussion of transmedia music in relation to sustainability issues and the rupture between practices.

4. Theory

The theoretical framework used in this study includes understanding transmedia storytelling and how it is employed in the entertainment industry, including the music industry, to better understand what transmedia storytelling is and the benefits it offers. In addition, the study will use Jenkins' (2009a, 2009b) notion of the seven principles of transmedia storytelling to analyse the complexity of BTS's transmedia storytelling and to "measure" the effectiveness of transmedia storytelling, as well as to examine how and whether these seven principles help BTS's global reach. The seven principles, explained below, could be a barometer for producers to create successful transmedia storytelling. One of the goals of the transmedia storytelling project is to engage the audience. Therefore, the theoretical framework of this thesis encompasses the elaboration of audience engagement and level of engagement, which will be beneficial to understand audience perspective and "measure" the impact of transmedia storytelling extensions, including individual changes and social changes. One of the indications of individual and social involvement in the transmedia universe is the reaction and activity of fans or fandoms to transmedia storytelling content. Therefore, the theoretical

framework of this thesis will also include fan activism, which could contribute to the understanding of fan dynamics, especially in terms of social movements.

4.1 Transmedia storytelling

The term transmedia storytelling was coined by Jenkins (2006) as a story that unfolds in several different media platforms that enrich and complement each other. Through its expansion, transmedia storytelling creates a more meaningful and entertaining experience for the audience. According to Jenkins (2007), transmedia storytelling has a character that allows different audience segments to have different entry points into the storyworld. This means that transmedia storytelling has the potential to appeal to a broader audience. Transmedia storytelling also allows the audience to choose and direct their engagement with the storyworld as they wish. Multiple elements within a transmedia world can pique the audience's interest in engaging with the story (Jenkins, 2006).

Concerning the application of transmedia storytelling in the entertainment and creative industry, the strategy has been used for many years to attract audiences, Jenkins (2014) argues that behind the brand logic, the idea of transmedia in the entertainment industry—such as Hollywood—is an effective tool to intensify audience engagement. Further, beyond the commodification within the entertainment industry, transmedia storytelling plays an essential role in social and behavioural change (Freeman, 2019; Hancox, 2019; Rutledge, 2019) by providing people with a deeper and gratifying experience beyond media commercialism. Phillips (2012) identifies the power of transmedia storytelling:

> Any single-medium work can, in theory, make an audience laugh or cry. But make an audience feel directly involved in the events in a story? Whether we're talking about responsibility for sending a woman to her murder, or perhaps instead saving her life or introducing her to her partner, you just can't evoke that feeling with a book or a movie. This is the power of transmedia. (p. 5)

Related to transmedia extensions, Jenkins (2009a) points out that every extension is unique and contributes differently to the unfolding of the story. To create a holistic

entertainment experience, including in the music industry, Jenkins (2009a; 2009b) comes up with seven principles of transmedia narratives that include spreadability vs drillability, continuity vs multiplicity, immersion vs extractability, worldbuilding, seriality, subjectivity, and performance.

Spreadability vs drillability is related to audience engagement and experience. Jenkins (2009a) defines spreadability as audiences' ability to be actively involved in the content circulation through social networks and expand its economic and cultural values. Mittel (n.d.) suggests the term "drillable" to describe the deeper engagement of the audience and where the audience has the urge to discover more and devote their time and energy to further engage and participate.

Continuity vs multiplicity focus on how transmedia delivers experiences to audiences. Continuity, according to Jenkins (2009a), allows audiences to "gather the puzzle" and "assembling them into a meaningful whole" (para.17). For hardcore fans, this format is preferred. Whilst multiplicity provides the audience with an alternative version by offering different points of view, characters and events in the parallel universe.

The difference between immersion vs extractability is how the audience enjoys the journey of the narratives. Jenkins (2009b) explains that being immersed is when the audience delves into the narratives outside of their everyday lives, such as watching a movie, playing video games, or reading a book. Extractability is when the audience takes a part of the narratives and brings it into real life, for example in the BTS case, by collecting the BTS Mattel's doll that fans can re-enact at home.

The concept of worldbuilding is related to the principles of immersion and extractability (Jenkins, 2009b): "the desire of audiences to map and master as much as they can know about such universes, often through the production of charts, maps and concordances "(para. 8). This audience activity can produce supported storyworld content that can be consumed and useful to others.

Seriality is usually evident on TV or in book series. It presents stories in multiple parts that come together to form a complete story. In the realm of transmedia storytelling, seriality is distributed across multiple media systems (Jenkins, 2009b). Furthermore,

Jenkins notes seriality works effectively for die-hard fans but can be confusing for non-fans due to the fragmentation of narratives.

Jenkins (2009b) uses subjectivity to explain how transmedia extensions can be the outlet to display and explore the secondary characters that do not have enough voice in the main story world. Therefore, subjectivity allows the secondary characters to evolve, gives the audience a more appealing value to dive further into, and encourages the audience to get involved, such as creating a blog or social media profile dedicated to that character.

The term performance refers to how fans can actively engage in the narratives by participating, expanding the story—for example, through fan fiction—and reconstructing parts of the story universe (Jenkins, 2009b). Hardcore fans are motivated to share their knowledge online and even create their own narratives based on their perceptions and expertise.

4.1.1. Audience engagement

Audience engagement is a personal and subjective practice due to the various degree of involvement, interaction, and/or participation. Therefore, there are a variety of definitions of audience engagement that will be elaborated in this study in which correspondence with transmedia storytelling and the case of this thesis. Broersma (2019) argues that it refers to the cognitive, emotional, or affective experiences the audience has with the content. Further, Broesma states that engagement is about "meaning-making, value creation, and connecting to public discourse" (2019, p.1). Broesma goes on that engagement shows the audience's response and purposeful reaction to what they consume, what they see, watch or hear. "These psychological experiences would motivate them to use it longer and more intensively, and stimulate users' loyalty, attentiveness, and thought formation" (p.1). The audience's active response can refer, for instance, to the exploration and interaction with more content, the purchase of associated products, and translation of information provided into political behaviour in their lives. Aligned with Broesma, Alison Norrington (in Norrington et al., 2019), the Creative Director at Story Central Ltd., states that transmedia storytelling producers need to understand the degree of audience

engagement and how to capture it. Norrington points out the importance of emotional design or how we leave impressions on the audience.

Jenkins (2006) acknowledges that deeper engagement with a fan base can create collective intelligence, and through transmedia storytelling, the audience has the opportunity to become the producer instead of a mere consumer of content. Pierre Lévy (1997) coined the term collective intelligence, which refers to the ability of knowledge production and distribution within the networked society. Moreover, within the concept of collective intelligence, participants share their expertise and cooperate with others to solve problems. Lévy states, "No one knows everything, everyone knows something, all knowledge resides in humanity" (1997, p.20). Collective intelligence is perceived as an alternative source of media power. Furthermore, Jenkins borrows from Lévy the premise that artworks, within the collective intelligence, act as cultural attractors, "drawing together and creating common ground between diverse communities" (Jenkins, 2006, p.97). In this sense, a transmedia extension can function as a cultural attractor, congregating audience members that share common interests and also as a "cultural activator" (Jenkins, 2006, p.95), offering audiences the opportunities to be co-creators and do something useful.

Askwith (2007) proposed five logics of engagement to identify why the audience keeps interacting in multiple platforms and in their preferred narrative worlds, which is relevant to understanding engagement within transmedia storytelling. The five logics include entertainment, immersion, social connection, mastery, and identity. The logic of entertainment refers to the pleasure of being entertained or why audiences enjoy watching certain content. The logic of immersion defines "the audience's desire to experience a show's production process and to be involved in" (p.112). Askwith (2007) explains the logic of social connection as an interaction between the audience who share a similar feeling or experience, and it creates a sense of belonging among the audience members. Mastery is defined as a concept of engagement that feeds the audience's intellectual desire to overcome challenges, unravel the complexity of narratives, and provide interpretation. The logic of identity is elaborated as "The range of ways in which engagement with television content may both help viewers to formulate and/or reaffirm their personal identities (self-identification) and allow them

to express and signal those self-perceived identities to others (social identification)"
(p.114).

Another notion related to audience level of engagement is suggested by Gambarato et
al. 2020), which point out the concepts of participation and interaction, including
audience collaboration on signing a petition for a social cause; "this involvement of the
audience has an impact to promote the social cause in vogue and inspires social
change" (p.42). Gambarato et al. notion is aligned with Carpentier (2015) suggestions
of interaction within a participatory process. He postulates, within the media logic,
there are two types of participation: minimalist participation means the media has
control over the process and outcome, and the power of the participants is very limited.
In contrast, maximalist participation allows the audience to be acknowledged and
recognised. In addition to audience participation Jenkins (2010) postulates,
"participatory culture refers more broadly to any kind of cultural production which
starts at the grassroots level, and which is open to broad participation" (para.7).

The level of audience engagement can also be seen from the audience's point of view;
how the fans perceive the artists. Horton and Wohl (1956) introduced the concept of
parasocial relationship –a one-sided imaginary interaction and intimacy at a distance.
Horton and Wohl (1956) developed this notion to examine the interaction between
viewers and media performers, particularly television performers. They considered this
relationship to be non-reciprocal, but in a later publication, Horton and Strauss (1957)
pondered that "parasocial interaction (is experienced by the user) as immediate,
personal, and reciprocal, but these qualities are illusory and are presumably not shared
by the speaker" (p. 580).

In the parasocial relationship, while consuming the media content, the audience has the
feeling of entering a new universe and connecting with the characters in the media
content. Although the audience is aware that this parasocial interaction is not an actual
interaction, they often feel intimacy and closeness because they are familiar and
understand the characters in the media content, similar to a real friend. To further show
their loyalty, the audience collects memorabilia, sends emails, and purchase the
performers' endorsements (Horton & Wohl 1956). Perse (1990) suggests that this
relationship is formed because of emotional involvement.

4.1.2. Fan activism

A fan community is a good example of the practice of audience engagement, namely spreadability, where the fan contributes content—creating an image, a video, a meme, a song—and shares it with a wider social network and creates impacts. Jenkins et al. (2013) use Susan Boyle, a Scottish singer, as a successful case of spreadability. "The Boyle video was broadcast content made popular through grassroots circulation" (p.10). Boyle's international success was driven by fans. Fans helped her to achieve fame by spreading content through social networking sites and media sharing tools. Another exemplify of fandom power can be spotted through Harry Potter (HP) Alliance. The HP Alliance translates social and political issues into Harry Potter's framework. According to Slack (2010), Harry Potter's powerful and compelling stories inspired readers to do good and do justice, which Slack calls cultural acupuncture, "finding where the psychological energy is in the culture and moving that energy towards creating a healthier world" (para.4). Slack elaborates cultural acupuncture as an "activism that is fun, imaginative, and sexy yet truly effective" (para.7) that comes from the activist without significant financial support.

Jenkins (2012) states that fans share their common interest and shape their social or public appearance. Furthermore, Jenkins (2012) points out that when fan groups have decided to organise a cause, strategies, share knowledge, and mobilise supporters, they have already fulfilled the requirement of activism. According to Jenkins (2010): "fandom refers to social structure and practices created by the most passionately engaged consumers of mass media property" (para.7). Fandom "represents a particularly powerful training ground for future activists and community organisers" (para.17). In the social media context, the use of hashtags (#) indicates the social mobilisation of fans concerning their positioning within society (Alzamora & Andrade, 2019). Jenkins (2006) argues that online activities can be the "playground" to exercise power when people have minimal control over what happens in everyday life.

Nevertheless, fan activism is not intentionally political, but according to Brough and Shresthova (2012), it offers political engagement possibilities. Hancox (2019) points out that this type of fan activism occurs because of the affection or fondness

of the characters in the storyworld, leading to participatory culture. Fans find their own way to express their engagement and unfold the ideas from the narratives—i.e., through fundraising or other social movements. "It encourages groups of people not generally associated with political action—young people, avid consumers of popular culture—to believe they have a valid voice, that they can find or create familiar spaces from which to express their concerns" (Hancox, 2019, p.336).

5. Method and material

Methodologically, the research takes a qualitative approach to build an in-depth case study supported by the transmedia design analytical and operational model designed by Gambarato et al. (2020). To answer RQ1 and RQ2, the analysis applies the five dimensions of the model: "(1) story, (2) premise, (3) extension, (4) audience, and (5) structure" (p.72).

5.1 Case study

A case study aims to thoroughly understand and interpret a single case in a particular context and discover data or information about the dynamics and processes involved (Aaltio & Heilman, 2009). Furthermore, "the researcher tries to understand and interpret individual cases thoroughly in their own special contexts" (Aaltio & Heilman, 2009, p.8). Yin (2012) states that case study is relevant when the research aim is addressed to answer a descriptive question, such as "how or why did something happen?"— which is the case of this study. As this thesis analyses different formats of storytelling, including social media, video, music and interactive games, it is categorised by Kara (2015) as creative research. Therefore, data will be collected through archival materials and analysis of creative works.

5.2 Transmedia design analytical and operational model

Gambarato et al. (2020) (see Table1) has a qualitative character that contributes to understanding the design process of transmedia projects. The analytical and operational

model of transmedia design consists of five dimensions, which, as mentioned above, serve as tools to analyse the extensions. Compared to other transmedia analytical models that exist - such as that of Moloney (2018), which focuses on journalistic works, Lovato (2018), which deals exclusively with non-fictional transmedia scripts, or Cliff (2017), which concentrates more on the commercial aspect –the model of Gambarato et al. (2020) is the most compatible model, as it allows the author to analyse non-fictional and fictional storytelling—the comprehensive analysis will usher to answer the RQ1. Further, the analytical model explores the role of producers and audiences—the analysis, therefore, will guide to answer the RQ2—while also examining the environment in which characters operate and considering the economic side of transmedia storytelling projects.

Each dimension of Gambarato et al.'s analytical model is accompanied by a set of practicable questions that guide the analysis. All these elements combined contribute to a holistic overview of the transmedia extensions considered in the thesis; therefore, they can enlighten the analysis oriented to answer the proposed research questions.

Table 1: A concise description of the transmedia design analytical and operational model
Source: Gambarato et al., 2020, p.79

No	Topic	Practicable Questions
1	**Story** The building of a storyworld with its narratives and characters that is robust enough to support expansions.	• What is the central world in which the project is set? • How is the world presented geographically? • What would be the summary of the storyline? • What is the timeframe of the story? • What are the strategies for expanding the narrative? For instance, are negative capability and migratory cues included? • Who are the primary and secondary characters of the story? • Could the storyworld be considered a primary character? • Could the audience be considered a character?
2	**Premise** What the project is about and why it exists.	• What is the project about? • Is it a fictional, non-fictional, or mixed project? • What is its fundamental purpose? Is it to entertain, to teach, to inform, or to market a product?
3	**Extensions** Transmedia storytelling involves multiple media in	• What media extensions (film, book, video game, comic book, mobile app, etc.) are involved in the project? • Does each extension enrich the story?

	which the storyworld will be unfolded and experienced.	• What devices (computer, game console, tablet, mobile phone, etc.) are required by the project? • What is the roll-out strategy for releasing the media extensions? • Which genres (action, adventure, detective, science fiction, fantasy, etc.) are present in the project? • What types of visuals (animation, video, graphics, a mix) are used in the project? • Is it possible to identify specific design styles in the project?
4	**Audience** Scoping the audience is fundamental to more appropriately deliver the transmedia experience. Transmedia storytelling involves some level of audience engagement.	• Who is the target audience of the project? • What is the project's business model? • What are the mechanisms of interaction in this project? • Is participation also involved in the project? Does the project work as a cultural attractor or activator? • Is user-generated content (fan fiction, parodies, recaps, mashups, etc.) part of the project?
5	**Structure** The organisation of a transmedia project, the arrangement of its constituent elements, and how they interrelate to each other offer concrete elements for understanding the project.	• When did the transmediation begin? Is it a proactive or retroactive project? • Is this project closer to a transmedia franchise, a portmanteau transmedia story, or a complex transmedia experience? • What are the possible endpoints of the project? • How is the project structured?

5.3 Materials

BTS transmedia storytelling is a vast universe that contains multiple extensions and expansions. The extensions comprise of non-fictional and fictional stories, that launched at different times. The extensions include (1) accounts on major social networks, including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Weibo; (2) a YouTube channel under the name Bangtan TV, which contains various content expansions; (3) graphic lyrics books, available in five volumes; (4) multiple BTS documentary films, such as Break the Silence, Burn the Stage, Bring the Soul; (5) several reality shows, including RUN! BTS, Bon Voyage, In the Soop, American Hustle Life; (6) TinyTAN - BTS animated characters; (7) mobile games such as BTS World and BTS Universe Story, which can be downloaded from Google Play and App Store; (8) Bangtan Universe, a parallel storyworld of which each member portrays a different character and develops fictional stories, including sensitive issues such as homicide, poverty and

abusive family; (9) webtoons; (10) BT21 Universe - a collaborative project between Line Friends and BTS since 2017; (11) numerous merchandising and licensed products, including clothing, key chains and Airpods cases; and (12) Weverse, a fan platform.

Ideally, to achieve a comprehensive result, more extensions can lead to better findings. But due to the limitation, this thesis will only analyse four BTS transmedia storytelling extensions that consist of BTS account on Twitter, Bangtan Log from YouTube channel, BTS Universe Story mobile game, and TinyTAN animated character. A further explanation about what the extensions are about will be written in Subchapter 6.3. These specific four were selected according to the following considerations: (1) the narratives are relevant to sustainability themes related to individual and social change, (2) the different nature of each extension contributes to a more complex and comprehensive outcome, (3) the approach of character development of BTS members and as a group before debuting until now, and (4) the combination between fictional and nonfictional narratives result to more compelling effects.

6. Analysis

6.1 Story

Story refers to 'how and when the story is built' and 'who are the characters involve in the story'. In the BTS transmedia storytelling universe, it seems obvious that the narratives that BTS and the Big Hit agency want to highlight are BTS sincerity towards fans and their humble attitude. The storyworld was developed through emotional design, which Norrington et al. (2019) cite as an important factor in transmedia storytelling. According to Norrington et al., many transmedia storytelling projects lack emotional connection, and the project merely serves as a soulless marketing tool. In contrast to BTS's transmedia storytelling, the messages conveyed by the band emphasise personality and humility.An example of this is the way RM, the group leader, responds to massive media attention and coverage by acknowledging that they are only seven guys from South Korea (Bruner, 2020). In the first Bangtan Log clip, RM (2013) shared his worries as a rapper, the criticism Bang Shi Yuk—the producer— gave him, the expectations, the insecurity, and his promised to rap better. In other times, RM (2013b) said: "I am in the studio, writing rap but it's not going too well. To

be honest, I am cold, hungry and sleepy" (0:17). The simple and mundane stories seem to evoke sentimental feelings in fans' hearts. According to a survey by Lee et al. (2019), the ARMY members relate to the story the artists deliver; "they are also experiencing such emotions and pains "(p.3). This strategy correlates with Bang Shi Yuk aspiration: "I did not want them to be false idols. I wanted to create a BTS that could become a close friend" (Hiatt, 2021, para. 20). Lazore (2020a) acknowledges in her study that a "strong and recognisable brand persona" (p. 49) is important to enhance the success level of the storytelling. Lee (2019b) also affirms the band's persona, stating, "Without their sincerity, they could not have established their global fan base that supports them with solidarity. Sincerity cannot be manufactured" (p.87).

Considering Jenkins' (2009a) principle of transmedia worldbuilding or the foundation of the story, BTS seem to have a sufficient amount of tapestry on which the main story can unfold. It follows by alternative narratives that arise from different circumstances, such as the launch of new (music) single. Each character in the BTS storyworld is endowed with multiple stories with an endless array of possibilities—as it can be developed as well in non-fictional extensions, akin to the ones in BTS Universe Story (BUS) mobile game. The BTS transmedia storytelling's central world was built around seven boys who are dubbed by the media as the biggest boy band in the world (Hollingsworth, 2019; Hiatt, 2021) and have been facing difficulties since their debut to be able to establish themselves in the music industry. The first two members of BTS, Kim Nam Joon, known as RM (26) and Min Yoongi, known as Suga (28), have underground hip-hop roots that are rather unusual for the idol concept, yet the agency formed the group around them. Jung Hoseok, whose stage name is J-hope (27), was the third to join the band with his talent as a skilled street dancer and trained as a rapper. When Big Hit decided to form an idol concept group with hip-hop as its root, they recruited new members who embodied "idol" factors: someone who can sing and dance in a highly produced manner, is fashionable and good-looking. Four members were added to the band through auditions: Kim Seokjin, known as Jin (28), Jungkook (23), Taehyung, known as V (25), and Jimin (25) and they were trained by the agency as dancers and singers. In 2013, BTS debuted with seven members with diverse backgrounds and talents.

The BTS storyworld also layered by the competitiveness of the K-pop industry, led to the discrimination of the BTS members at the beginning of their career: RM and Suga received disrespectful comments from other rappers saying that they were "selling" themselves as idols who wear makeup like girls and that there is no such hip-hop or rapper idol genre (Korea Times, 2019). Bang Shi Yuk advised the BTS members to respect their tastes and stay true to themselves. In return, BTS members critically questioned why no one (in the K-pop scene) spoke about society and youth (Yonhap News, 2018). Subsequently, BTS's musical identity looks like a translation of their dilemma as a youth, a diagnosis of social reality, and a yearning for social change, not to mention as an outlet to respond the hateful comments, for example, the songs *Idol, Mic Drop, Not Today, Cypher Part. 1-4* and *Ddaeng*.

Regarding the characters, BTS is explicitly the primary character in the transmedia storytelling. ARMY, as the audience, can be considered a secondary character due to their ability to interact and participate within the extensions of the BTS world. The audience can, for instance, create social dialogue, be a producer of content, share their own stories as fan fiction, and organise social movements such as gathering donations under the campaign "Our Remedy is ARMY" to support COVID-19 relief support (oneinanarmy.org, n.d.b). Further exploration about audience interaction and participation through Twitter, Bangtan Log, BUS, and TinyTAN will be presented in Subchapter 6.3.

The BTS world—which is robust and dynamic—also plays a significant role and could be considered a character in the narratives, as everything that happens in the BTS world has an impact on BTS. The band reflects what is happening around them and expresses their positioning –for example, through the storyline in BUS, which speaks about the challenge of being young adults, and how in the end, the characters comfort each other. The basic storyline of BUS seems like an effort to mirror what happen in society, such as the struggle for the young generations (for instance) to get a job and meet society expectations. Early in their career, they focused primarily on the South Korean community, but since going global, BTS has begun to respond to broader narratives and became the voice of a larger and more geographically diverse audience. To exemplify, BTS is the UNICEF ambassador for the #LoveMySelf and #ENDViolence campaigns and has spoken out for #BlackLivesMatter and #StopAsianHate, as mentioned

previously. Their actions amplify and resonate in their transmedia storyworld. BTS's social and political juggernaut could be considered as a logical consequence of their fame: they want to maintain their fan base and gain more fans and cultivate their brand image. Ultimately, the strategy gives BTS more international exposure, which benefits both BTS and Big Hit in commercial terms.

To engage fans and keep them returning to the BTS universe, Big Hit uses both "migratory cues and negative capability" (Long, 2007, pp.53-59). Negative capability refers to "the art of building strategic gaps into a narrative to evoke a sense of uncertainty, mystery, or doubt in the audience" (Long, 2007, p. 53), while migratory cues suggest where the audience need to continue for the next experience (Long, 2007). For example, due to the word limit, Twitter is used as a reference to the larger narratives that the band usually posts on other platforms, such as YouTube or Weverse. In this way, the audience will migrate from one extension to another. Before BTS releases a new single or album, Big Hit's marketing strategy is to release a series of teasers that they upload to various extensions of BTS transmedia. Most recently, was the single *Butter*, which was released on May 21, 2021.

The first teaser for *Butter* was released on April 26, 2021, via the BTS Twitter account and BTS YouTube channel. Using the hashtags #BTS and #BTS_Butter, the group posted a short video clip of a love-shaped butter slowly melting, and at the end of the clip, the date and time were mentioned. At this point, ARMY probably began to wonder and discuss what "butter" meant, and because of their curiosity, they looked forward to the next clues and kept the story alive. Lazore (2020a) refers to this strategy as "'gaps' in the story that the audience tries to fill in" (p.49) by creating their own theories, reaction content, and discussions. A week before the release date, BTS members began uploading their individual images with their new look representing the concept of the new single, and the official teaser followed. This strategy could also be perceived as anticipation for the ARMY members to prepare for what was to come, get organised, and help Big Hit to market and to promote BTS and break new records—which they did. *Butter* debuted at #2 on Spotify Global with 11,042,335 streams, the highest debut for a song in the platform's history and broke their previous record—the *Dynamite* music video—as the most viewed video in YouTube history with 108.2 million in 24 hours (bandwagon, 2021). This very recent achievement clarifies that the BTS world

continues to expand and grow as their career in the global music industry progresses, providing rich potential for narratives to evolve further and appeal to a wider audience worldwide.

6.2 Premise

Premise analyses the foundation of the projects' existence and explores what the project is and why the producer creates transmedia storytelling. The initial purpose of BTS appearance on social media was to brand and to gain audience engagement, which could be referred to Jenkins' (2014) notion about the idea behind transmedia in the entertainment industry. As a new boy band, they clearly needed to make themselves known and to inform the public that they were going to debut. Due to limited financial resources and low support from local media, Big Hit could only rely on social media as a tool to publicise the group and a marketing strategy. "Everything we did was try to survive in the marketplace and build a fan base," states Bang Shi Yuk in Elberse & Woodham (2020, p.9). Nonetheless, Bang Shi Yuk recognised how digital media was increasingly separating and alienating people, and therefore, he projected the group as "artists for healing," which is also the agency's branding (Elberse & Woodham, 2020). The design implication of the visibility and the relationship in social media between the band and the fandom was how the fandom was actively involved in distributing the materials. Jenkins (2009a) refers to this term as spreadability. BTS social media functioned as an advanced promotion for the band's album and attracted an enormous number of fans globally.

In their corporate briefing with the community, the company mentioned a few points of their content directions: "to make the fans feel as if they are living and breathing with the artists and be part of their daily lives and offer 'healing' for fans" (Rhee, 2020, 25:04). And that is how the BTS universe expands: giving fans more opportunities to feel connected to the artists and engage with them every day. This approach resonates with what Brembila (2019) postulates: for music to be transmedia, it must become spreadable. Big Hit strategy is also related to Jenkins' (2009a) principle of continuity vs multiplicity, where the audience is given multiple options to enter the BTS universe and still can understand the story even without entering other extensions. Further, the strategy can also attract a broader audience, for instance, the BTS fictional extensions

such as TinyTAN, an animated character version that appeals to younger markets and BTS Universe Story mobile games. BTS transmedia storytelling projects also serve as an entertainment source for the audience. The audience might find it as a comforter and solace due to the emotional connection that the audience builds with the band, as explained in the previous Subchapter. On the other hand, Big Hit's 'fans oriented' direction could be an entrance to monetise fans and fans labour due to affection, which will be discussed further in Subchapter 6.4.

In the development of transmediality—and given the global reach of BTS—Big Hit combines fictional and non-fictional stories, and it shows that the purpose itself has shifted: no longer as pure band visibility, but more into the economic logic of business and profit-making. Inevitable to sustain Big Hit's business and further grow, they need to apply a competitive advantage strategy as suggested by Cliff (2017)—in this case, transmedia storytelling surrounded by a narrative of authenticity and vulnerability— that could stand in the music industry's hectic market and "bring added value to their offer" (Brembilla, 2019, p.83). Moreover, paid content such as documentary films and indirect artist involvement strategy implemented as part of the business model, including merchandise and franchise—Mattel's BTS dolls and BT21 Line characters created by BTS members. Rhee Seung Suk, Big Hit IP (Intellectual Property) General Manager, states:

> New spin-off content was created based off of various different activities that artists have done to create new, organic content. By using existing artists IPs (music, photos, music videos, etc.), Big Hit IP was able to develop secondary IPs such as characters and music-based product lines to continue generating profit without the artists' direct involvement. All while providing the fans with all-new, top-tier experiences (2020, 24:40).

Albeit the indirect artist involvement's extensions are fictional and commercial, it could be seen that the core of the stories embodies BTS's valuable messages in the non-fictional world, including self-love, social justice, and mental health. Therefore, there is a consistency and cohesion in the BTS narratives that reinforce and intensify the image of BTS and Big Hit as "music and artists for healing" and how each extension complements each other. Narrative consistency could be considered as a crucial

element for BTS in order to maintain brand reputation and identity; it avoids confusion and facilitates brand sustainability and audience loyalty. Bang Si Hyuk states: "They never suddenly switched gears or changed pace. They were consistent. I think that convinced the public" (Bruner,2019, para.11).

With BTS at the peak of their popularity, many brands, including a luxury fashion house, Louis Vuitton, endorsed BTS with their fashion pieces. "People will buy everything they touch," Paul Han, the co-founder of the Korean news site, told the Washington Post (Liu, 2020). BTS looks like Louis Vuitton's walking mannequins, spotted wearing their attire in public appearances, including in their daily vlog. BTS use the transmedia project (indirectly) to promote Louis Vuitton. The fashion industry is susceptible to unsustainable practices, including labour issues. Thereupon, there is a conflict between BTS as a global sustainable leader and the pursuit of marketing goals to bolster the company's business. The implication of BTS-Louis Vuitton soft marketing is extractability (Jenkins, 2006) by fans purchasing Louis Vuitton fashion items. Jenkins (2008) postulates that transmedia storytelling projects inevitably have a strong economic motive. "There is a strong interest in integrating entertainment and marketing to create emotional attachments and use them to make additional sales" (Jenkins, 2008, p.104). Even though it is 'normal' in the logic of the transmedia storytelling project, but in the BTS case it somehow becomes rather perplexing and problematic due to the band image and messages that they convey.

On the other hand, BTS portrays inclusivity within the fashion industry by representing the Asian community, which is in line with the increasing activism against Asian hate, which they also supported. As a result, major brands are pushing for more diversity in their advertising. In addition, BTS is one of the few bands where all members are involved in the same collaboration with high-end fashion brands. In most cases, brands only collaborate with one member, such as Chanel with Jennie from girls' band Blackpink, while the other member of Blackpink, Rosé, collaborates with Saint Laurent. Regardless of the fact that Big Hit generates higher revenues with the participation of all members, Big Hit (also) maintains the collective spirit that sustains the group.

Based on the exploration above, the premise of BTS transmedia storytelling, therefore, provides fans with a holistic experience of entertainment, information and soft marketing, and could promote individual and social change through fictional and non-fictional projects.

6.3 Extensions

Jenkins (2011) defines transmedia extension and distinguishes it from adaptation: "Basically, an adaptation takes the same story from one medium and retells it in another. An extension seeks to add something to the existing story as it moves from one medium to another" (para.13). This Subchapter will delve into selected extensions; the contribution of each extension to the BTS transmedia storytelling universe, the genre along with the visuals and design styles.

The BTS storyworld has evolved and unfolded into an array of multiple platforms, and it emerged through the use of social media—Twitter and YouTube. The richness and vastness of the BTS storyworld have made the narrative extensions possible and meaningful. Lenzo, CEO of Big Hit Global, explains that digital content is key to connecting artists with their fans. "We focused on the possibilities of new media which we knew would become a bigger part of our fans' lives" (Stassen, 2021, para.10). Therefore, Big Hit's focus on developing content in digital platforms is extensive, and most BTS extensions can be accessed digitally.

This study will discuss selected extensions—BTS Twitter account, Bangtan Log from BTS YouTube channel, TinyTAN animated characters and BTS Universe Story mobile game—as they are representative of the research focus. The motivations behind why these extensions are chosen, has already mentioned above in Subchapter 5.3.

6.3.1 BTS Twitter account

BTS first transmedia storytelling was a Twitter account which created on July 14th, 2011, but they didn't tweet until December 18, 2012. BTS Twitter username is @BTS_twt and they are the band with the most followers on Twitter (Herman, 2020), with a follower count of over 38.1 million as of August 2021. To date, BTS has

accumulated 12.600 tweets, which means in the last eight years and eight months, the band has tweeted an average of four posts per day. Five tweets from BTS were among the top 20 most retweeted tweets in 2020 (Boyd, 2020). This data shows the popularity of BTS and how they use this platform to stay connected with their fans. Although most of BTS's tweets are in Korean, this does not seem to stop fans from engaging with BTS less.

The members of BTS do not have a personal Twitter account –which is unique and in stark contrast to other artists—therefore, all members share their tweets under the same account to post personal messages, upload photos, videos, songs, and even celebrate other members' birthdays. Bang Shi Yuk emphasises a group image (Bruner, 2019), hence, this is probably why BTS members do not have a personal account. The distinct approach that Bang Si Hyuk takes ultimately creates a collective and solidary image of the band, identity, and values. Instead of highlighting one member, it seems like Big Hit wants each member to shine together and avoid a "star" frontman and popularity contest among members—for example, by the number of followers or endorsements. Another thing could probably be to maintain their 'clean' image by avoiding blunders with other artists, fans, or even between members and makes it easier for Big Hit to 'control' it. From a fan perspective, it could be seen as convenient because, with one account, fans do not have to search for other accounts to connect with BTS. Members of BTS seem to have no problem sharing an account with other members because they can still show their personalities. To exemplify are the tweets series from RM, where he shows off his daily outfit and uses the hashtag #KimDaily, Jungkook (2020) posted himself covering the song *Never Not*, in which he sang nicely but blabbered towards the end of the song or Jimin (2018) posted a series of 'funny' tweets showing how he missed J-hope—Jimin tweeted along with his pictures holding J-Hope photo in various poses. The same goes for their solo projects. The members of BTS do not have a solo album, but the agency encourages the band members to release mixtapes and songs (Bruner, 2019). From a business point of view, this is a somewhat unusual approach because, with such popularity, it is presumably easy to make more profit from individual projects. Anyhow, since the beginning, "the group was envisioned as a collective to heal the alienation" (Davis, n.d., para.18) in the digital era.

Accessing Twitter requires devices such as a cell phone, tablet or computer and the content of the tweets are non-fictional, but it cannot be pinned down to a specific genre; BTS tweets contains their daily activities both text and images, teaser and promotion of their latest works, jokes, emotional expression and many other topics. The tweets have a different style depending on who is posting them and with what intention; for instance, when members tweet individually, they usually include emoticons, photos and selfies that make the tweets intimate. Through their tweets, BTS seem want to build a 'fun' relation with the fandom, this demonstrates by their 'somewhat random' contents they post, to exemplify when they post a picture of V, Jin and RM (2016) who at that time had different hair's colours—V (bright red), Jin (pale yellow) and RM (light green)—and the caption said they were similar to a human traffic light or a clip when all the members were screaming of joy (and frantically) to cheer ARMY because of their single *Dynamite* had remained at number one on the Billboard Hot 100 for a second consecutive week (BTS, 2020).

At the beginning of the BTS career in 2013, BTS members interacted with the fans by replying to their comments and questions. This helped fans engage with the band, especially when the band needed exposure and recognition. In February 2013, RM (2013) tweeted that he was sorry for the international fans that they rarely responded to their comments due to the language barrier. It seems like they understand how to communicate *to* the fans instead of *at* them. Through Twitter, BTS members often express their gratitude for the support of ARMY, especially Jimin, who consistently tweets to thank ARMY and show his affection; in the period of May-July 2021, Jimin posted eight tweets related to that. "Statements on Twitter have the capacity to both represent emotions and also provoke strong emotional reactions from other users" (Duncombe, 2019, p.410). Based on Duncombe's notion, BTS members tweets might strengthen the connection between artist and the fandom, in which could garner further responses and reactions, for instance retweeting, giving like, translating or further create a social cause.

Concerning the limitation of Twitter words, it can be perceived as an advantage for the band, the message becomes straightforward, and fans might find it easier to digest. Regarding to this limitation –280 characters maximum—Twitter is used as an usher or cue to the bigger narratives that the band usually posts on other platforms. Jenkins

(2009a) classifies this as one of the transmedia principles; the ability to be drillable –
where members of ARMY then spend their time to engage further. The interaction
between ARMY in Twitter could be referred as the logic of social connection –the
similarity of interests and sense of belonging (Askwith, 2007). Through Twitter, fans
get the latest update on BTS and can discuss it instantly with other ARMY members.
Twitter could be considered as a symbol of the power and activities of ARMY because
most of ARMY causes are communicated through this platform—for example
#shareARmeal, #WhiteLivesMatter #MatchAMillion—and employ the power of
hashtags. According to Alzamora and Andrade (2019), hashtags show an indication of
our position within society. Therefore, Big Hit's decision to use social media, and
Twitter in particular, as the first platform for the band to expose themselves is
considered as a strategic move, in favour of McLuhan (1964) and Jenkins (2006) about
the vital role of medium choice.

Further, BTS (and Big Hit) seem to understand the emotional dynamics in Twitter's
world and how social media can be the force for social and political change. Jenkins et
al. postulate, "a media text becomes material that drives active community discussion
and debate at the intersection between popular culture and civic discourse -
conversations that might lead to community activism or social change" (2013, p.168).
Arguably, BTS seems more careful before they tweet serious matters, especially when
it comes to socio-political issue such as the condemnation of #AntiAsianHate and
#BlackLivesMatter, they write it professionally in Korean and English—this is
probably done to avoid misinterpretation and for the international fans to understand
immediately. To exemplify is BTS tweet concerning the anti-Asian hate in the U.S.
BTS tweeted using the hashtags #StopAsianHate and #StopAAPIHate on Tuesday,
March 30, 2021. "We have endured expletives without reasons and were mocked for
the way we look (…). You, I, and all of us have the right to be respected. We will stand
together" (BTS, 2021). The tweet was retweeted over 1 million times and received
more than 2.5 million likes. In the tweet, the band also mentioned they needed time to
discuss the issue and to formulate the best way to communicate it with fans. The tweet
was implicitly stating that they were being careful before releasing the statement. Since
the band members have faced racism and xenophobia themselves, their message
became relatable. To date, the author could only find two BTS's tweets that intersect
with politics.

BTS consideration to use Twitter as a platform to reflect their political stand is probably because of the Twitter nature as a form of social media that allows users to share or access information in real-time: "The collapsing of time and space and in-the-moment changes in the speed of communication that social media provides blur our online and offline social lives, which has manifest significantly through the overlap of the "cultural, the political, and the popular" (Shepherd 2017, p.217).

BTS social-political stand was picked up by ARMY. The fandom created the #MatchAMillion movement on Twitter and within less than 24 hours their mission to match BTS's donation was accomplished; they even surpassed it by U.S.$200,000. A press release by One in an ARMY - the organiser - states that: "The fundraiser was created by ARMY in response to the overall influence of BTS" (2020, para.9).

ARMY movement is relevant with a notion from Jenkins et al., "a media text becomes material that drives active community discussion and debate at the intersection between popular culture and civic discourse - conversations that might lead to community activism or social change" (2013, p.168). In this context, BTS tweets lead to grassroots circulation practice. It is in the nature of social media that everyone is considered as a producer (Jenkins 2006). As seen in the Twitter practice of BTS described above, any member of ARMY can be the initiator of a cause they care about and connect with a large number of members in a short period of time to amplify the messages and to generate awareness. The initiator could then use the hashtag to share knowledge and give identity (Mascio, 2019). In addition, the Twitter algorithm uses the hashtag to help discover people who share the same views. In this sense, ARMY is similar to HP Alliance, the fan activism due to fans engagement becomes less intimidating and more accessible to young people and it refers as 'cultural acupuncture' (Slack, 2010). Further, Park et al. note that the ability of ARMY to mobilise social causes-including fundraising- "lies in the shared values of the community members, in addition to their strong desire to do "good" to amplify BTS' positive influence" (2021, p.13) and because of the sympathy for the characters (Hancox, 2019). The ability to create such a ripple effect could ultimately begets ARMY members a valid voice within the community and build confidence within themselves.

6.3.2   Bangtan Log from BTS YouTube channel

YouTube could be considered a "playground" for BTS (and their agency) and a platform they use the most. BTS has been using YouTube extensively since their debut. BTS's official YouTube channel, BANGTAN TV, has 56.1 million subscribers and is managed by Hybe Labels (formerly Big Hit). BANGTAN TV mainly features behind-the-scenes videos while their official music videos are uploaded under the agency's YouTube account Hybe Labels. YouTube can be accessed through mobile phones, computers, tablets, and certain TV devices.

Big Hit chose YouTube as a platform to expose the band it is probably because it has a character to "support a high volume of visitors and a range of different audiences, it offers participants a way to garner wide exposure" (Burgess and Green, 2009, pp.4-5). Jaewha Choi, the head of marketing for YouTube in South Korea, states that: "YouTube has played a crucial role in growing the fan base for BTS" (Elberse & Woodham, 2020, p.10). The spreadability nature of YouTube has enabled BTS content to travel globally. Choi mentions how BTS has many passionate fans in the U.S.; they kept requesting BTS songs to play on the radio, and that was because of YouTube (Elberse & Woodham, 2020).

This research focuses on the analysis of Bangtan Log (a non-fictional video clip) as an example of the YouTube extension of BTS. The reason is that Bangtan Log portrays the raw, unscripted and unpretentious side of BTS members since the beginning of their debut—the log was firstly uploaded on January 7, 2013, and currently contains 155 episodes. Bangtan Log is akin to the archaeological importance of BTS evolvement, where fans can witness their journey from an unknown boy band to a Grammy-nominated artist. Further, to the author knowledge, there hasn't been any research that analyse Bangtan Log, hence it is a good start to explore this extension to see in what way this extension enriches the BTS storyworld.

Due to its permeability, YouTube not only supports creative works but also social interaction and acts as a cultural agent (Burges & Green, 2018). Therefore, BTS who connects with the ARMY members intensively on YouTube arguably conveys their identities and stories, which presumably could infiltrate and influences the lives of ARMY members. Burges & Green (2018) refer to this as community logic and social networking within YouTube in which enables organisation and mobilisation around their relationship. To describe the social interaction, YouTube also allows band members to speak as if they were having a personal and private conversation (Horton & Wohl, 1956) with the members of ARMY, which permits fans to be 'immersed' (Jenkins, 2009a) in the content conducted by BTS members.

Bangtan Log could be considered as an outlet that helps to formulate and affirm the identities of both BTS and ARMY and shapes their camaraderie. To exemplify, on the first Bangtan Log, RM talked about his New Year's resolution (2013) and that he hoped 2013 would be his year. Through this clip, the audience can see how RM (then known as Rap Monster) portrayed and identified himself before debuting. As a rookie, the author got the impression that he wanted to imitate American rappers from the way he styled his hair and kept his sunglasses on, even when he was in the studio at night. In the early years of BTS, the audience can see the teenagers of BTS with their hip-hop style and they seemed shy while filming themselves and sometimes hesitant: when Jimin recorded the log with Jungkook, Jungkook seemed awkward and let Jimin talk most of the time. Other times, the log seems "heavier," for example when RM (2013) talks about the importance of friendship, or when Jungkook (2013), who was only 16 at the time, says he misses his mother and father and just wants to go home. A survey by Lee et al. (2021) states that ARMY members found it easy to relate to BTS on a personal level and they felt a profound connection because of the authenticity of the members and their message.

On January 19th, 2014, J-Hope talked about how he fell burden because of ARMY loves and attention to him. He thought he needed to give back the love he received by working harder and doing his best. In the next log on March 2nd, 2014, Suga had the same concern, he felt that the fans gave him so much and he was in debt. Therefore, he prepared gifts for the fans which he wrapped himself and he said that it was a gift from his heart. He added that it is important to show our feelings to others. V—BTS's latest

member that was revealed to the public—told the audience that he felt great that he could finally sit in the same car with the other members and was amazed the band had its own car. This honesty and unpretentiousness probably that sets BTS apart from other celebrities. It could give viewers a breath of fresh air; it has possibility to create sentiment, empathy and as a possible result is fans personal identification with the artists. "As BTS shares their worries, ambitions, thoughts, and daily activities, they seem more familiar than friends in real life" (Lee, 2019b, p.634).

The repercussion of Bangtan Log is that it acts as a tool for fans to expand each member's story. The drillable ability of Bangtan Log is evident in the way ARMY delves into the stories of each member and continues to feed their curiousity by migrating to other extensions. In addition, fans collect the band members' stories from debut to present and create expanded worldbuilding. To exemplify is the YouTube videos created by ARMY members that contain mashup clips about the members' struggle or the introduction of the BTS members. Bangtan Log also encourages the fans to create their own narratives or identifies as 'performance' by Jenkins (2009a), for instance, analysing the friendship between V and Jimin. Bangtan Log seems to provide fans with experiences and stories that could last in fans' hearts and inspire them to become a better version of themselves; "they don't give false hope that things will magically get better" (P764, as cited in Lee, et al., 2021, p.4). The "realistic" approach of BTS messages supports the organic growth of BTS and its reach. Furthermore, Bangtan Log could be seen as a window for fans to see how BTS struggle to be where they are now, and how they seem to have practised endlessly that they can identify with fans who are also struggling to achieve their dream, and ultimately, fans could be motivated by BTS's narratives. In addition, BTS members seem to allow themselves to show their vulnerability even when they are already successful. To exemplify, on Sept. 23rd, 2018, RM told the audience that he was going to give a speech at the UN, and he felt nervous:

> I am wondering what I should talk about. I am a bit flustered […] I am just planning to tell my story as it is […] The thing that keep bothering me is whether it's really alright for me to do this or not […] But through (doing) this, I would like it if more people started thinking better thoughts. I think that would be enough for me (2019, 01:14-02:14).

There are two things that could be highlighted from RM clip here; the first one, the impression that he feels insecure despite his status as an established artist and the second one is the message for the fans, where he would like the fans to think better thoughts, which could motivate fans to change their perspective to develop a positive attitude as a materialisation of individual change.

The visuality and iconography of Bangtan Log are part of BTS stories itself. In author regard, it conveys beyond what it is seen on the screen: from RM hairstyle evolution throughout the years—dreadlock, mohawk, back to natural with various colours—to Jungkook's growth from an early teenager until he is mature and no longer shy and quiet, to Jimin's body evolution; from muscular to lean and other members who also went through self-growth, both physically and mentally. The audience can also witness the company's financial growth through how BTS studio, in the beginning, was small, messy, and dark and later, it moved into the brighter and it looked stylish and opulent. Not to mention the way they style themselves are evolved. All those physical outlooks, styles, fashion evolution and financial growth can be witnessed by the fans through Bangtan Log. The extension in one hand could probably create deeper connection with BTS since ARMY might feel that they know the BTS a lot better, while in the other hand, the audience could also see how the band become less sustainable, in the sense how they become more "extravagant" and somehow contradicts their musical lyrics which some of them talk about capitalism and consumerism like in *Go Go, Spine Breaker,* and *Silver Spoon.*

6.3.3   TinyTAN

While Twitter and Bangtan Log represent non-fictional extensions of BTS transmedia storytelling, TinyTAN is a fictional extension that officially launched on August 8, 2020 and aims to reach a younger audience. TinyTAN is animated characters of BTS members and a second self-concept that transcends to "magic door"—a door that can transport characters to any place they need to be—with a good message of empathy, and the importance of not giving up easily. TinyTAN expansions include mini-figures, media content, education—Learn Korean with TinyTAN—and a number of collaborations with other brands and endorsements, including Facebook Messenger and

Instagram, where users can download animated TinyTAN stickers and P&G Downy fabric softeners. Therefore, there are different types of devices or items needed to access this extension due to the different nature of the expansions.

TinyTAN is one of Big Hit's indirect artist involvement projects, highlighting Bang Si Hyuk's focus on content and fans. Ha Se-jung, the chief producer of TinyTAN, explains the reasons why they created the project:

> First, we wanted to provide more ways for fans to enjoy BTS music through characters and animation. Characters are freer and can express various things. We wanted to take advantage of that and create content that was only possible via imagination. The second reason is that we wanted to expand our business models so that artists who need to focus on creative activities could focus on producing better music and preparing better performances (Kwon, 2020, para. 7-8.)

Figure 1: TinyTAN, BTS animated characters that deliver a good message to a younger audience. Source: TinyTan [@TinyTanofficial]. (2020, Aug 4).

The visuals of TinyTAN are considered as likable, stylish and adorable (see Figure 1). The characters' outfits and hairstyles were originally inspired by BTS *Idol* music video, but later the characters changed their style to resemble BTS *Mic Drop* music video, and in the current 2021 version, the mini boy band characters portray BTS style in the *Dynamite* music video. According to Ha Se-jung, the reason why the characters continuously changing their style instead of being consistent is because they are adapting to the BTS members as the original IP, for entertainment purposes and "to be more suited to deliver the message" (Kwon, 2020, para. 11).

While most TinyTAN projects are commercial, fans can enjoy free music video clips on YouTube that laden with positive messages—showing the cohesiveness of BTS narratives and enriching other storyworlds. To date, TinyTAN has released two music videos that are similar to an animation film: *Magic Door* (2020) and *Dream On* (2021). In *Magic Door*, TinyTAN sings the BTS track *MicDrop*, which is primarily requested by fans. This acknowledgement of fan requests demonstrates a form of maximalist participation (Carpentier, 2015), where the producer "listens" to the audience's suggestions. The music video tells the story of a girl who pursues her dream as a pianist but faces some challenges along the way, and TinyTAN, transcending into the girl's world through a magic door to offer comfort and show empathy. Ko Yoon-a, the project team leader explains:

> Using the dual meanings of a "dream", we are planning other stories of a "Magic Door" and TinyTAN that appear in our dreams. TinyTAN is cheering our dreams in their own way; through the "dreams" we have at night, the magic doors are opened, and through that passageway, they are going to give us the energy, comfort and support to achieve that "dream" (Kwon, 2020, para.22)

The TinyTAN music video leaves the impression that BTS wants fans to become 'heroes' by finding their inner strength to overcome the difficulties in their lives. The message is spread through drillable (Jenkins, 2009a) visual symbols in the music video that encourage fans to analyse or Jenkins (2009a) refers it as mastery and continuity (Jenkins, 2009a). Continuity at this point means that fans can piece together the symbols in the video clips and create a meaningful narrative. Thus, the music video

opens the door to other extensions. For example, in the *Dream On* music video, the girl wears a t-shirt with a whale motif. According to a fan analysis (Magan, 2021), the whale is a reference to the BTS song *Whalien 52*, which tells story of the loneliest whale in the world. The symbol depicts that "we have each other, and we are not alone" (para. 8).

TinyTAN has great potential to bring in new audiences due to its visuals and project concept and can be a new entry point for audiences into the vast BTS universe. The child friendly characters could also be considered as a Big Hit business strategy, by utilising transmedia storytelling to monetise fans as it allows for extractability (Jenkins, 2009b); for the fans to purchase the collectible characters and cuddling them at home as comforters or simply as decoration. But beyond the commerciality, and despite being a fantasy-based story, TinyTAN could evokes "a gratifying feeling" (Phillips, 2012)—the messages are considered 'strong' and the way they are delivered is touching—as discussed previously.

6.3.4   BTS Universe Story Mobile Game

BTS Universe Story (BUS) is a fictional mobile game whose story is derived from the Bangtan Universe and officially launched on September 24, 2020. At BUS, BTS will be under the virtual control of their fans. This interactive mobile game can be downloaded for free from Google Play or Apple App Store, and there are in-app transactions if players want to get to the next level and unlock assets. This mobile app is a collaboration between Big Hit and Netmarble, who previously released another BTS mobile game: BTS World.

The initial story of BUS (see Figure 2) is about seven boys who face various challenges and hardships in their lives, and one of the characters—Seokjin, who corresponds to Jin, attempts to save them. The storyline's themes cover various sensitive topics that (perhaps) cannot be freely discussed in BTS real world or even through their music. This is probably due to the cultural barrier as issues that are still perceived as taboo to be talked about in South Korea. However, BUS could open a conversation to the fans— and enhances the fans knowledge and awareness—about topics that are sometimes still stigmatised. Therefore, it enriches the BTS storyworld as BUS initiates and contributes

the discussion about mental health, bullying, homicide, and poverty to young audiences. BUS could be considered as an alternative communication vehicle for BTS to move their sensitive yet purposeful messages subtly.

> BTS Universe Story was created with the intent of utilising new technology and introducing players to a diverse, innovative multitude of gameplay options. The aim is to create a game that is both engaging for BTS's ARMY, as well as fans of storytelling games who may in turn become invested in BTS through the new game (Herman, 2020, para. 5).

BUS can be perceived as a model to provide a holistic experience and produce more extensive narratives in which, according to Brembilla (2019), it is needed in the music industry. This mobile game extension project can be an outlet for new audiences to immerse themselves in the BTS universe. BUS is both 'interactive and participatory' (Gambarato, 2012), allowing the audience to decide how they want to experience the game, as well as create and co-create the storyline. With the game's tagline "their story lies in your hands," Netmarbles ensures that players who are unfamiliar with BTS can weave the stories in any dimension they prefer. The mobile games could make the fans directly involved in the event of the story, and it, therefore, referring to Phillips (2012), indicates the power of transmedia storytelling

Furthermore, the flexibility of the stories and the fact that different stories can lead to different outcomes, might lead fans coming back to the games to try out different characters and alternate narratives to explore the possibilities. In order to do this, however, players must buy a ticket, which shows how Big Hit's IP project aims to monetise fans and make profits.

Figure. 2 BTS Universe Story, an interactive mobile game

Source: Netmarble, https://btsuniversestory.netmarble.com/en/gallery

BUS provides an augmented reality where audiences can engage and share through social media platforms (Herman, 2020a), and it enables subjectivity (Jenkins, 2009a); as BUS allows the audience to act as a producer where they can take complex viewpoints through the development of multiple characters and dimensions of the stories. In addition, BUS offers audiences to what Jenkins (2009b) refers as performance, where fans can actively participate and create their own narratives –fan fiction—based on their ideas and fantasies. The benefit of these fan activities is that the audience is being immersed (Jenkins, 2009b) and that the fans feel the urge to drill more (Jenkins, 2009a) and dedicate their time and knowledge to create narratives that are compelling and engaging to others and share them within the community. In terms of genre, there are different project genres that appeal to different types of audiences.

For the visual's aspect, BUS is a hybrid project combining animation, music, graphics, video and augmented reality, developed using the latest technology. Physically, the characters portray the seven members of BTS, while the storyworld and design style -

using soft tones and pastel colours—serve as a counterpart to Bangtan Universe - another BTS transmedia storytelling extension.

6.4 Audience

In this chapter, the analysis will explore the audience part, in which can lead to answer the RQ2. To reveal that, the study will discuss about the level of audience engagement that covers the mechanism of the audience interaction, in what form the audience participate and as well as the business model of the project. For BTS transmedia storytelling, Bang Si Hyuk, the mastermind behind BTS, admits that he has an obsession with audiences: "We have always focused on the content and the fan" (Stieg, 2020, para. 6).

The primary audience for BTS transmedia storytelling extensions is their 40 million (and counting) ARMY members spread across the globe (Moon, 2020). The devoted fan base is the source of BTS's global success and the reason for the Big Hit agency's prolific growth. The TIME writes that ARMY knows no rivalry (Moon, 2020), and in the book BTS and ARMY Culture, the author states that the members of ARMY are the prominent supporters of the band and act as ambassadors for the band (Jeeheng, 2019). Furthermore, ARMY, the fandom, is known to have mobilisation power (Reuters, 2020), solid financial force (Donebedian, 2021) and an unstoppable squad (Billboard, 2021).

ARMY members show rather unique demographic dispersion, with the age range between 18-65. In 2020, BTS tour ticket sales in the U.S. showed that the percentage of women over 45 doubled from 7.5% to over 16% (Bhandari, 2020). With the older fans on board, it creates fan economics and helps the selling of merchandise, and concert tickets even afford products that the band promotes.

> We're buying cars and selling out stadiums; you can't just do that with some
> overexcited girls," said Erika Overton, 40, one of the administrators of One In An

ARMY. "This is not just a fan group to enjoy music – it's an economic force, and something you can't really dismiss as something trivial (Reuters, 2020, para.4)

The business model of this project is freemium: a mix of free and paid products (see Figure 3). The purpose of BTS free transmedia storytelling extensions—Twitter and Bangtan Log—could be considered to create fans engagement that cultivates fans' loyalty. Big Hit seems to leverage BTS emotional design to motivate ARMY to contribute to the company's growth. Big Hit looks like that they understand how to leave impressions and make the audience crave for more stories. Norrington et al. (2019) describe this transmedia storytelling strategy as creating an exciting project with a story that touches the audience's heart.

Meanwhile, paid content—TinyTAN merchandise, BUS in-app transactions—aims obviously to make a profit. Moreover, Big Hit's strategy of portraying BTS members as youths rather than idols generates fan activities where fans willingly or voluntarily share, promote, purchase, and mobilise social and political movements. It is clear that the visibility of BTS on various platforms has not only helped the band to reach and connect with fans, but moreover, it has contributed to the economic revenue even to South Korea. In 2020, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of South Korea studied that BTS's hit single *Dynamite* generated 1.7 trillion won ($1.43 billion) in economic activity (AFP, 2020). BTS has arguably become a soft power to South Korea—culturally, politically and economically.

By the end of 2020, BTS is still Big Hit's leading artist, bringing in the most revenue even during the pandemic. Even without world tours, BTS still made a profit from album and merchandise sales (Peoples, 2021). BTS is responsible for more than 87% of Big Hit's revenue in the first half of 2020 and over 97% in the first half of 2019 (Stieg, 2020, para. 14). Broesma (2019) identifies this type of purchase as an audience's active response, while Jenkins (2009b) refers to this engagement as extractability. BTS IP extensions are a survival kit for the company at times when BTS is no longer active or on hiatus.

Figure. 3 BTS transmedia storytelling business model
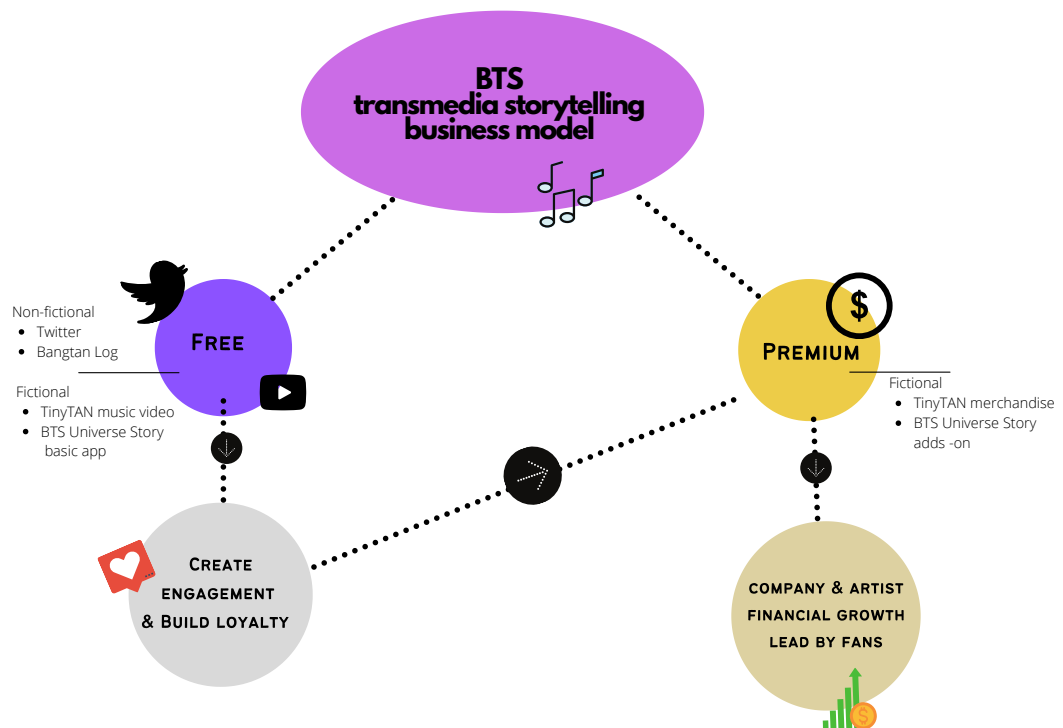
The BTS transmedia storytelling business model leads to the problematic issue in which also intersect with sustainability. On the one hand, the freemium transmedia storytelling strategy could sustain the Big Hit's business and clearly BTS as the main character of the storyworld, but on the other hand, it is not sustainable for the audience's financial means, and most probably for the young audience who do not yet earn their own money and potentially open access to audience labour—which will be discussed further on this Subchapter.

As mentioned earlier, BTS fandom can create a fan economy by investing their money to buy shares of Big Hit since the company went public in 2020 (Herman, 2020b), and to collect the merchandise, buy the BUS ticket and purchase other lifestyle affinities - such as the car or luxury brand that the band represents. According to Liang and Sheng (2016), the economic force lead by fans is possible because of "long-term, stable,

virtuous, and reciprocal relationships with their idols, that not only satisfy the desires of fans to have personal connections with their idols but can also influence and serve to develop the public personas of artists and their brands in return" (p.334). TinyTan, for example, comes in various merchandise and franchises that open up many revenue streams for the company. From this point of view, the design impact of the transmedia storytelling project for the audience is consumerism.

What makes BTS transmedia extensions unique is the involvement of ARMY in translating the content, which has helped clear up the language barrier. Askwith (2007) refers to this as mastery. Big Hit seems to validate and further celebrate ARMY members participation; hence, the fans feel appreciated, to exemplify; whenever the BTS members acknowledge the fandom effort to support them—for musical awards voting or social causes, the BTS members thank and cheer the ARMY through Twitter and go 'live' through another platform, such as Vlive. Another nuance of fans participation or user-generated content similar to the one in BUS, where the fans can develop their own stories, it possibly could lead into two logics, referring Kurt Squire in Jenkins (2006); (1) to save producer money and spend less energy for the game developer as they do not need to always conduct the narratives, (2) more usable for the audience as it is participatory design.

BTS transmedia storytelling could also facilitate to fans pool their knowledge as no single fan can understand everything. Lévy (1997) describes this as collective intelligence that can inspirit individual change. Jenkins (2006) posits that fans are motivated by epistemophilia—not simply pleasure in knowing, but pleasure in exchanging knowledge. This 'pleasure' perhaps also leads to the free or voluntary labour conducted by fans, and somehow to a rather complicated economic arrangement between fans and artists. Arguably, ARMY members participation on the transmedia narrative of BTS can be attributed to what Sennett (2008) posits that the commercial transaction is not always about financial gain, but about an individual or professional performance that materialises in an alternative value system—which could also be perceived as an individual change. For example, in this study case, the fan community participates in the creation and co-creation of YouTube videos. ARMY members may create the video because they want to share it with others, and sometimes, if the video receives many views, it is not simply (probably) boosts self-confidence and pride, but it

could also mean a financial gain for the video creator. This means that ARMY members also have the opportunity to make a profit for their involvement or their labour. An example of this is the YouTube account named Bangtan Subs with 1.48 million subscribers uploading English translations of Bangtan Log, in which very useful for this study. In case of BUS, by audience contribute their stories as a story creator, they also have possibility to connect with other users, interact, discuss and create own community, which perhaps will benefit to eliminate the alienation.

Further, Bangtan Log could help to formulate and affirm the identities of both BTS and ARMY and shape their camaraderie. Burges & Green (2018) refer to this as community logic and social networking within YouTube, enabling organisation and mobilisation around their relationship. To exemplify is the ARMY Help Center, which was created through Twitter interaction between members—as a form of cultural attractor (Jenkins, 2006)—to support BTS fans struggling with their mental health. The movement was inspired by the BTS messages of self-love, kindness, and Suga's statement, "I hope we can create an environment where we can ask for help and say things are hard when they're hard" (McNamara, 2020, para. 6). ARMY Help Center is also functioned as a cultural activator (Jenkins, 2006) where the members provide aid and console each other and create their own narratives (Bird, 2001) and giving audiences something to do, creating a meaningful experience and opening up a new discourse that can be discussed further.

The serendipitous connectivity between members of ARMY enables and encourages collaboration. Jenkins states, "Members believe their contribution matter and feel some degree of social connections with one another (at least they care what other people think about what they have created)" (p.7). To describe the social connection, YouTube also allows band members to speak as if they were having a personal and private conversation (Horton & Wohl, 1956) with the fans, which creates space for audience immersion (Jenkins, 2009a). Furthermore, in Bangtan Log, the audience has the potential to participate in spreading the video; Wyrwoll (2014) suggests it as user-generated content, where the audience takes part in the creation of content and makes it available to all with the possible consequence as discussed above. Jenkins (2006) characterised it as participatory culture, and at the same time, it functioned as a cultural attractor.

ARMY members also perform philanthropic actions on behalf of BTS; there were more than 380 charity projects in 2020 organised by the global BTS fan community (oneinanarmy, n.d). Askwith (2007) perceives fans' willingness to act for the band or mirror their actions as the "identity logic" (p.114) of engagement. It could be perceived as both social identification and affirmation of personal identity. In this sense, identity logic motivates the fan to inherit BTS message –for example, self-love and mirroring the band's charitable behaviour, or even support for the band's social and political views—which also referred as the logic of the fandom immersion. BTS transmedia storytelling project has allowed fans to become "heroes" of sorts, as they can participate in a social and political movement and have open access to be a part and be heard in the community. In addition, the involvement within the fan community could stimulates individual change and collectivity as discussed previously in the extensions section. Louise, a Swedish ARMY member, explains, "You follow them on this emotional journey [...] They heal you even when you don't know it. It's quite magical" (Savillo, 2020, para. 14). Broesma (2019) notes this as a "physiological experience" (p.1).

In further development, the parasocial relationship (Horton & Wohl, 1956) is somewhat debatable given how BTS perceive their fans and emphasise the value of ARMY - as accelerators, supporters, and even comforters. In one hand, "the BTS-ARMY relationship is a horizontal relationship between friends, not a vertical one between stars and fans" (Lee, 2019b, p.650). Echoing Lee, Donabedian (2021) argues that "BTS disturbs the unilateral structure of the parasocial relationship" (p.109). For the band, the fans come first, which is evident in the fact that BTS members always mention them during their performances. "No matter the achievement, BTS never lets the fans forget that the glory is theirs too. This genuine attitude and active communication with the fandom build trust and appreciation, allowing fans to feel respected as individuals rather than treated as monolithic consumers" (Lazore, 2020, para. 10). BTS wrote and produced songs -*2!3!*, *Magic Shop* and *Mikrokosmos*- about what ARMY means to them to show their affection for fandom. On the other hand, the relationship between BTS and ARMY is still perceived as hierarchical, in the sense that BTS is the one that drives the most narratives and benefits more in financial terms.

Through the analysis, it could be said that ARMY fandom has always been the centre of the BTS universe. Bang Si Hyuk seems to understand well the fans' important role and navigates the company to create an image that is loved by many and produce content that generates loyalty and devotion from fans. This study shows, BTS transmedia strategy is designed to serve fans by maintaining an emotional connection and enhancing the audience experience. Cliff (2017) states that putting audience as the primary focus is a successful strategy for transmedia projects, whether they are undertaken by a small or big company. The unforeseen consequence of emotional design—the high level of engagement—is what Donabedian (2021) refers to as "purchase of intimacy," including fan-led marketing, fan voting in popularity awards, and the social activities under the BTS name.

6.5 Structure

BTS transmedia storytelling (see Figure. 4) is a proactive project where Big Hit planned from the inception that the project designed in a transmedial way. The first phase of the project comprised Twitter, YouTube and a blog, where it was launched at almost the same time. The transmedia projects that followed after were a response to the band's lack of media publicity, the rising popularity of BTS and intended as a business opportunity. As a result, Big Hit simultaneously created several extensions, including reality shows, documentary films, graphic books, video games, animated mini figures of BTS, and a fan platform. The creative team behind the massive BTS universe has created multiple extensions that enrich the storyworld with relevant continuity and cohesion and complement each other. "Each extension shows different sides of BTS, and fans immediately know how the artists are portrayed in each content, so fans look forward to it" (Kim, 2020, 34:30). With the numerous extensions, fans have more opportunities to engage and select which stories they choose to explore.

BTS Twitter, Bangtan Log, TinyTAN, and BUS present themselves as a transmedia franchise that does not depend on one another, and fans can choose their entry point without getting "lost" and still fully experience the narratives within the postponements. Since the BTS world is ongoing, and Big Hit has already created artist-indirect involvement, thus, even if the group disbands, their story and universe will live on –meaning that both the company and the band can continue to benefit from the

revenue generated by the IP products. Furthermore, the messages they convey can remain being communicated. In this way, BTS transmedia strategy will create a longstanding impact on audiences.

Figure. 4 How BTS Transmedia storytelling contributes to the band outreach and motivate the audience to seek individual and social change
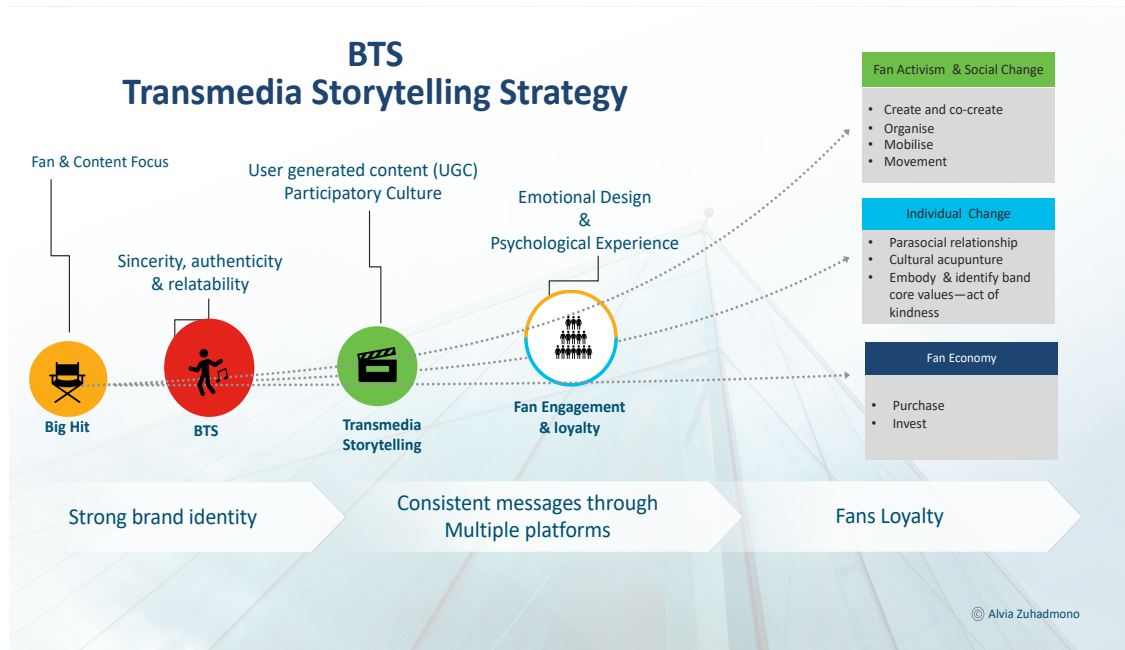
After analysing the BTS extensions, Figure 4 summarises the transmedia storytelling strategy of BTS that helps answer the RQ1 and RQ2 of this study. The author created this figure to facilitate the connexion between the producer (agency), the artist, the fandom through the use of transmedia storytelling and its implications. Big Hit as a producer projects the business by focusing on the fans and the content and creating the image or brand identity of BTS as a "product" that is relatable and conveys sincerity to the fans. To communicate and reinforce the product and the message, Big Hit creates transmedia storytelling projects (fiction and non-fiction) that allow the artist and the fandom to connect and interact. The multiple projects and the different media types provide the audience with the opportunity to engage in a variety of ways, while the product's image and personality consistently communicated across multiple platforms, create fan's experiences and fan's engagement on an emotional and psychological level, gaining the loyalty of fans. Fandom's high level of engagement leads to three main aspects: Fan economy, individual change, fan activism and social change.

7. Conclusion

This case study research on BTS's transmedia storytelling aims to provide answers to the two initial research questions related to (RQ1) how transmedia strategies contribute to the global outreach of BTS and (RQ2) how these strategies can motivate fans to seek individual and social change. By applying the transmedia design analytical and operational model (Gambarato et al., 2020), the study found that in the selected case, the intersection of transmedia storytelling for social change mixed with the freemium business model and the different contributions of fictional and non-fictional worlds to the global outreach of BTS's transmedia praxis can be noted.

BTS's transmedia storytelling extensions Twitter, Bangtan Log, Tiny Tan and BUS - contribute to the global reach of BTS, as these extensions have different content and can be an inviting entry point into the BTS universe for new audiences. An example of this is TinyTan, which can be an attractive extension for youth and children alike and BUS for game lovers. BigHit demonstrates an understanding that different audiences require different approaches to engagement and different types of media, as McLuhan (1964), Jenkins (2006), Carpentier (2015), and Evans (2019) suggest. Each extension has a different purpose and performs different strengths that complement each other. For example, Twitter is an extension to employ migratory cues and negative capability (Long, 2007), while Bangtan Log and TinyTAN apply the principle of drillability (Jenkins, 2006) that encourages further exploration. At the same time, the BTS's transmedia extensions can also stand independently. Thus, audiences do not necessarily feel lost when they engage with (only) one extension, as in the case of BUS and TinyTAN, for example, where the stories are based on fiction, although still consistent with the core messages of the BTS. All four extensions employed Jenkins' (2009a, 2009b) most of seven principles for transmedia narratives and demonstrate its efficacy.

In relation to RQ2, the cognitive design of the project, which leverages emotional connection, could motivate the audience to participate and practice what Wyrwol (2014) refers to the user-generated content and collective intelligence (Lévy, 1997). The continuous and consistent appearance of BTS over multiple extensions has generated a logic of immersion for the fandom, as they engage with the content again and again, which could lead to individual and social identification with the band and the

fandom culture. For example, Twitter activities brought numerous social and political causes to life with the power of hashtags (#) (Alzamora & Andrade, 2019). ARMY social activities reflect Jenkins' (2012) notion of fans' collective efforts to support the artist. Although BTS has never affiliate themselves with a particular political ideology and is careful on making a statement that intersects with politics, the fan base translates their messages into a social and (unintended) political movement (Brough and Shresthova, 2012) and practices cultural acupuncture (Slack, 2010). Their high level of engagement triggers ARMY activism. This finding also confirms a previous study (Lazore, 2021) and is supported by Lee et al. (2021) and Blady (2021), who emphasise that BTS plays a significant role in the lives of ARMY members, especially in relation to self-growth and mental health issues.

Further, activism is an epitome of individual change due to the act of identification and immersion with the band and the attitude of giving back to the intimacy that the members of BTS provide. Donabedian (2021) depicts ARMY members giving back attitude as a "purchase of intimacy" (Donabedian, 2021). The five logics of engagement introduced by Askwith (2007): Entertainment, immersion, social connection, mastery, and identity, are fulfilled and have been shown to be a good "barometer" for BTS's transmedia storytelling strategy, and it works to motivate ARMY to strive for individual and social change.

Through analysis, this study also found the somewhat questionable relationship between BTS and the fandom; on the one hand, the reciprocal, somewhat empowering relationship is relevant with what Lee (2019b) and Donabedian (2021) refer to as non-hierarchical; on the other hand, it is a parasocial relationship (Horton & Wohl, 1956) where there is still a "distance" between the artist and the fans, in the sense that the fans are perceived as free labour and the artist is the one who benefits the most, i. e. financially and in terms of fame. Regardless, the ripple effect of camaraderie between BTS and ARMY is not only a philanthropic movement, but also a fan economy in one hand. As a result, Big Hit's transmedia storytelling strategy no longer served only to brand and gain engagement. It has shifted into Big Hit's financial logic, by monetising fans, including soft marketing through Bangtan Log and photos of members on Twitter showing BTS members wear endorsement fashion items. The implication of BTS soft marketing is identification (Askwith, 2007) and extractability (Jenkins, 2009).

Brembilla (2019) and Jenkins (2008) postulate the economic value behind transmedia strategies. On the other hand, fans gain what Sennett (2008) argues as an alternative value system, such as pride, satisfaction and perhaps in ARMY case, the fandom itself as a community. Further, fans are also possible to harvest profit through their user-generated activities; creating YouTube channels that relate to BTS.

Since this study is situated under the sustainability umbrella, inevitably, the various nuances of BTS transmedia storytelling cannot be ignored. Of course, there are problematic and contradictory points throughout the analysis, for example, fan labour practises and fan economy as mentioned previously. Ideally, BTS, or in this case Big Hit as a producer, should cultivate its image as a 'global sustainable leader' by being more selective in its collaborations. This study finds conflicts of interest and contradictions when examining how a leading boy band that conveys sustainability messages is unsustainable in its practice by representing (for example) a luxury fashion brand, Louis Vuitton, that is fragile in sustainability. On the other hand, BTS's commitment also represents inclusivity in the fashion industry. Due to this contradiction, there is room for improvement on this topic, including conducting surveys or in-depth interviews with ARMY members to obtain more insightful outcomes and the producer to delve more into the strategic side.

Further, this study should be extended to analyse more extensions to gain more comprehensive results in the vast BTS, both fictional and non-fictional storyworld. Therefore, more profound studies in this area are encouraged to be conducted, including the subsequent legacy of BTS in the music industry, given the fact that they break numerous global records, and the fan base is massive and influential. There is an opportunity to explore further how transmedia storytelling projects contribute to the sustainability issues within the music industry and comparative study between Western and K-pop transmedia music using Cliff (2017) competitive advantage model, for instance.

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