INTERTEXTUALITY AND TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING IN K-POP:
Focusing on the content analysis of BTS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on the rise of K-pop in the international market and the understanding the industry as the tripartite structure based on three participants: the management company, the idol, and the fandom. More often than not, discussion of K-pop idol has inclined toward financial achievement. Whereas Korean fandom studies have dealt with K-pop idol fandom as research object unlike Western tradition based on television texts, many tend to incline toward gender discourse. Fandom’s significance in the transmedia storytelling, which has recently began to be applied in K-pop idol industry, is still relatively a new research topic. Moreover, when discussing K-pop, the idol members themselves were excluded from the discussion. This thesis attempts to view K-pop idol as combination of popular text/fictional fan objects and popular icon/factual fan objects that is possible because of the active participation of fans who put the intertextual puzzle pieces together. BTS, known for their intricate BU storytelling via various contents and the members’ participation in writing the songs, is given as the example where the tripartite structure of K-pop works effectively.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Motivation and Rationale

On September 4th, 2018, Professor Samuel Richards at the Penn State University gave a lecture to the room full of students taking his Soc 119 class and the entire lecture was live-streamed on YouTube. At one point during this one-hour-and-a-half-long lecture, Richards shows his students a slide with two numbers: 45 million and 24 hours. Then he asks, “Who can tell me what that means? Who can tell me what those two numbers are?” After a couple of unsuccessful guesses, like the number of newborn babies, one student provides the correct answer: the new record of YouTube video views within 24 hours. Then the professor drops the big reveal with the next slide featuring a picture of BTS (방탄소년단), the K-pop boy band that has been amassing massive popularity all around the globe since its debut in 2013. Richards continues, “In 24 hours, they surpassed the record set by all-American Taylor Swift, with 45 million views….How many have ever heard of this band, or how many have never heard of this band?” When he sees multiple hands go up, he comments that “It’s striking to me that we live in a very insulated world” (Richards).

Indeed, BTS broke the record for the most-viewed YouTube video with their music video for IDOL (released on August 24th, 2018) surpassing Taylor Swift’s record for “Look What You Made Me Do”. With 45 million view counts, “IDOL” exceeded the band’s previous 24-hour debut record on YouTube with “Fake Love”, which recorded the biggest 24-hour YouTube debut of 2018 three months prior to “IDOL” (Herman). Then this record was outstripped again in 2019. BTS’ latest release “Boy With Luv (작은 것들을 위한 시)” got the title of the biggest 24-hour debut with 74.6 million views and also had 100 million views
within two days, becoming the fastest music video to reach that milestone (Kelley “BTS”).

This is only one of many pieces of evidence that show the popularity of K-pop in the world today. Ranking 28th in terms of the country’s population, South Korea definitely did not use to be one of the first choices for the cynosure as a birthplace of leading cultural contents. However, the new millennium has witnessed the Korean Wave, or hallyu, hitting the global market hard. Especially during the last decade, K-pop has been at the center of the global popularity of Korean culture, more K-pop artists gaining fandom overseas. Nevertheless, I have felt there are some limitations to the previous researches done on K-pop.

Domestic researches on the Korean Wave have mostly focused on the market value or national brand power in relation to the popularity of Korean culture, meaning most academic papers are written on the financial aspects. In Knowledge Network Analysis on Hallyu Research, the authors analyze 666 theses on hallyu and they come up with the conclusion that the government budget for hallyu research has been concentrated on the market research and enhancement of the nation (Hong et al. 346). The most frequent keywords that appeared along with hallyu were “national image” and “China”, which leads to the analysis that the dominant discipline used for hallyu is not linked to cultural studies but rather focused on international relations and commercial values. The paper points out the stagnancy in research of hallyu as a cultural phenomenon (347). Even though academic papers written on K-pop indeed has increased since 2010, most still remain on the second generation of K-pop (e.g. TVXQ, Girls’ Generation, and Big Bang) and discussion on the current, third generation of K-pop groups (e.g. EXO, BTS, and TWICE) is rather scarce (Choi 2-3). There is also a problem of seeing only one side of the coin. Researches done on K-pop are either on managing companies’ strategies or on how the fandom consumes or reacts. The existing researches on Korean idol fandom view them as active participants in cultural consumption and even production, but are limited to segmented research on groups divided according to
their gender and age (Lee 2-4). I have not found much written on the group members who are also the creators of text and sometimes exist as text themselves. Most fandom studies on Korean idol fandom show the dichotomy between the company as the initial producer and fandom as active audience or secondary producer, excluding the idol stars from the discussion.

On the other hand, research on transmedia storytelling and fandom studies outside Korea unsurprisingly deal with Western or English-language-based culture. Moreover, conventional audience studies revolve around fictional text not celebrities. Early audience/fandom studies started with TV show and its fans such as Star Trek and Trekkies. Also, many foreign media treat hallyu as consequences of government funded success when it is not entirely true. One of the characteristic descriptions of K-pop by US and UK media is that it is a political propaganda and the K-pop stars are national heroes (Kwon 23-26, 68-71). East Asia’s productivity of border-crossing popular culture contents deserves more recognition.

Lastly, as an aca-fan, I had the motivation to analyze the object of my passion. I am a native Korean whose first language is Korean. However, I have received my college and post-university in media and cultural studies in English. I felt that I could attribute to the academia with my insider knowledge as a fan and a bilingual. I hope that this thesis provides an inclusive view on K-pop.

1.2 Objective and Methodology

This thesis aims to achieve these five main objectives:

1. To answer the following question: Can K-pop idols be considered as media text based on intertextuality and transmedia storytelling strategies?

   To answer this, I will go through an overview covering the initial genesis of
intertextuality based on literary theories. Then I will move on to the expansion of the concept in popular music and in celebrity studies and focus mainly on Henry Jenkins’ ideas on fandom, convergence culture, and transmedia storytelling.

2. To suggest a tripartite model of K-pop idol industry that is composed of the company, the idol, and the fandom.

3. To propose that K-pop idol can be interpreted as text that is combination of popular text (fictional) and popular icon (factual) based on the concept of intertextuality.

4. To analyze the transmedia storytelling strategy of BTS, the K-pop group that has earned massive global popularity, based on the said tripartite model and intertextuality.

5. Provide a meaningful contribution with an English-based article that covers both Western/English-language-based and Korean-language-based researches on fandom studies.

Western research on fandom did start with audience studies based on television and have stayed mainly on the topics of fictional storytelling than on celebrities. Domestic researches on the Korean wave or hallyu have been mainly conducted on its financial growth. Cultural studies have dealt with K-pop and its fandom but have gravitated toward ideological examination, especially in terms of gender dynamics or political resistance. Moreover, whereas Korean take on fandom studies has been concentrated on the country’s unique idol fandom, there has been a lack of effort to include the idol members in the discussion.

In this thesis, I would like to conduct a textual analysis of the K-pop group BTS, based on the tripartite model of idol industry composed of the company, the idol, and the fandom, which will be elaborated in Chapter III. In applying the concept of intertextuality, I acknowledge its rather broad and unfixed definition. Therefore, I would like to refer to the definition of Burns, Woods, and Lafrance in their research on Lady Gaga (4-5). They quote
**John Frow’s Intertextuality and Ontology** and state that intertextuality, to their understanding, is “to comprise the web of interrelated creative elements that link a text to other texts” (4). I suggest that intertextuality account for the statement that no text stands alone as an independent piece and thus, it is meaningful to see how it responds to other works. Therefore, the analysis will be conducted on texts of various forms, from music to videos, to performances. Also, I propose that K-pop idols, especially many of the recent, “third generation” idols, should be understood as a text that combines the fictional aspect and the factual aspect, keeping in mind the intensity may vary among groups.

1.3 **Definition and Orthography of Frequently used Terms**

This thesis will include inevitable mixtures of proper nouns and academic references written in different languages, mainly English and Korean. Thus, there is dire need for some kind of rules for orthography and definitions of frequently used terms.

**Translation and Orthography**

*Korea as South Korea.* First of all, for the sake of simplicity, Korea refers to Republic of Korea or South Korea throughout the thesis. The adjective form Korean accordingly equals to South Korean. In a similar context, the word pop will sometimes bear the meaning of pop as a musical genre without specification.

*Transcription of foreign words.* I will try to write English equivalents of the words in this thesis whenever possible. The prioritized choice of language is English for both common and proper nouns. If seemed necessary, the original Korean word is written in parenthesis in Hangeul characters and followed by italicized Romanized Korean after a comma.¹ The Romanized Korean follows the rules of Revised Romanization of Korean drafted by the

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¹ e.g.: idol (아이돌, aidol)
Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of South Korean government in July 2000. Terms that are written in other foreign languages are italicized. In case of Chinese and Japanese words, the Chinese characters or Japanese kanji/hiragana/katakana is followed in the parenthesis.  

**Personal and artist names.** Personal names of Korean figures also follow the Romanization of Korean rules unless the referred source is written in English and specifies the name otherwise. Korean given names, which are usually composed of two syllables, tend not to include a dash in between the two syllables in this thesis unless it is written otherwise in the original source. The artist names, especially those of Korean artists, will follow the official English transcriptions of the management companies that are used in their homepage, their physical albums, or digital tracks on Spotify. When repeated, only the English name will be used. 

**Translation.** Korean articles that are cited in this thesis is translated by me and tagged as “own translation” in the parenthesis, unless otherwise noted in the Work Cited page. I will attempt to be as neutral and accurate as possible but to avoid anything being lost in translation, reference materials originally written in Korean will include their original title and authors in the Works Cited page. 

**Abbreviations.** The name of organizations will be written in full. If the organization appears multiple times afterwards, abbreviation will be given in parenthesis and used for repeated citations. 

**Definitions of Major Terms**

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2 For more information, refer to the homepage of the National Institute of Korean Language (https://www.korean.go.kr/front_eng/roman/roman_01.do)
3 e.g.: hanliu (韩流, translated to Korean wave)
4 A Sweden-based digital music streaming service, Spotify (https://www.spotify.com/) has grown to hit 100 million paying subscribers and over 200 million monthly active users. Although it does not offer its service in Korea, I thought it was one of the most common ways for global listeners to approach to latest K-pop releases.
5 e.g.: BTS (방탄소년단), EXO (엑소), Seo Taiji and Boys (서태지와 아이들)
Korean popular music and K-pop. First and foremost, “Korean popular music” and “K-pop” are used in slightly different ways. Rather, it is more accurate to say that the former covers larger range and includes the latter. The different use of the two terms or the derivation of K-pop will be further elaborated in second section of Chapter II. In this thesis, the focus is on K-pop and I will use the word with the connotation as follows: Korean popular music that 1) was released after 1992, 2) is sung and performed (usually with elaborate choreography) by idol groups where the majority of the members are of Korean nationality, and 3) is performed by idol singers who are managed by Korean management companies.

Idol. In addition to the definition of K-pop, it is essential to put a definition of “idol” in the earlier section of this thesis. The English or western world idol originally had its roots in Jewish or Christian traditions. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, idol in its initial context means “an image or similitude of a deity or divinity, used as an object of worship” (“Idol, n”). As time pass by, it has come to denote “any thing or person that is the object of excessive or supreme devotion, or that usurps the place of God in human affection” (“Idol, n”). This second meaning has been imported to East Asian popular culture. Nowadays, idol tends to refer to the performing individuals who incorporate singing and dancing into their performance, participate or act in entertainment shows, and become models for magazines and advertisements. This East Asian concept of idols or aidoru (アイドル) was first born in Japan during the 1970s. The Japanese public’s enthusiasm inspired the music producers of Korea including Suman Lee, who produced the very first Korean idol group H.O.T., and led to the birth of idol groups in Korea as well.

Even though Japan was the birthplace for the current concept of performing “idols”, the relative newcomers of Korea have come a quite separate ways from their initial role models, mainly on two different points: aiming for different audiences and appealing disparate charms. Above all, the sheer scale of music market of the two countries is different.
In *2016 Music Industry White Paper*, the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism reveals that Japan has the second largest music market in the world right after the United States, whereas Korea marked eleventh (Korea Creative Content Agency, *2016 Music Industry White Paper* 9). Korea marked ninth the next year, but Japan still remained its second place (Korea Creative Content Agency, *2017 Music Industry White Paper* 9). Japan’s domestic music market is sufficient for the artists to make profit without risking to venture outside the country. It is still not uncommon to see Japanese music labels only upload roughly one-and-a-half-minute-long so called “Promotion Video (PV)” instead of uploading a full-length music video online. Even when these PVs are uploaded, they are often not available outside Japan. On the contrary, Korean music industry is active in opening up to foreign audience. Brasor states that it is impossible to obtain the economic success desired by Korean talent agencies if they only stay in Korea (“K-pop takes on the world”). In addition to the smaller music market, the current profit system does not benefit the performers that much, with the online streaming service providers taking 40% of the profit while the singer takes only 3% (Korea Creative Content Agency, *2016 Music Industry White Paper* 63). To compensate for the market scale and profit distribution system, Korean entertainment companies are eager to attract global interest. It is presumed that whenever a Korean idol group releases new album, one or even multiple music videos would be uploaded and be available across the globe at the same time. In addition to economic differences of Korea and Japan, the way the idol groups of each country appeal to their respective consumers is different. Essentially, the consumers have different expectations for their countries’ idols. Japanese idols are usually differentiated from singers or “artists”. They appeal to the public with “the girl or boy next door” images and are liked as ordinary teenagers who are not perfect at performing but still try hard to achieve their dreams of becoming popular idols. AKB 48, one of the most successful Japanese idol groups of the 2000s, was launched with a slogan that they “idols whom you can go to meet” and
implemented “handshaking events” to sell their albums (Jin Woo Kim, own translation). Korean idols sometimes get denied their identity as singers and some even do not accept them to be as talented. Nevertheless, the prevailing opinion is that idols are sub-category of singers and even idols are severely criticized when they show unsatisfactory level of performance. Korean idols are expected to excel at numerous things. It is widely known that Korean idols go through years of training before making their debut to refine their singing, dancing, and even foreign language skills (Dongyeon Lee, own translation). Members of Korean idol groups often appear on TV competition shows, such as rap competition Show Me The Money (쇼미더머니) or anonymous singing competition Masked Singer (복면가왕) to appeal to the public of their performance skills (Zico and Yu, own translation; Song, own translation). Full-fledged idol industry had its beginning in around 1980s in Japan and Korea followed suit in 1990s. However, after a couple of decades, the idol industries and cultures of the two countries have split up to develop their own characteristics.

Michael Fuhr has published an extensive research on Korean popular music in 2016 under the title Globalization and Popular Music in South Korea. In the appendix to his book, Fuhr details a number of Korean glossaries that are crucial when discussing Korean popular music. To follow Fuhr’s definition of idol or aidol (아이돌), it is:

the Korean pronunciation of the English word “idol” and denotes the good-looking and systematically trained all-round entertainer in the Korean media and in mainstream pop music. As a product of Korean entertainment companies, the aidol basically resembles its counterpart in Anglo-American pop music (“pop idol”) and in Japanese pop music (aidoru) although showing significant differences in regard to specific local contexts of production and consumption. (appendix I)
In this thesis, I would like to stick to Fuhr’s definition of idol. Idol will refer to Korean pop singers who are produced under Korean entertainment companies, combine singing and dancing into their performances, and usually form a group with multiple members with some exceptions of solo singers such as BoA. Although the group members are involved in individual gigs, like releasing solo songs or albums, I will include those individual acts under the collective group effort. For instance, in Chapter IV, I will discuss BTS members’ individual works such as mixtapes and these will be discussed as individual works but also contributing to the group as a whole.
CHAPTER II: KOREAN WAVE AND K-POP AS ITS NEW BACKBONE

The term “Korean Wave” or “hallyu” was coined to delineate the popularity gained by the South Korean pop culture. When it was first used, it mainly referred to its popularity in East Asia based on enthusiastic followers of Korean dramas. Chinese media Beijing Youth Daily (北京青年报, Beijing qing nian bao) is known to have used the term “hanliu(韩流, translated to Korean wave)” for the first time in their article published on November 19th, 1999 to refer to a group of manias cheering at Korean culture (Yi 33). Interest in Korean culture had already been planted with the Korean dramas aired in China and the albums released by H.O.T., often referred to as the very first K-pop idol group. This coincided with the successful concert by Korean dance music duo CLON. The article used the word hallyu with the connotation of “ripples of Korean trends” that is gaining enthusiasts in China. The next year opened up with the 2000 H.O.T. LIVE CONCERT IN BEIJING held in February and the term hallyu was widely used in East Asian media(33, own translation). Over the course of two decades, the Korean wave has rippled through various mediums and global audiences outside the Asian continent. What started with TV dramas has augmented to now cover films, music, food, games, animations, cosmetics/make-up, IT, and sightseeing.

In the mid-2000s, Korean wave has faced another wave or phase with the success of K-pop artists. The rise of massive, fervent K-pop fandom has been apparent and amazed both domestic and international eyes. Sam Lansky, an American journalist uses “hallyu tsunami” to illustrate what he has observed at SM Town 2012, a collaborative concert featuring several K-pop groups from SM Entertainment, one of “Big Three companies” in charge of producing

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K-pop idol groups. He mentions that he “was on a trolling high” and received “death threats from crazed fans” after jokingly tweeting to K-pop stars. Lansky concludes his article with rather negative connotations on radical fans and remains as an outsider point of view to the culture. Nevertheless, Lansky does acknowledge the passion of K-pop fandom, saying that “unlike American pop stars, K-pop idols command a level of obsession among their fans that easily outshines the Beliebers and Directioners, and their choirs of screaming adulation have become as much a part of an album campaign as the music itself” (Lansky). The following years after Lansky’s observation, K-pop has continued to lead the invasion of hallyu far beyond the East and Southeast Asian regions. Even American pop music market has witnessed this “Korean invasion”. More often than not, “American pop was synonymous with pop music in general” and “no agent has breached or appeared as a significant alternative to this current” (Youngdae Kim 92). However, the 2010s marked the thriving new era for K-pop even in the US market. Especially, BTS, a seven member group which debuted in 2013, has achieved an unprecedented success, not just for a K-pop act but for a pop singer in general. Before delving deeper into the unexpected success of BTS, this thesis will take a brief look at the overall history of hallyu.

2.1 History of Korean Wave or Hallyu

The success of K-pop in the global market may seem like a meteoric burst that came out of nowhere. However, it had its roots in the popularity of Korean TV dramas in mainly East Asian region. Hallyu has gone through several different phases until it reached to its current stage. Chua and Iwabuchi have combined a number of articles written by scholars and writers from Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Hong Kong, and Australia in their book East Asia Pop

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Culture. Before heading into the multi-national and multi-disciplinary works, the editors offer the historical background behind the birth of hallyu, or hanliu, as it was first coined in China. In the 1980s and the early 1990s, the major cultural imports came from Japan. Japanese TV dramas were “visual metaphors for capitalist-consumerist modernity”, which featured “urban trendy dramas of romances among young professionals dressed from head to toe in international designer togs, living in well appointed apartments and dining in Tokyo” (Chua and Iwabuchi 2). Despite the initial success of Japanese dramas, the sheer size of Japanese domestic market meant that the producers did not require foreign market to make significant profits. Moreover, the financial superiority of Japan meant high price for Japanese contents. It is also noted that the Japanese colonial activities before and during the Second World War added to the emotional resistance to Japanese productions. Here, cost played in Korean dramas’ favor. Korean domestic market was relatively smaller than that of Japan. Up until 1980s, Korean cultural industries solely targeted domestic audiences and made slow progress. Nonetheless, globalization and the pressure to open its market forced many Korean industries, including cultural ones, to open up and adapt to global market. This led Korean producers to turn their eyes toward foreign markets. Korean pop music gained some popularity and then subsided after a while. However, TV dramas and films were thriving. “One drama series was followed hot on the heels by another” and Korean dramas “became part of the daily programming of many free-to-air and satellite television stations in East Asia and, thus, part of the routine viewing habits of their respective audiences” (2). The late 1990s was when Korean pop culture started budding in the global market, yet still confined to the neighboring countries. Korean pop culture products were exported to Asian countries, especially Japan, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore (Youna Kim).

Below are some of the early successful Korean dramas and singers that made their way beyond the national and linguistic barrier. In 1997, Korean drama What Is Love All
About (사랑이 머길래, Sarangi mwogillae) was aired by CCTV (Chinese Central Television Station), predominant public broadcasting station of mainland China. It ranked the second-most viewed dramas in Chinese television history. The audience rating was 4.2%, meaning that over 150 million Chinese viewers enjoyed the show ("Hallyu (Korean Wave)"). CCTV even had to do a rerun the next year, having received hundreds of calls and thousands of letters requesting the rebroadcasting of the drama (Yoo 32, own translation). Followed by A Wish Upon a Star (별은 내 가슴에, Byeoreun nae gaseume), Tomato (토마토, Tomato), and Autumn in My Heart (가을동화, Gaeuldonghwa), the Korean Wave remained strong throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s. Yi counts that at least twenty-four Korean dramas were aired on Chinese television by September of 2000 (37). The Chinese audience “fell for Korean dramas as if they had discovered a whole new world” (Hong). Then came Winter Sonata (겨울연가, Gyeouryeonga). Aired in 2003 in Korea, it was exported to Japan and was hugely successful. NHK (Nippon Hoso Kyokai, Japan Broadcasting Corporation) first screened in April 2003 and the series was rerun for four times on NHK because of never-ending requests from the viewers who were mostly middle aged or elderly females. The leading actor Yongjoon Bae even earned the nickname “Yon-sama (mixture of the first syllable of his first name and Japanese honorific for royalty and aristocrats)” from the enormous fan base among Japanese women (Huh and Ham 13, qtd. in Jung). With its nationwide popularity and following reaction entitled as “Yon-sama syndrome”, Winter Sonata was the first case for Korean drama to become popular first in Japan and then spread to China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong (Jang and Paik 198). The Korean historical drama Dae Jang Geum, also known as Jewel in the Palace, is another example of Korean drama leading hallyu. Based on a real historical figure of 16th century Joseon Dynasty, the show features beautiful traditional garments of royal court, reproduction of Joseon architecture, and
exquisite palace cuisine. This attracted the interest of global audience outside Korea. First aired in Taiwan in 2004, the Chinese-speaking regions were quickly swept with a “Dae Jang Geum Fever” (KCIS, The Korean Wave 27). The fever crossed the barrier of East Asia and went as far as Peru. The drama’s broadcast in Iran recorded astonishing ratings of 86% and was also aired in other Middle Eastern countries such as Jordan and Egypt. It has been aired in dozens of other countries including China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Brunei, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, India, Turkey, Israel, Nigeria, Romania, Hungary, Bosnia, Russia, Sweden, Colombia, Peru, Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand (KCIS, The Korean Wave 28-29).

TV drama was not the only sector of Korean popular culture that gained popularity. Korean popular music, or K-pop also began to captivate Asian listeners. With dramas taking over the small screen, general interest in Korean culture arose. Hong Kong-based Channel V started to show K-pop music videos since the late 1990s (KCIS, The Korean Wave 30). Chinese government officially ratified the release of Korean music albums in May 1998 and one of the very first albums to be sold was that of H.O.T. (or High-five of Teenagers) is often mentioned as the first ever K-pop idol group and made its debut in Korea in 1996. They sold 50,000 albums in China, within just one month of its official release. The group also held a successful concert at Beijing Worker’s Stadium (北京工人体育馆) with 10,000 audience in February 2000. Following H.O.T.’s footsteps, boy groups such as NRG, Sechs Kies, and Shinhwa and girl group Baby V.O.X. filled their concerts with cheering fans in Taiwan and Hong Kong. K-pop took over the center of Asian pop culture that was enjoyed by Japan for a long time.

The new millennium opened its way up for hallyu with more and more K-pop stars flourishing over the border. Female solo singer BoA is considered as one of the first Korean singers to actually active in global markets by focusing on Japan and US market than on
Korea. She began her career in Japan in 2001 which was half a year after her debut in Korea and marked the number one position in Japan’s Oricon Weekly album chart seven times. One of the most successful K-pop boy bands, TVXQ was the very first foreign artist to top the Oricon Weekly single chart nine times and also hold gained a number of awards in Korean and across the continent (KCIS, *The Korean Wave* 30-31). Though TVXQ faced a disbanding crisis when three of the original five members seceded from the group in 2010, two members retained the group. Rather than waning, their popularity knows no end; TVXQ set the record as the first ever foreign singer and 13th ever singer to perform at Nissan Stadium, the largest concert venue of Japan with its 72,327 seats, in 2013. The group even broke their own record in 2018 by becoming the first artist ever to hold concert at Nissan Stadium for three consecutive days (Lim). It is quite remarkable achievement regarding that both of the members had to undertake mandatory military service just as any other able-bodied Korean males. Even after 760 days of hiatus due to the enlistment, TVXQ has proved that they still are “the Kings of K-pop”.

Nevertheless, seemingly unstoppable wave of *hallyu* has faced its own breakwater. The historical and political entanglement, especially in East Asia where *hallyu* was most prominent, has led to some resistance and backlashes. Japanese media states that “Korean invasion” could happen where Korean pop groups could dominate the Japanese music market, making comparison to the British groups like the Beatles that took over the American music market in the 1960s (KCIS, *The Korean Wave* 37). Even the anti-Korean wave phenomenon against the rise of Korean popular culture has been observed in countries such as China, Taiwan, and Japan. Nevertheless, *hallyu* has clearly not died out and evolved into its next phase, if anything. The new Korean wave has bloomed with the growing popularity of K-pop. The so-called “third generation” K-pop stars of the 2010s are enjoying unprecedented support from their global fandom. This will be elaborated in the third section of this chapter.
2.2 Emergence of K-pop as the Spearhead of Hallyu 2.0


The first part of K-POP discusses the early modern historical background of the birth of Korean pop music. US missionary Henry Appenzeller introduced hymns and folk songs to Koreans at Pai Chai Academy and it led to the evolution of changga (창가)⁹. Then during the early half of the 20th century, the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910) came to an end under Japanese

⁹ Changga (창가, 唱歌) is the Korean pronunciation of the Japanese school songs shōka (唱歌).
colonization (1910-1948). Though tragic for the country and its people, the colonization also brought the emergence of another major genre of Korean music, trot (트로트, teuroteu), which was influenced by Japanese enka songs (KCIS, K-POP 47-48). After thirty-six years of Japanese occupation, the Korean Peninsula was divided into two: the communist North and the capitalist South. The catastrophic Korean War (1950-1953) further solidified the division. Nevertheless, it meant “a new chapter in Korean popular music history” and “new forms of music, mostly influenced by Western music, began mushrooming” (KCIS, K-POP 49). The US troops were stationed in South Korea and American pop music came with them, which led to two major changes: “a major shift in musical style from the pentatonic scale to the Western heptachord, and the creation of Korean pop music modeled on Western pop” (KCIS, K-POP 50). The latter half of the century was also a turbulent period for the country. During the 1960s, South Korea underwent a rapid economic growth and urbanization, rising from the remnants of colonization and a civil war. Korean musicians who began their career with performing for American soldiers began to cater the Korean public. Also, the Beatles fever did not skip Korea and led to the popularity of “group sound”, or band music. The next decade, along with the global youth movement of the late 60s, was marked by the newly used term “youth culture” (KCIS, K-POP 55). The post-war generation was drastically different from their parents. The younger generation adopted “long hair, jeans, acoustic guitars, and folk music” (KCIS, K-POP 55). Elite university students led the Korean folk music trend characterized by honesty and liberal values (KCIS, K-POP 56). The fifth section gives several star singers such as Yongpil Cho and Moonse Lee as representative singers of the 1980s. Cho explored various musical genres, “from rock ballads to rhythmic dance to trot and even folk”, becoming the first Korean artist to hold a solo concert at Carnegie Hall in New York (KCIS, K-POP 60-61). The dominant genre of this era, however, was ballad. Ballad singers Moonse Lee and Jinsub Byun established the pop ballad as a main pillar in Korean
pop music (KCIS, *K-POP* 61). Last but definitely not least, KCIS explains the Korean music trend of the 1990s. After the ballad boom of the previous decade came to an end, the remarkable male trio Seo Taiji and Boys opened up a totally disparate era for Korean popular music. Making their debut in 1992 on a TV show featuring new artists performing in front of a group of judges, the trio performed “I Know (난 알아요, *Nan Arayo*)”. Despite the cold reception on air, it did not take long for the band’s unprecedented and one-of-a-kind musical style, dance performances, and even fashion style to prevail the Korean pop music. Seo was the frontman of the group, writing their first song with “a mixture of rap, plaintive lyrics, and heavy metal sounds” and the other two members Hyunsuk Yang and Juno Lee were known for their dashing choreography (KCIS, *K-POP* 63). The next year, Seo Taiji and Boys released their second album. One of the tracks of the album, “Hayeoga”, was an experimental piece which combined a melody performed on a traditional Korean conical oboe *taepyeonso* and beatboxing. The song has been voted as the trio’s best song ever released by twenty musical experts (Im, own translation). With the revolutionary success of Seo Taiji and Boys, rap and hip-hop continued to soar in popularity with hip-hop acts like Jinusean, 1TYM, and Drunken Tiger (KCIS, *K-POP* 63). The intriguing thing here is that Jinusean and 1TYM, two groups that led the 90s hip-hop popularity were produced under YG Entertainment, which was established by one the former “Boys” of Seotaiji and Boys Hyunsuk Yang and still is one of the “Big 3” entertainment companies leading K-pop trend of the 21st century. At the same time, the humongous popularity of Seo Taiji and Boys among the young generation led the music industry to target teenagers as their new audience (KCIS, *K-POP* 64). The mid-1990s was a turning point for Korean popular music with the birth of first K-pop “idol (아이돌, *aidol*)” groups. H.O.T., or “High Five of Teenagers”.

The current usage of the term K-pop, thus, can be said to have been born during the
last decade of the 20th century. The hybridity and multinational elements make it hard to define what K-pop really is, and this difficulty is echoed in many articles. The Korean Culture and Information Service also mention this:

Defining what K-Pop really is, however, can be somewhat tricky. Is it Korean pop music made by Koreans, or sung and performed by Korean artists? Can it include pop music made and sung by non-Koreans who perform in Korea? The increasing presence of global producers and composers on the K-Pop scene has blurred the criteria somewhat, but if we take into account the fact that K-Pop began receiving serious attention from the global audience in the wake of the overseas success of Korean pop groups, we may define K-Pop here as Korean pop music sung and performed by Korean artists and received positively by international fans. (11)

Beginning around the late 2000s and continuing into the 2010s, emergence of the “new Korean wave” (Jin), “hallyu 2.0” (Lee and Nornes), or “Neo-Korean wave” (KCIS, The Korean Wave 39) was evident. The previous or initial stage of hallyu that began in the 1990s did include a couple of export products including dramas, films, music, and food, but at its center was TV dramas. In terms of target market, the main audiences were based in the Chinese-speaking world (mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong), Japan, and the Southeast Asia. The new Korean wave, however, took a turn. It was led by K-pop music stars, mainly so-called “idol” dance groups who augmented the boundaries of hallyu beyond Asia and went over to Europe, North, South, and Central America, and elsewhere (KCIS, The Korean Wave 39). In essence, the influence of K-pop has “exploded onto the international scene” (Howard 298). Yoon and Jin state that hallyu 2.0 “appears to be more intensive in its popularity and extensive in its dissemination” (1278). They list three characteristics that set hallyu 2.0 from its preceding stage:
First, *hallyu 2.0* is defined by its genre, as some researchers equate hallyu 2.0 with the penetration of K-pop in the Western markets in tandem with the creation of K-pop fandom (Song and Jang, 2013). Some critics attribute the new Korean wave to more than one genre, including digital content (e.g. K-pop and online games) and gadgets (e.g. smartphones) (Kim, 2013). Second, hallyu 2.0 is characterized by the significant role of social media in media production and consumption (Jung and Shim, 2013; Oh and Park, 2012). Third, hallyu 2.0 is distinguished from the earlier wave by its global reach (Hong-Mercier, 2013; Jin, in press), as exemplified by the increasing number of North American audiences of hallyu content. (1278)

What is notable here is that the popularity of K-pop in global market is often equated with the renewal of *hallyu* at its next phase. The Korean Tourism Organization conducted an online survey on *Hallyu* via its website and received responses from 12,085 non-Korean visitors from 102 countries in its June 2011 survey (KCIS, *K-POP 27*). To the question of which category or field of *hallyu* interested them, 55 percent of the respondents, which equals 6,447 people, chose K-pop as their answer. The second most frequent answer was TV series with 33 percent (27). K-pop was also picked up as the most frequent keyword that first comes into mind when thinking of Korea in a November 2017 survey (KOFICE, *2017 Hallyu White Paper 20*).

2.3 K-Pop and Its Characteristics, Appeals, and Generations

After about half a century, Korean popular music has settled into the current K-pop form. There are a number of frequently observed characteristics of 21st century K-pop. Korean Culture and Information Service quotes the special report aired on *Monocle*, a
program on Bloomberg TV network, in February 2011 and picks three aspects of K-pop that increase its competitiveness: 1) K-pop is a genuine business with great potential for export, 2) social media is the key to K-pop’s success, and 3) K-pop is a composite art based both on audio and visual elements (Korean Culture and Information Service, K-POP 31). Then the report proceeds to propose four characteristics of K-pop: 1) hybrid entertainment, in that K-pop incorporates music, dancing, and fashion, 2) the versatility of Korean stars, 3) globalized star-making system, and 4) social media enabling rapid spread (KCIS, K-Pop 31-46).

In his book on overview of K-pop, Micahel Fuhr offers what he calls “a K-pop tropology” which is “an assemblage of disparate components that, only in conjunction with each other, constitute K-Pop as a music genre” (60). In this chapter, Fuhr lists a number of elements such as artist names most of which are based on English words, English code-mixing in lyrics, and fansubbing that works as a successful and effective means of overcoming the language barriers (62-67). He continues with the unique system of K-pop industry, where talent agencies have replaced record companies as key players in the music industry. Korean entertainment companies have the idol star system. Sometimes referred to as the trainee system or the academy system, the idol star system involves casting young talents and training them and nurturing them so that they can become global stars and bring revenues for the companies. This leads to the fans’ and consumers’ strong awareness of the management companies behind the stars (67-74). Fuhr again mentions the companies’ nurturing of trainees, explaining the frequently held auditions to find recruit talented teenagers and the training process that the selected trainees go through (74-81). Fuhr also makes a great observation on the songs. Korean pop music scene is mostly filled with dance pop and pop ballads and more and more North-European and North American composers participating in composing (84-86). The country’s music industry has been organized around albums for relatively longer period and the Western pop single format is still a recent concept.
Usually K-pop singers release digital singles, mini albums or EP (including around five to seven tracks), full-length albums (has longer track list than mini albums), and re-packages (“repackaging” a full-length album with a couple of new songs or remixes). Musical characteristics of K-pop include hook songs emphasizing catchy repetitive musical phrases, “song dramaturgy” (flow-oriented, climax-oriented, breaking-the-flow, remix-style), dance beats, rap parts, and the “Ppong (뽕)” factor, which is an unofficial term to describe an obscure musical vibe that makes songs sound Korean (86-108). Visual aspects of K-pop are group dance performance, signature moves, and de-localized and de-temporal space displayed in music videos (108-119).

It is evident that the mainstream K-pop is predominated by idol groups, of which the members are carefully selected and trained by their management companies. Since the launch of H.O.T. in the mid-1990s, there have been countless groups that were produced and made their debuts. Media and academia have loosely divided these groups into three generations: first generation (debuted in the 1990s), second generation (debuted in 2000s), and third generation (debuted in the 2010s). Each generation has own traits, interrelated with the development of communication technology and the status of K-pop in the global market. To explain each and every group is an impossible task to do it in the limited page of this section. Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of three generation of K-pop idols.

### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>1st Generation</th>
<th>2nd Generation</th>
<th>3rd Generation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>TV / Radio</td>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>Mobile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics</td>
<td>-Make debut under the strict supervision of the management company</td>
<td>-The establishment of the “trainee system”: debut after years of training</td>
<td>-Debut in Korea and in global market simultaneously</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Standardized behavior patterns</td>
<td>-Singing ability matters as much as visual</td>
<td>-Transnationalization and active communication via</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-Focus on visual</td>
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</table>
The current K-pop is blooming with the third generation idol groups whose hallmarks are intimate communication with fans and active globalization based on social media. Unlike the preceding generations, the third generation aims to achieve both domestic and international popularity. It is not uncommon to witness some of the most popular K-pop idols on music charts outside Korea. EXO has achieved huge success since their debut in South Korea and China at the same time in 2012. EXO was the fastest K-pop artist to reach the millions-seller milestone of physical album sales and has continued to mark five consecutive million-seller albums ("Gaon"). BTS has recently scored number one on Billboard 200 Chart three times in less than a year with their latest album MAP OF THE SOUL: Persona. The group also has seven songs that made into Hot 100 Chart ("Chart History"). Their latest title

<table>
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<tr>
<th>K-pop in the Global Market</th>
<th>Representative Groups</th>
<th>elements (appearance, performance)</th>
<th>elements -Attempts to expand to the global market after gaining domestic popularity</th>
<th>social media</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-Hallyu based on TV dramas</td>
<td>H.O.T. Sechskies Fin.K.L S.E.S god Shinhwa</td>
<td>-K-pop hallyu expanding to Asian countries</td>
<td>-K-pop as the main driving force of hallyu -Globalization of K-pop: going over boundaries of Asia and spreading to Europe, North and South America -Digital hallyu based on social media</td>
<td>EXO BTS Red Velvet TWICE BLACKPINK</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

track “Boy With Love” became the most viewed YouTube video in 24 hours with 74,600,000 views from April 12th to 13th (“Most Viewed”). TWICE have achieved huge success in Japan, where anti-Korean sentiment has grown stronger in recent years. The group sold over 6 million albums, combining both Korean and Japanese release (Kelley “K-pop”). BLACKPINK continues to break their own 24-hour view count record. Their latest music video for “Kill This Love” marked the biggest 24-hour debut with 56.7 million views which outnumbered 55.4 million views of “thank u, next” by one of America’s most popular singers Ariana Grande (Kelley “BLACKPINK”).
CHAPTER III: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

"Nothing is original. Steal from anywhere that resonates with inspiration or fuels your imagination... Authenticity is invaluable; originality is non-existent. And don’t bother concealing your thievery - celebrate it if you feel like it."

These words are borrowed from the film director Jim Jarmusch. Here, he is talking about film making process, but this somewhat radical comment can be applied when discussing the intertextuality in music. Intertextuality, first coined by the French philosopher Julia Kristeva in 1966, is one of the most frequently used analytic tools when interpreting various cultural forms. Although the concept of intertextuality originates from literary theories, it has been adopted by scholars in musical contexts. Intertextuality allows the analyst to have a look at a musical text and its endless cultural references. A musical piece does not stand independent, aloof from other works. Instead, it stands as one of innumerable stars in infinite constellations in the vast universe.

3.1 Intertextuality

A very important question should be answered first: what is intertextuality? In a general sense, intertextuality refers to the interwoven references between literary, media, or social texts, either consciously done or unconsciously done. The Oxford English Dictionary defines it as “the need for one text to be read in the light of its allusions to and differences from the content or structure of other texts” and “the (allusive) relationship between

10 https://bloomgroup.com/blogs/tim-parker/authenticity-invaluable-originality-non-existent
especially literary texts” (“Intertextuality, n”). Nonetheless, academic definition of the term intertextuality has been disparate among the scholars who define it. Some of the key scholars who have defined it are as follows.

**Julia Kristeva**

The first usage of the intertextuality in academics, nonetheless, is generally agreed as the French philosopher Julia Kristeva. The French intellectual scene of the 1960s where Kristeva took part in was marked by various theories that stems from structuralism based on Saussurean linguistics and also numerous critiques of the Saussurean linguistics, later known as post-structuralism. Kristeva was influenced by Ferdinand de Saussure and Mikhail M. Bakhtin in coining the term intertextuality. However, since neither of them actually made use of the exact term, “most people would wish to credit Julia Kristeva with being the inventor of ‘intertextuality’” (Allen 11). Saussure came up with the definition of a sign as the combination of a signified (concept) and a signifier (sound-image). Language is synchronic rather than diachronic; whenever people write or speak, their specific acts of linguistic communication, parole, always come from the accessible synchronic system of language, langue. Thus, language is differential, meaning that it is chosen along the sintagmatic (combinatory) axis and paradigmatic (selection) axis (Allen 8-9). On the other hand, Bakhtin is more interested in the social and dialogic nature of language. His argument is that “there is no real moment in time when a synchronic system of language could be constructed” (Bakhtin and Vološinov 66). Graham Allen puts Bakhtin’s argument against Saussure in this way: “Language, seen in its social dimension, is constantly reflecting and transforming class, institutional, national and group interests” (18). Baktin thus picks dialogism as indispensable element of all language. Kristeva works within “the hidden spaces” of these linguistic theories (Allen 31). She coined the term intertextuality in 1966 and her initial concept was quite different from what connotations it has come to bear now. Kristeva suggests that while
the words a speaker utters may sound original, every sentence that comes out is composed of the words that the person has heard. Thus, “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations” and “the absorption and transformation of another” (66). Her coinage of intertextuality signals her shift from structuralism to post-structuralism.

**Roland Barthes**

Over fifty years after its first appearance, numerous academics have discussed intertextuality with various connotations. The disparate usage of the term is largely due to the various usage of the term “text”. Julia Kristeva puts that a text is “a productivity” and “is a permutation of texts, an intertextuality: in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another” (36). Whereas text used to denote linguistic objects that is written or printed, the term has come to include books, magazines, movies, dramas, games, and even music. Popular culture indeed offers endless access to a “multi-dimensional space” of textual relations (Barthes 146). Roland Barthes’ 1968 essay effectively enunciates the downturn of the concept of the author after the birth of intertextuality with its title “The Death of the Author”. In this essay, he writes:

We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture... the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as ever to rest on any one of them. Did he wish to express himself, he ought at least to know that the inner ‘thing’ he thinks to ‘translate’ is itself only a ready-formed dictionary, its words only explainable through other words, and so on indefinitely. (146)

Barthes’ phrase of text being “a tissue of quotations” is not so different from Kristeva
saying it being “a mosaic of quotations” (Barthes 146; Kristeva 66). He rejected to the then prevalent literary tradition of *auteurisme*, claiming that the author is only one of multiple sources of meaning. To Barthes, “a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures” and if there is “one place where this multiplicity is focused” it would be the reader not the author (148). Adam Rush remarks on this revolutionary essay in his dissertation, saying that its publication signals the moment when the concept of intertextuality transitioned shifted from linguistics to literature, and further, from structuralism into post-structuralism (33).

**Gérard Genette**

Having been inspired by both Kristeva and Barthes, Gérard Genette attempted to bring back the structuralist origin of the term intertextuality. Allen comments that to Genette, literary works “are not original, unique, unitary wholes, but particular articulations (selections and combinations) of an enclosed system” (93). Whereas the text itself may not exhibit its connection to the system, it is the function of criticism to reveal the relation by “rearranging the work *back into its relation to the closed literary system*” (Allen 93). Genette felt the need to recompose the term intertextuality, which he felt to have become too vague. Genette thus coins the term transtextuality and then comes up with five subtypes that each shows a distinct way in which a text adjusts and extends on the basis of the contents of other texts. The five subdivisions are intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, hypertextuality, and architextuality. His definition of intertextuality refers to “a relationship of copresence between two texts or among several texts” and “the actual presence of one text within another” (1-2). Paratextuality refers to the texts that enclose a text and a combination of peritext (e.g. titles, prefaces, and notes) and epitext (e.g. interviews, reviews, and personal letters or other authorial/editorial discussions). Genette defines metatextuality as a commentary of a certain text that “unites a given text to another, of which it speaks without necessarily citing
it…sometimes even without naming it” (4). The fourth division, hypertextuality indicates any relationship that unites one text (hypertext) to a previous text (hypotext) (Genette 5). The last concept, architextuality refers to the placing of a text in the context of a genre. Genette writes that “determining the generic status of the text is not the business of the text but that of the reader, or the critic, or the public” (4). Genette admits that his subtypes are not “separate and absolute”, but it is clear that he contributed by elucidating numerous relationships between texts.

3.2 Audience Studies and Post-Audience Studies: the Rise of Fandom

As early as the 1960s, Roland Barthes already declared the death of the author, who in traditional literary theories was hailed as the absolute. Then, however, what comes after to fill the void? The concept of intertextuality calls for the readers or the audiences and their previous experience to make sense of the text in an interrelated context. This can be linked with the development of audience studies and post-audience studies or fandom studies of the late 20th century.

In his 1990 overview on media audience studies, Shaun Moores covers the media and audience studies since the mid-1970s. Moores first explains the field of film studies in which many scholars, such as Stephen Heath, Colin MacCabe, Laura Mulvey, and Peter Wollen, were involved in the film journal Screen. He points out that these works were rather focused on the structure of the text, but did take a look at the relations between texts and its audiences, using psychoanalysis, linguistics, and Marxism (9-14). Then Moores picks up the significant development of screen theory critique at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies of Birmingham. This critique was based on Stuart Hall’s encoding/decoding model of television and its audience (14).

Stuart Hall
Stuart Hall’s encoding/decoding model is often regarded as the primary work that has set the basis for active audience research. He is known for defying the conventional linear transportation model in the communication studies. Hall came up with the semiotic framework where the production and reception of the television message, constructing an intricate social meaning. He states that “discursive ‘knowledge’ is the product not of the transparent representation of the ‘real’ in language but of the articulation of language on real relations and conditions. Thus there is no intelligible discourse without the operation of a code” (131). Language does not actually show the world as it is. Televisual sign is even more complicated, being a mixture of visual and aural discourses. Anything has to be encoded in particular ways and decoded by the audience. He points out that these codes of encoding and decoding “may not be perfectly symmetrical” (131). This asymmetry occurs because television texts are polysemic (134-135). Also, the reading practice involve “selective perception” that is based on “individual variants, significant clusterings” (135). Later in his essay, Hall identifies “three hypothetical positions from with decoding of a televisual discourse may be constructed” (136). The first one involves the audience operates within the dominant code and reads the encoded meaning “full and straight” (136). In the second, the viewers accept a negotiated code that “acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions…while, at a more restricted, situational (situated) level…operates with exceptions to the rule” (137). The third, oppositional position shows decoding the message in a “globally contrary way” (137-138). One important takeaway from this influential model is that there is no inevitable accord between encoding and decoding. Therefore, the audience breaks away from the passive position and the meaning of text is created only when it reaches the audience. Hall’s theoretical foundation inspired and coincided with those of other scholars like David Morely and Charlotte Brunsdon (Moores 14-18).

John Fiske
Often referred as active audience theory, the field made its advance with John Fiske. In his 1992 essay “The Cultural Economy of Fandom”, Fiske extends the work of French philosopher Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu used a horizontal east/west axis to separate cultural capital from economic capital and a vertical north/south axis to show the amount of either capital possessed (qtd. in Fiske 31). Fiske identifies that Bourdieu’s model concentrates on class at the expense of other elements such as age or gender but still is useful if modified to consider those as “axes of subordination” and “extended to include forms of ‘popular cultural capital’ produced by subordinate social formations” (33). He then explains three major characteristics of fandom: discrimination and distinction, productivity and participation, and capital accumulation (34). Especially, when explaining the productivity of fandom, Fiske conceptualizes three types of productivity, namely semiotic productivity, enunciative productivity, and textual productivity (37-42). Semiotic productivity refers to “the making of meanings of social identity and of social experience from the semiotic resources of the cultural commodity” (37). Enunciative takes a public form where there is a face-to-face or oral culture, expressing one’s membership of a certain fan community (37-38). For textual productivity, Fiske picks up the research on Star Trek fans by Jenkins and Penley, both of which are later known as representative works of early fandom studies. Fiske claims that “fans produce and circulate among themselves texts which are often crafted with production values as high as any in the official culture” (39). The most significant contribution of Fiske’s concept of fandom productivity lies in the fact that it marks the transition of audience theory; previous perception of active audience remained as a resistance against dominant ideology but Fiske paved the way for subsequent perception of audience activity that covers general audience practices (Kim and Kim 37). The active audience theory, media studies, and subculture/fan studies crisscross their way via Fiske’s work. There is no doubt that he was one of the inspirational figures for the field of post-audience/fandom studies.
Henry Jenkins

*Textual Poachers.* It is impossible to discuss fandom studies and transmedia storytelling without Henry Jenkins. Published in 1992, his book *Textual Poachers* opened up the new page of audience studies. Jenkins quotes Michel de Certeau’s analogy of active reading as “poaching” to explain the tension between readers and writers (or the social authorities) over the possession of the text. As opposed to the conventional, negative labels put upon fans as “cultural dupes, social misfits, and middles consumers”, Jenkins proposes fans are:

active producers and manipulators of meanings…who appropriate popular texts and reread them in a fashion that serves different interests…[and] who transform the experience of watching television into a rich and complex participatory culture….Their activities pose important questions about the ability of media producers to constrain the creation and circulation of meanings. Fans construct their cultural and social identity through borrowing and inflecting mass culture images, articulating concerns which often go unvoiced within the dominant media. (23)

In concluding the book, Jenkins suggests five characteristic activities of fandom: 1) fans take part in meaning making with a “mixture of emotional proximity and critical distance”, 2) fandom conducts certain critical and interpretive practices that take them to a meta-text beyond what is explicitly expressed in the original series, 3) fans establish a foundation for consumer activism by speaking up to the producers, 4) fandom owns certain forms of cultural production, artistic traditions and practices that challenge and reverse media industry, and 5) fandom functions as an alternative social community where fans finds a Utopian dimension within popular culture (283-293). With the cover featuring a well-known Star Trek fan artist Jean Kluge’s illustration, the book deals with fan activities such as fanfic,
fan art, fan videos, and filk\textsuperscript{11}. To the contemporary readers’ eyes, this book may appear outdated, being published prior to extensive Internet accessibility and focusing quite much on slash fandom. Nevertheless, \textit{Textual Poachers} remains iconic in the fandom studies and was quite unusual to celebrate fan and fan activities instead of disregarding them as pathological.

There are, however, a couple of limitations of \textit{Textual Poachers} as a hallmark of post-audience studies. Sujeong Kim and Sooh Kim pick up three main critiques that have come up against Jenkins’ earlier work (42-45). Firstly, the cultural practices of fandom are still understood in the dichotomic, oppositive frame of “the producer versus the consumer” or “the dominant versus the subversive”. Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington criticize this romantic view of what they refer to “the first wave” of fan studies under the heading that says “Fandom Is Beautiful” (1-4). In the modern digital media environment, one often observe a rather cooperative relationship between the media corporate and the fandom. Kim and Kim state Korean idol fandom as typical case. Idol fandom vigorously participate and cooperate in the star marketing of the entertainment company for the success of their stars. They also point out that the almost compulsive notion that fans should function as progressive social being may hinder more accurate understanding of reality (43). The second critique is that the first wave fan scholars do not consider the hierarchy within fandom. Gray et al., state that the second wave of fan studies identify the taste hierarchies within fandom that repeat the existing economic, social, and cultural status quo, rather than empowering or emancipating fans (5-7).

Lastly, third limitation of \textit{Textual Poachers} is that Jenkins still seeks the fundamental meaning of fandom activities in their interpretive dimension. Nonetheless, Kim and Kim comment that Jenkins provides the turning point in audience studies, from critical interpretation paradigm to performance paradigm of fans.

\textsuperscript{11} There is a controversy regarding its definition, but for the sake of convenience for the reader of this thesis, I would like to put it as the folk music of the science fiction community.
Convergence Culture and Transmedia Storytelling. “Let’s face it: we have entered an era of media convergence that makes the flow of content across multiple media channels almost inevitable”; this is what Jenkins declares in his 2003 article “Transmedia Storytelling” on MIT Technology Review. After more than a decade after the publication of Textual Poachers, the rapid development of technology has affected every facet of human life, including fandom. Fandom activities have transformed in terms of their scale and characteristics. Along with these changes, Henry Jenkins comes up with a concept of “transmedia storytelling”. He makes an observation on modern day entertainment industry, where younger consumers, who have grown up and are already familiar with this type of media like Pokémon, “have become information hunters and gatherers, taking pleasure in tracking down character backgrounds and plot points and making connections between different texts within the same franchise” (“Transmedia”). Here, Jenkins’ choice of words, “hunters and gatherers”, somewhat echoes his earlier publication. Jenkins sums up in a quite positive note that this kind of multilayered approach to storytelling will lead to a more sophisticated and satisfying narrative to appear “within the constraints of commercial entertainment” (“Transmedia”).

Jenkins develops this concept again in his 2006 publication Convergence Culture. In this book, he explains what influence the technological advance has on the relationship between media technology and its users and fandom culture. The three key concepts discussed are media convergence, participatory culture, and collective intelligence. According to Jenkins, convergence refers to “the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences” and is “both a top-down corporate-driven process and a bottom-up consumer-driven process” (2, 18). Participatory culture can be observed in media convergence, as Jenkins describes the modern media audiences “will go almost anywhere in search of the
kinds of entertainment experiences they want” (2). This makes contrast against the conventional perception of passive media audience. Again, Jenkins tends to perceive fandom as more of a community instead of paying attention to fans as individuals. Collective intelligence is used in his book with the assertion that “Consumption has become a collective process” (4). Based on the close interaction between online users, collective intelligence show the possibility of alternative media based on knowledge communities based on mutual interests. With these three interrelated concepts, Jenkins emphasizes the production ability of fan/fandom even more. *Convergence Culture* takes a rather rose-tinted view on fandom in the digital media era. Opposed to his prior opinion on fan activities as resistant against the media industry, Jenkins sees that the relationship between the fandom and the industry can be reciprocal and mutually beneficial. Transmedia storytelling is picked up as the result of this transition, defining it as “stories that unfold across multiple media platforms with each medium making distinctive contributions to our understanding of the world, a more integrated approach to franchise development than models based on urtexts and ancillary products” (293). In the fourth chapter, Jenkins elaborates on the concept with various examples like *The Matrix* (93-130). Reflecting his 2003 article, Jenkins states 1) that transmedia story expands across multiple media platforms, 2) that each new media contributes in unique and valuable way, 3) that each franchise entry should be self-contained but also becomes a point of entry into the franchise as a whole (95-96).

Jenkins has continued to develop this idea. In his 2009 blog post, Jenkins suggests seven principles of transmedia storytelling: 1) spreadability & drillability, 2) continuity & multiplicity, 3) immersion & extractability, 4) worldbuilding, 5) seriality, 6) subjectivity, and 7) performance.

In this sense, transmedia storytelling presupposes intertextuality in disparate media texts that should be recognized by the readers/audiences. A story is continuously expanded
with the constant participation of fans. In this “world-making” process, as Jenkins describes, fans go through various experiences as disparate as the multiple platforms.

3.3 Literary Theories Applied to Music and Idols

The aforementioned theories and ideas related to intertextuality, transmedia storytelling, and the significance of fandom in understanding popular culture can be applied to analyze musical pieces, celebrities, and idols. The musical intertextuality was first considered in analyzing classical pieces and then expanded to popular music. The East Asian, especially Japanese and Korean idols, being celebrities whose marketing strategies involve multimedia platforms, can also be understood using concepts of intertextuality and transmedia storytelling.

Intertextuality in Music Analysis

In his second edition of *Intertextuality*, which was published in 2010, a decade after its first edition, Graham Allen acknowledges the technological development that has created an environment where “the narratives and the art works we engage with are presented to us in a plethora of media” (207-208). After almost another decade, it only augmented. Although the concept and theories of intertextuality stems from literary theories, the definition of text has been expanded to include not only linguistic or literary “texts” but also cover a variety of other cultural mediums including music. One can view a musical text as a culmination of multiple cultural references that does not function on its own, independently. A number of scholars have incorporated the concept of intertextuality in analyzing musical artists and their works. In reviewing Mark Evan Bonds’ book *Wordless Rhetoric: Musical Form and the Metaphor of the Oration*, Kevin Korsyn states “[o]nce we abandon the idea of pieces as closed entities, then the distinction between what is inside and what is outside the piece breaks down, and compositions become knots of intertextual forces” (132).
In his 1985 article *The Place of Intertextuality in Music Studies*, Robert Hatten suggests that musical intertext has two contexts: *style* and *strategy* (70). Hatten’s focus of interest was classical music but Mark Spicer adopts Hatten’s idea to analyze popular music, such as three Beatles’ songs composed by John Lennon. According to Spicer, *stylistic intertextuality* happens when a composer accepts unique characteristics of a pre-existing style or genre, without referring to any specific piece of that style. He lists a couple of examples such as “Eleanor Rigby” and “Love You To” (353). *Strategic intertextuality*, on the other hand, occurs when a composer intentionally refers to a particular preceding work or works by various techniques including quotation, structural modeling, variation, or paraphrase. Just as the literary theorists have argued, “the central premise behind musical intertextuality is, in short, that compositions acquire meaning not in and of themselves, but through their relationship to a potentially infinite universe of other works.” (Spicer 351) Spicer notes that “the goal of an intertextual analysis is to unravel the many ways in which the stylistic and strategic references contribute to the meaning of the new piece” (354).

Serge Lacasse bases his model of *transtextuality* on Gérard Genette’s ideas and explores the possibility of implementing intertextuality and hypertextuality in recorded popular music (35-58). His definition of intertext is “the text in which one finds elements from a previous text” (38). Lacasse comes up with terms like allosonic/autosonoic quotation and parody and picks up other cases such as covers and remixes where hypertextuality influences listeners. Burns, Woods, and Lafrance extends Lacasse’s concepts, use the concept of a critical genealogy based on Michel Foucault, and takes into account what John Frow states about intertextuality in their analysis of Lady Gaga in 2009 (3-9). Burns again employ these concepts in her more recent article where she examines Coldplay’s *Mylo Syloto* album’s storytelling according to multimedial, intermedial, and transmedial contexts. She points out that artists of modern age relay on elaborate intricate promotional strategies and thus expand
“the idea of the concept album to the concert tour, music videos, books, and a range of supplementary materials” (91). Accordingly, “the concept album can be seen to extend across multiple media formats in supplementary materials and live performances” (Burns 91-92).

More recent works in this field includes that of Adam Rush and Rebekah Hutten. In his PhD dissertation published in 2017, Rush applies the concept of intertextuality in his analysis of 21st century musicals. He claims that musical theater is “an inherently intertextual form” and “ultimately requires intertextuality to reflect the recycled nature of popular culture more broadly” (Rush 2). Hutten utilizes theoretical framework of worldmaking, intertextuality, and mediality in music for her examination on Beyoncé Knowles-Carter’s 2016 album Lemonade (30-39). These musical analyses are all inspired by the concept of intertextuality that has its root in literary theories.

**Intertextuality and Transmedia Storytelling in Idol**

In addition to the implementation of intertextuality in general popular music analysis, there have been several attempts to apply the concepts of text and intertextuality in celebrity studies. There are also articles written specifically on East Asian idols.

*Celebrity Studies.* Richard Schickel effectively sums up his ideas with the title of his 1985 book *Intimate Strangers: The Culture of Celebrity*. He suggests that the history of celebrity in western world is closely related to the development of communication technology. Whereas the new forms of media led to the information explosion in terms of both speed and availability, Schickel observes that it becomes more simple, depending on simple symbols “that crystallize and personify an issue, an ideal, a longing” (28). Schickel states that the celebrity image can be a valuable ideological symbol for constructing meaning in the modern western capitalist system. He explains that “illusion of intimacy” established between the celebrity and the public via celebrity gossip media is the basis of the power of celebrities as cultural symbols and the public’s enchantment to them (4). Schickel does not elaborate much
but does mention television as a possible celebrity media source that dismantles the barricade separating the celebrities from the public by showing the behind-the-scenes life of the celebrities (9-10). With the advance of technology during last three decades, television is not the only media where the audience gets to learn about celebrity. The more media gateways for the audience allows Schickel’s concept of celebrities as intimate strangers to be augmented in this millennium.

Richard Dyer mainly examines film stars but his contributions to celebrity studies are invaluable. “Stardom,” according to Dyer, “is an image of the way stars live. For the most part, this generalized lifestyle is the assumed backdrop for the specific personality of the star and the details and events of her/his life. As it combines the spectacular with the everyday, the special with the ordinary” (Stars 35). Dyer claims that there is no correct image of the celebrity since every element of the star’s image is constructed. While the audiences “cannot make media images mean anything they want to”, they can still choose “from the complexity of the image and meanings and feelings, the variations, inflections and contradictions, that work for them” (Heavenly Bodies 5). Therefore, a celebrity image should be understood in the context where it is presented, also taking account the audience’s previous knowledge on the celebrity. Nevertheless, Dyer also states that most audiences believe what lies underneath the professional façade is genuine. Whereas the audiences initially start with the public or professional persona of the celebrity, they turn to celebrity media in search of authentic aspects of the celebrity. The audiences’ quest of finding meaning within public presentation and celebrity media inspires them to consider what is true and enhance their feelings of intimacy with the celebrity.

Erin Meyers employs Schickel and Dyer’s ideas in his analysis of Britney Spears as a celebrity figure. Meyers suggests that “the audience’s intimacy with the star gives the illusion of knowing the ‘truth’ about what a star is ‘really like’” and “once the celebrity is positioned
as ‘authentic,’ the values and ideologies she symbolizes also become ‘real’ and culturally resonant” (895). He does acknowledge that even the images featured in extratextual celebrity media, which are supposed to present the genuine face of the celebrity, are in themselves “fraught with contradiction” due to their mediated nature. Meyers, however, defies the Frankfurt School view of seeing such images beguiling audiences into yielding to dominant ideologies. He concludes that “it is up to the audience to put together the pieces of Britney Spears’s star persona in a way that is socially meaningful and pleasurable to them” (895).

**Idols.** In her articles written in the mid-2000s, Fabienne Darling-Wolf focuses on Japanese idols, especially male idol groups produced by the Japanese talent agency Johnny & Associates, commonly known as Johnny’s (ジャニーズ, Janīzu). She mentions Richard Schickel’s delineation of celebrities as “intimate strangers” and claims that it fits particularly well in Japanese context, “in which stars are groomed in a highly intertextual media environment to feel particularly close to their audience, yet ordinary” (Virtually 513). She states that the highly, and thus uniquely, intertextual nature of Japanese media ensures ubiquitous presence of SMAP, then popular male idol group, in the popular culture scene. Darling-Wolf claims that “this intertextuality helps blur the distinction between popular cultural texts and between the different roles media celebrities typically play” (SMAP 358-359). She mentions the group’s 2001 concert tour as an example of intertextual reference that would not make sense to outside observers (366).

There are a number of Korean academic papers written on idol and idol fans. Especially, since the late 2000s, more scholars have paid attention to the significance of fandom in idol industry. Some of the works that have been done on the transmedia storytelling aspects and fandom contribution of Korean idol industry include Hoyoung Kim and Taejin Yoon’s article on how the idol system works in Korean pop culture. Kim and Yoon quote Darling-Wolf and make the claim that idols have become media texts in a way (68-69,
own translation). The intertextuality of idols as media product is possible because of the fandom’s activities, especially those expanded along with the new media like Internet (69-75, own translation). The current popular music industry is overflowing with idols and in this environment, idols themselves, not their songs, become the text and the product. Kim and Yoon claims that this transition runs on dipartite structure; one part is institutional or official work of entertainment companies and mass media and the other is unofficial pillar of fandom as both consumer and producer (77, own translation).

Sooah Kim and Sujeong Kim are also scholars who have focused on the Korean idol fandom and their significant position in modern media environment. Sujeong Kim has reviewed the domestic (Korean) research on audience studies that are rooted on Stuart Hall and John Fisk in her 2010 article. She points out the excessive investment of Korean academia on ideology, such as feminism and gender politics, when doing audience studies (37-40, own translation). Sooah Kim focuses on K-pop as an example of cultural consumption via the social media. In her 2014 research, she gives the case of K-pop musician Jaebum Park’s fandom and their use of social media, mainly Twitter. Kim states that this resulted in the expansion of pre-existing fandom and even dismantled the power structure within the fandom (64-72, own translation). She also picks up the fandom’s involvement in transmedia storytelling regarding the artist (79-82, own translation). The two scholars work together in their 2015 article “From Interpretation Paradigm To Performance Paradigm: Tendencies and Issues of Media Fandom”. In this work, Kim and Kim first review the audience studies and post-audience studies in the West or English-speaking world, explaining the contribution and limitations of Henry Jenkins (35-56, own translation). They then move on to give an overview of Korean fandom research by dividing them into three chronological categories: 1) discovery of fandom focusing on the political and resistant nature of fandom (roughly from 1998 to mid-2000s), 2) fandom and its cultural/political nature in relation to
gender dynamics or inner-fandom hierarchy (around the late 2000s), and 3) fandom and its relationship with the entertainment industry (after the late 2000s) (56-68, own translation). In particular, when discussing the latest fandom research in Korea, they quote Kim and Yoon to emphasize on the dual structure of idol industry, where fandom participate in the production and reproduction to sustain the system (65-66, own translation).

Indeed, there are a number of idol and fandom researches conducted in the 2010s that deal with transmedia storytelling strategy and fandom’s contribution in it. In particular, BTS and EXO have appeared multiple times as examples of the group that actively employ this strategy. In 2018, Moonjeong Kim and Myoun Kim analyze albums of six idol groups (BTS, GFRIEND, EXO, B.A.P, SHINEE, and VIXX) and categorize them into three based on their strategies: 1) storytelling through consecutive series (29-31, own translation), 2) storytelling through group plot and character creation (31-32, own translation), and 3) storytelling through organic connection between albums (32-34, own translation). They conclude that these groups share three common elements, simple and universal theme, borrowing from pre-existing literary or film works, and leaving a room for fandom participation, whether it be interpretation or expanded reproduction (34, own translation). Minsun Jo and Eunhye Chung also examine transmedia storytelling tactics in contents of EXO and BTS. They conduct their analysis based on Northrop Frye’s five modes of literature. According to Jo and Chung, EXO adopts Romance mode with idealized heroes of supernatural powers whereas BTS follow Low Mimetic mode where the characters mirror the problematic reality (227-230, 230-233, own translation). Xu does an analysis of how fandom culture is applied in strategic marketing based on transmedia storytelling by using EXO as a case study in 2017. Xu concludes that this kind of marketing is quite effective but fans should function as gatekeepers (59, own translation). In her 2018 thesis, Gyeongwon Min uses a similar approach based on transmedia storytelling to analyze BTS, mainly focusing on music and video as two major factor of the
group’s success. Though her analysis covers broad range of contents that constitute the transmedia storytelling strategy of BTS, Min does not mention much of fandom’s function. She does quote her own Internet news article and briefly mention BTS’s fandom as one of the main factors of the group, but does not delve further in her thesis (111, own translation).

All in all, intertextuality, which first appeared in literary theories, has emphasized the significance of the reader/audience in the decoding of the produced “text”. This inspired the concept of convergence culture and transmedia storytelling in the new media environment. At the same time, the emphasis on the audience led to the modern interest on fandom studies as academic field. These Western-based concepts and theories have influenced Korean academia, where fandom studies have rather been focused on idol and its fandom. Nevertheless, most Western or English-based fandom studies deal with fictional stories whereas Korean fandom studies are strongly inclined towards ideological analysis. Another critique on precedent researches is that almost all works exclude idol members from discussion.

3.4 Methodology: Tripartite Structure of K-Pop Phenomenon

As mentioned in earlier sections, there are a number of preceding researches on K-pop idol and its fandom. Some take into account the potential of idols as media text that can be understood with intertextual analysis (Kim and Yoon; Sujeong Kim and Sooah Kim). There are researches that focus on the fictional transmedia storytelling strategies of idol groups (Jo and Chung; Xu; Min). I would like to propose a model that covers both the fictional and factual aspects of idols as media texts and includes three pillars of idol industry, which are the company, the idol, and the fandom.

The following chapter will be of analysis of K-pop group BTS as text combining what Matt Hills describe as popular texts (fictional) and popular icons (factual). Hills distinguishes the two; the former, such as literary works or television would include texts that
are created and controlled by the copyright and license holders and the latter, such as musicians, actors, athletes, or celebrities, do not fall under strictly managed texts. Even though one tries to maintain the professional or stage persona, fans’ interests are bound to follow the celebrity around (qtd. in Sandvoss 22). Cornel Sandvoss mentions that the popularity of celebrity biographies proves this passion but at the same time, it also hints at the fact that one cannot depend on a definite authorship. When a fan buys a biography of his or her favorite celebrity, the fan does not make that decision based on the author of the book. It is based on the celebrity, the factual fan object that attracts the fan (22). Sandvoss points out that “the hypertextuality of the Internet forces the reader/user into the active construction of the text’s boundaries” (23). He continues:

Fan objects thus form a field of gravity, which may or may not have an urtext in its epicenter, but which in any case corresponds with the fundamental meaning structure through which all these texts are read. The fan text is thus constituted through a multiplicity of textual elements; it is by definition intertextual and formed between and across texts as defined at the point of production. (23)

Sandvoss proposes that in this new mediascape, individual texts are merely part of a broader entanglement of textual occurrences, thus making intertextuality is at the heart of all texts.

While I will borrow from the distinction between popular texts (fictional) and popular icons (factual) by Hills, I propose to see K-pop artists as the combination of both fictional and factual fan objects. Intertextuality in the texts provided in all kinds of forms from music to videos to performances enables this combination when detected by its audience: fans. K-pop idols are known for the strict management and planning by the entertainment companies. As Moonjeong Kim and Myoun Kim observe, K-pop industry is actively employing
storytelling album strategies. The research done by Minsun Jo and Eunhye Chung analyze the transmedia storytelling strategies of EXO and BTS. Both studies conclude that the management companies come up with storytelling strategies and induce active participation of the fandom to go scavenge hunting of the fragmented narrative puzzles. The strict management actually enables the consistent narrative that can sustain throughout the artists’ career. This trait suggests the possibility of understanding K-pop idols as popular texts. On the other hand, being actual living celebrities, idols are also understood as popular icons. Especially, the third generation of K-pop industry is distinguished by their effective use of social media. Artists do not have to rely on the broadcasting companies or conventional media to communicate. Anyone can create a Twitter or an Instagram account. In addition, the competitive market of K-pop idol have led to many entertainment companies to release more behind-the-scenes contents or encourage the idol members to communicate. Therefore, K-pop idol can be understood as popular text or fictional fan object of which the narrative is controlled by the entertainment companies and as popular icon or factual fan object that try to express who they “really” are. The intertextual, fragmented puzzle pieces, whether they are of the company-conceived narrative or of the celebrities, are offered in numerous forms due to K-pop’s extreme hybridity. In this sense, fandom is an indispensable element in the success of K-pop idols. The fandom take in the story cues of this popular text, fills in the gaps, comes up with fan theories explaining the popular text, and completes the narrative. The fandom are always passionate to learn more about their stars, eagerly follow their social media, are willing to do free labors to ring their stars to a higher place, and sometimes even request feedback from the company or the members.

Being one of the most successful K-pop artists ever, BTS is an appropriate example for two reasons: 1) BTS have released numerous contents that show either the fictional storytelling (BU) in relation to their musical works or “more genuine” behind-the-scenes
moments of the members and 2) BTS is a “hip-hop” group that emphasize their authentic lyrics reflecting on themselves and the society surrounding them. To analyze BTS as a combination of company-led popular text and self-expressing popular icon, the next chapter will first provide an analysis of BTS’ fictional narrative contents. The following section will attempt to give a general overview of BTS as factual fan objects. The intertextuality existing in between different mediums, anything from lyrics to videos to comics, will be addressed in the analysis process. Last section will provide the fandom’s participation in this tripartite structure.
CHAPTER IV: DELVING INTO THE “BTS WORLD”

Ladies and gentlemen, how exciting. Folks, my next guest can only be described as an international music phenomenon. They have made TIME magazine's most influential list. They are the first Korean act to reach number one on the Billboard Charts. And they just became the first group since the Beatles to earn three number-one albums in less than a year. (Colbert, “Where”)

This comment quite effectively sums up where BTS stands in global music market today. On May 15th, 2019, BTS made appearance on the Late Night Show With Stephen Colbert. Before hoping up to the talk show stage, they appeared in a comical segment, which featured them in classic Beatlesuits and was filmed in black and white to reenact the very first American television appearance of the Beatles in February of 1964 (see Figure 1). Stephen Colbert, the host of the show, opened up the segment with Ed Sullivan-esque comment, introducing the “new bunch of moptopped heartthrobs” from “across the Pond, the big one with Hawaii in the middle” (Colbert, “BTS”). Then he again introduces the group with the above comment. Often compared to the British Invasion of the 60s, BTS is taking over the world, currently on their Stadium Tour covering both North and South America, Europe, and Asia.
BTS (방탄소년단) is a K-pop idol group consisted of seven members, RM, Jin, Suga, J-hope, Jimin, V, and Jungkook. Three members, RM, Suga, J-hope, are in charge of rapping and four members, Jin, Jimin, V, Jungkook, are vocalists. Managed by BigHit Entertainment, which was far smaller than the “big 3” entertainment companies of Korea (SM, YG, and JYP), nobody could have expected their current success. Now compared to the Beatles, BTS is enjoying an unprecedented global popularity for a K-pop act. The group’s Korean name, 방탄소년단, is translated into the Bulletproof Boy Scouts, which led to the English acronym BTS. The name originally meant that the group is the speaker of the young generation,
protecting the youth from prejudice and oppression against them. Accordingly, their songs tell stories of what young generation (including themselves) go through and what they feel and think. Ever since their debut in 2013, BTS have come a long way “from nobodies to legends”, as certain fan-made YouTube video title suggests (“BTS // FROM NOBODIES TO LEGENDS 2013”, “BTS // FROM NOBODIES TO LEGENDS 2”). As media celebrities, the seven members function as celebrities, popular icon or factual fan objects as Matt Hills explains, and at the same time, participate in the fictional storyline of their discography and related videos that form popular texts or fictional fan objects. This chapter will explore the compositive nature of BTS as combination of fictional and factual fan objects. Proposing that core theme that put both aspects together is “seven boys who go through growing pain but overcome difficulties and try to find dream, happiness, and love together”, this chapter will analyze the fictional aspects of BU, or BTS Universe and factual aspects of BTS as celebrities based on the tripartite structure of K-pop idol industry.

Figure 2. Concept photo for BTS’ latest album MAP OF THE SOUL: Persona showing the members, From the far left, V, Suga, Jin, Jungkook, RM, Jimin, and J-hope,
4.1 Available Contents

There are countless “official” contents that are related to BTS. Fans even make content guides to help “newbies” get used to the massive contents and get immersed in the BTS universe with less confusion. Before going into detailed analysis, here are a few tables of BTS contents that are spread all over different media and format.

**Albums/Digital Release**

Usually BTS release “official” Korean albums twice a year, whether it be a mini album or a full-length one. These are sold in physical form, mostly a CD with a booklet featuring lyrics, thank you messages of the members, and “concept photos” that follow the general theme and atmosphere of the songs. For the Love Yourself series, the package included a small leaflet that had bits of fictional story of BU written on it. Occasionally, the group release Japanese albums which mostly contain translated versions of Korean release with a couple of additional Japan original songs. Digital singles are mostly collaborated effort of an individual member and other artists. For example, BTS released a remake of Seo Taiji and Boys’ 1995 hit song “Come Back Home” as a digital single in 2017 and RM featured in HONNE’s single “Crying Over You” in March 2019. Table 2 gives an overview of the group’s physical albums and four mixtapes done by the rappers. The Korean album series are written in the top row in italic and bold for easier recognition. The album titles are written in bold and are followed by the title track in the parenthesis, release date, and total sales number.

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Note that the categorization of the series typed in bold are not entirely official. Some are based on the company’s press release and others are based on my subjective decision. “Single” refers to single release, “Mini” stands for “mini album” (similar to EP, album that contains less tracks, often around 5~7 tracks), “Full” refers to full-length album, and “Re” means repackage album (usually contains similar track list with the previous full-length album with a couple of new original tracks). For more information on K-pop release formats, refer to *Globalization and Popular Music in South Korea* written by Michael Fuhr (86-88) or an article posted on Korea Creative Content Agency homepage ([https://koreancontent.kr/619](https://koreancontent.kr/619)). The sales amount is based on Gaon Chart data of May 31st, 2019 ([http://www.gaonchart.co.kr/](http://www.gaonchart.co.kr/)).
in the parenthesis. HYYH is the initial of the Korean pronunciation of Chinese characters 花樣年華 (화양연화, Hwayangyeonhwa), which is translated into “the most beautiful moment in life”, and this acronym will be repeatedly used in the later parts to replace the phrase “The Most Beautiful Moment In Life”.

Table 2

BTS Albums: Korean and Japanese Physical Album Release and Four Mixtapes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KOREAN RELEASE</th>
<th>MAP OF THE SOUL: PERSONA (작은 것들을 위한 시 Boy With Lov)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>School Trilogy</strong></td>
<td><strong>DARK &amp; WILD</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>O! RUL8, 2?</strong></td>
<td>2 COOL 4 SKOOL (Danger)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Skool Luv Affair</strong></td>
<td><strong>Skool Luv Affair Special Addition</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Table 2**

BTS Albums: Korean and Japanese Physical Album Release and Four Mixtapes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Trilogy</th>
<th>DARK &amp; WILD (Danger)</th>
<th>The Most Beautiful Moment In Life (HYYH)</th>
<th>WINGS</th>
<th>LOVE YOURSELF</th>
<th>MAP OF THE SOUL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>O! RUL8, 2?</strong></td>
<td>2 COOL 4 SKOOL (Danger)</td>
<td>HYYH Pt.2 (RUN) 4th Mini 2015.11.30. (565,828)</td>
<td>YOU NEVER WALK ALONE (봄날 Spring Day) Re 2017.2.13. (935,062)</td>
<td>LOVE YOURSELF 轉 ‘Tear’ (FAKE LOVE) 3rd Full 2018.5.18. (1,960,652)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Skool Luv Affair</strong></td>
<td><strong>Skool Luv Affair Special Addition</strong></td>
<td>HYYH Young Forever (불타오르네 FIRE) Re 2016.5.2. (645,154)</td>
<td>LOVE YOURSELF 結 ‘Answer’ (IDOL) Re 2018.8.24. (2,342,703)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Love) Re</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014.05.14.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### JAPANESE RELEASE

| NO MORE DREAM | BOY IN LUV | DANGER | WAKE UP | FOR YOU | I NEED U | RUN |


### MIXTAPE

| RM (by RM) | Agust D (by Suga) | Hope World (by J-hope) | mono. (by RM) |
| 2015.3.20. | 2016.08.16. | 2018.3.2. | 2018.10.23. |

Source: Rearranged the information from “DISCOGRAPHY.” BTS, [https://bts.ibighit.com/en](https://bts.ibighit.com/en)g/discography/index.php

### YouTube

YouTube is surely a space and a tool that K-pop has benefited of. BTS is no exception; rather, it would be more accurate to say that the group is among those who have utilized this platform the most effectively. BTS have used YouTube quite extensively ever since their debut. Perhaps this was the outcome of desperate struggle to survive in the super-competitive K-pop market as group that was built by a small entertainment company. Nevertheless, the countless videos that have been uploaded and continue to be uploaded to the group’s channel are definitely helping their global popularity. The entertainment company that manages BTS, BigHit Entertainment, uploads official music videos and videos with fictional storyline that is
related to the music videos on their ibighit channel. Another official channel, BANGTANTV, is used for videos that show more natural sides of BTS, with behind-the-scenes episodes and videos taken by the members themselves. As of June 10th, 2019, ibighit channel has 318 videos (including videos for the company’s artists other than BTS), 26,528,286 subscribers, and 6,054,775,174 view counts. BANGTANTV channel has 991 uploads, 19,400,335 subscribers, and 2,519,097,029 view counts in total.

The official music videos used to be uploaded to two different channels: one is the entertainment company BigHit’s official channel ibighit and the other is 1theK, based on Kakao M. Kakao M is one of the largest music entertainment company that operates as a record label, talent agency, production company, event/concert management, and music publishing company. Many small entertainment companies upload official music video both on their companies’ channels and 1theK channel due to the sheer number of 1theK channel subscribers is much larger. BTS music videos were also initially uploaded to both channels, but since the group’s global popularity stood out in 2016, music videos that were released after May 2016 were only uploaded to ibighit. It is notable that the videos that contribute to the fictional storyline told across various mediums are marked with “BU”, which is considered to stand for BTS Universe, in the explanation section. The following tables provide general overview of BTS’s video contents on YouTube. Table 3 divides the video contents into two categories, BU videos and the ones without BU mark. Table 4 is a summary of the main behind-the-scenes contents uploaded to BANGTANTV channel but does not contain each and every video or playlist.

**Table 3**

*Music Videos and Short Videos Related to BU Available on ibighit Channel*

---

13 https://www.youtube.com/user/ibighit
14 https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCLkAepWjdyImXSLtofFvsYQ
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Upload Date</th>
<th>BU Video Contents</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013.6.11.</td>
<td>No More Dream</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013.7.16.</td>
<td>We Are Bulletproof Pt.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013.9.11.</td>
<td>N.O</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014.2.12.</td>
<td>Boy In Love (상남자)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014.4.7.</td>
<td>One Day (하루만)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014.8.20.</td>
<td>Danger</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014.10.22.</td>
<td>Hormone War (호르몬 전쟁)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015.4.29.</td>
<td>I NEED U</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015.5.10.</td>
<td>I NEED U (Original ver.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015.6.24.</td>
<td>Dope (쩔어)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015.10.01.</td>
<td>HYYH on stage: prologue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015.11.29.</td>
<td>RUN</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015.12.01.</td>
<td>I NEED U (Japanese ver.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016.3.11.</td>
<td>RUN (Japanese ver.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016.4.19.</td>
<td>EPILOGUE: Young Forever</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016.5.01.</td>
<td>FIRE (불타오르네)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016.5.15.</td>
<td>Save Me</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016.9.04.</td>
<td>WINGS Short Film</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016.9.05.</td>
<td>#1 Begin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016.9.07.</td>
<td>#2 LIE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016.9.08.</td>
<td>#3 STIGMA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016.9.09.</td>
<td>#4 FIRST LOVE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016.9.10.</td>
<td>#5 REFLECTION</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016.9.13.</td>
<td>#6 MAMA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016.9.13.</td>
<td>#7 AWAKE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016.9.25.</td>
<td>Boy Meets Evil</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016.10.09.</td>
<td>Blood Sweat &amp; Tears (피 땀 눈물)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017.2.12.</td>
<td>Spring Day (봄날)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017.2.19.</td>
<td>Not Today</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017.5.09.</td>
<td>Blood Sweat &amp; Tears (Japanese ver.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017.8.18.</td>
<td>Love Yourself Highlight Reel ‘起承轉結’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017.9.04.</td>
<td>LOVE YOURSELF 承 Her ‘Serendipity’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017.9.18.</td>
<td>DNA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017.11.24.</td>
<td>MIC Drop (Remix)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017.12.06.</td>
<td>MIC Drop (Japanese ver.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018.4.05.</td>
<td>Euphoria: Theme of LOVE YOURSELF 起 Wonder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018.5.06.</td>
<td>LOVE YOURSELF 轉 Tear ‘Singularity’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018.5.18.</td>
<td>FAKE LOVE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Release</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018.6.01</td>
<td>FAKE LOVE extended ver.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018.8.10</td>
<td>Love Yourself 結 Answer 'Epiphany' Comeback Trailer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018.8.24</td>
<td>IDOL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018.9.06</td>
<td>IDOL (Feat. Nicki Minaj)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019.3.28</td>
<td>Map of The Soul : PERSONA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019.4.12</td>
<td>Boy With Love (작은 것들을 위한 시)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Rearranged information from ibighit channel, *YouTube*, [https://www.youtube.com/user/ibighit](https://www.youtube.com/user/ibighit)

Table 4

**Behind-the-scenes Contents Available on BANGTANTV Channel**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BANGTAN BOMB</td>
<td>Relatively short videos (around 5 minutes) of behind-the-scenes sets or music shows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTS Episode</td>
<td>Relatively long videos (from 10 minutes to 30 minutes) of behind-the-scenes of MV filming, Concept Photo shooting, birthday, and award shows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTS Practice Video</td>
<td>Choreography practice videos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTS on Air</td>
<td>Music show videos and commercials that were uploaded on broadcasting companies’ channels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BANGTAN LOG</td>
<td>Self-taken video diaries or logs that record personal thoughts and feelings of the members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Jin] EAT JIN</td>
<td>Eating segments by Jin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTS Shout-out</td>
<td>Short videos for season’s greetings or cheering students facing national college entrance exams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BANGTAN TASTE</td>
<td>Review videos of early albums and producing machines by Suga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golden Closet Film by JK</td>
<td>Jungkook’s self-recorded and self-edited videos featuring BTS members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTS 꿈 FM 06.13</td>
<td>Video released annually on June 13th, celebrating BTS’ debut day featuring BTS members reflecting their past year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burn The Stage (paid content)</td>
<td>Eight episodes of documentary that portrays the 300 days of concert tour journey in 2017, Includes snippets of stage performances, below-stage preparations, and individual interviews</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Rearranged information from BANGTANTV channel, *YouTube*, [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCLkAepWjdyImXSlt0FvsYQ](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCLkAepWjdyImXSlt0FvsYQ)
Launched in August 2015, V Live is a live video streaming service owned by Naver (the biggest web portal service in South Korea). BTS was one of a few groups that utilized V Live from the very beginning of its service. On BTS V Live channel, there are personal and casual live streaming videos taken by the members and also well-structured variety shows that feature BTS members but were planned and filmed by a production team (see Table 5). As of June 10th, 2019, the group’s channel has 678 videos, is followed by 14,441,309 followers, and has over two billion view counts in total.

Table 5

Group Variety Shows, Personal Lives, and Paid Contents Available on V Live BTS Channel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Free Variety Shows (planned and produced by the company)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTS “Bokbulbok” (Lucky Draw)</td>
<td>Short videos of the members playing random games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTS GAYO (15 episodes)</td>
<td>Variety show format with music theme: various quizzes on BTS songs or famous K-pop songs, quizzes on well-known K-pop choreography, and creating music videos by themselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RUN BTS! (75 episodes)</td>
<td>Variety show format evolved from early days of BTS “Bokbulbok”, the members doing just about anything: cooking food, playing online games, riding roller coasters, solving riddles, doing skits, dressing each other, and many more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Album Preview Show</td>
<td>Usually done about an hour before the official release of new music tracks on streaming services, feature short introduction on the album and mini games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Contents (done by the members)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual/Group Contents</td>
<td>RM “1 Minute English” (RM teaching Jungkook English), Album Behind (RM explaining process of producing the album), Eat Jin Live (eating segments by Jin), 95z “Mandakko” (Jimin &amp; V introducing Gyeongsang province dialects), “Hwagaejangteo” (화개장터, Suga &amp; J-hope doing comical segments), Hope on the Street (J-hope showing his dancing ability)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual/Group Live Streaming</td>
<td>Casual personal live streaming done by individual member or several members together, usually done during the group’s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

https://channels.vlive.tv/FE619/video
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>concert tour season</th>
<th>Paid Contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bon Voyage</strong></td>
<td>A travel reality show featuring BTS in foreign countries that has three seasons: Season 1 (Northern Europe), Season 2 (Hawaii), Season 3 (Malta)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paid Streaming of Stage Performance</strong></td>
<td>Paid streaming of concerts or fan meetings: 2017 THE WINGS TOUR THE FINAL, 2018 Prom Party, 2019 SPEAK YOURSELF in Wembley Stadium</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Rearranged information from “BTS”, V Live, [https://channels.vlive.tv/FE619/video](https://channels.vlive.tv/FE619/video)

**Social Media**

*Twitter*: BigHit Entertainment has two twitter accounts: @BigHitEnt (used for major announcements, broadcasting schedules, major press release links) and @bts_bighit (used for YouTube/Facebook upload notices, group photo taken after every official schedule, notification on new release or events). The members run a shared group account, @BTS_twt, where all seven members post personal messages, upload photos and videos, recommend songs, and celebrate the members’ birthdays. This account was created in July 14th, 2011, even before the group’s official debut. Now it has 11,791 tweets and is followed by 20,363,318.18 There are two other accounts that were used for transmedia storytelling. The account @Smeraldo_Books was officially run by the company to promote the online comic series and book publications (HYYH The Notes 1) based on BU storyline. The account @FlowerSmeraldo does not explicitly reveal that it is run by the company, but it can be inferred that the company twitted links that led to a blog telling stories of a non-existing flower called Smeraldo, which constantly appear in video contents related to BU storyline.

*Blog*:19 The group had posted on the blog even before their debut. Although it is not used as much as the early days, the blog feature practice videos, non-commercial song covers or mixtape, cooking or eating segments, video logs recording personal thoughts, and personal posts.

*Facebook/Instagram*: Facebook and Instagram account are both run by the company and mainly used for high resolution pictures of concerts, behind-the-scenes, concept photos,

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19 [https://bangtan.tistory.com/](https://bangtan.tistory.com/)
and birthday celebrating posts.

Armypedia[^20]. Named after the BTS fandom ARMY and Wikipedia, this online archive project was run from February 22\textsuperscript{nd} to March 24\textsuperscript{th} in 2019. The company planted QR codes on the Internet and in real-life locations, which gave access to specific days on the archive page when scanned. Anyone could log in and leave record about what happened regarding BTS on the opened dates from BTS’ debut date June 13\textsuperscript{th} 2013 to February 21\textsuperscript{st} 2019. Currently the uploading function is out of service but it is possible to access the posts.

SoundCloud[^21]. SoundCloud is an online audio distribution platform. Here, BTS upload non-commercial tracks, which are often individual works including cover tracks of other singers, songs written by the members, and rappers’ mixtapes.

Official Fan Café[^22]. Based on the Korean web portal service Daum, many fans join an official fan café, or a community, managed by BigHit Entertainment. The company posts official notifications and upload pictures and videos. The members sometimes write posts or comment to fans’ posts. Fans can also write posts and comments. The number of members is 1,446,447 (June 10\textsuperscript{th} 2019). One has to pass a weekly quiz and submit an image proof of streaming BTS songs to be a regular member. Regular members can access to fan-café-only pictures and read messages written by BTS members that are relatively more lengthy and intimate than their twitter posts. Every year, a paid-membership is offered for exclusive contents.

Books

BTS Wings Concept Book. Published and sold in June 2017, this 312-page hardcover is a size of a wedding album that is filled with full color photographs. It provides a sneak peek of the production process, founding ideas, and motifs of WINGS album, its tracks,

[^20]: https://www.armypedia.net/
[^21]: https://soundcloud.com/bangtan
[^22]: cafe.daum.net/BANGTAN
related videos, and stage costumes and design. It also contains interview of each member of BTS.

花樣年華 (HYYH) The Notes 1. During the release of Love Yourself album series, there was a piece of paper containing bits of fictional storyline in each album package with the title “HYYH The Notes”. The notes were not identical, meaning that each package contained random notes that were formatted as the members’ or the BU characters’ diaries excerpts. Then the company published 花樣年華 (HYYH) The Notes 1 that had a compilation of these diary entries.

Related books. It is notable that BigHit Entertainment listed Demian by Hermann Hesse, The Art of Loving by Erich Fromm, and Jung’s Map of the Soul by Murray Stein on the official online merchandise page. These are books that are mentioned in various interviews to have provided inspiration for BTS and their discography.

Other Contents

Webtoon. From January 17th 2019 to April 11th 2019, a series of online comics, or often called “webtoon” in Korea, were released on the Korean web portal service Naver. BigHit Entertainment is credited for the plot. This webtoon series share repeated images and events scattered in various videos, album booklets, twitter posts, BTS WINGS CONCEPT BOOK, and 花樣年華 (HYYH) The Notes 1. It offered a relatively straightforward explanation for fans who have collected bits and pieces from various contents.

BTS Festa. To celebrate BTS’ debut day June 13th, from the beginning of June toward the 13th, everyday there is a special content uploaded for fans on YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, SoundCloud, blog, and official fan café. The contents include compilation of photographs from the past one year activities, interviews or profiles written by BTS members, video of the
members talking about their past year, choreography videos, non-commercial tracks, and a special small scale fan meeting performance.

**DVDs & Blu-rays.** Various kinds of DVDs and Blu-ray discs are available. There are ones containing concert or fan meeting stage performances with behind-the-scenes videos and photobook; “Season’s Greetings” series are sold at the beginning of each year containing photobook, journals, calendars, and a DVD of photo shooting; “Summer Package” series feature photo shooting in foreign countries with summer atmosphere; “Memories” series are released each year with massive video contents of the past year.

**Character & IP business.** In 2014, seven “Hip Hop Monster” characters based on each member were created to be made into stuffed dolls or featured in comics. There was a webtoon series titled “We On” released from August 2014 to April 2015, showing an American cartoon style characters with supernatural powers who were also based on BTS members. In 2017, LINE, an instant communication application launched by Naver Japan, announced that they were launching LINE FRINEDS CREATORS and BTS was their first partner to create characters based on the ideas of artists. The resulting BT21 initially consisted of eight characters and continues to expand with additional characters based on those eight, such as their families, friends, and antagonizing characters. The designing process was recorded and released on YouTube.\(^{23}\)

**SuperStar BTS & BTS World.** SuperStar BTS is a mobile rhythm game developed by Dalcomsoft and became available in South Korea on January 18\(^{th}\), 2018. Later the game became available in Indonesia, United States, South America, and Surinam. Japanese version was launched on May 22\(^{nd}\), 2018. BTS World is a cinematic mobile game developed by Netmarble Games and is expected to be released on June 26\(^{th}\), 2019. The game will feature BTS members and players will be the manager of the members to become global superstar.

\(^{23}\) [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCINr5W7cwW06ADtsszAToAw](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCINr5W7cwW06ADtsszAToAw)
4.2 Popular Text/Fictional Object: BTS Universe

It is not an uncommon to see a single music video that has its storyline. However, it is not quite usual to see the storyline continues throughout series of years in the singer’s career. BTS is known for referencing literary works that fit their musical direction and also continuing elaborate fictional storyline via their countless contents. BTS as this popular text or fictional fan object is largely maintained by the elaborate planning and execution of their management company, BigHit Entertainment. In 2016, the company actually posted a job opening for “storytelling writer” position. One of the requirements was to write an essay on one of following four topics: 1) A recent political issue and the applicant’s opinion on it, 2) Activities on the Internet community sites (including café, blog, social medial, etc.) or club, 3) Experience as a “mania”, and 4) Analysis essay on BTS HYYH series based on humanities/social science/aesthetics (Hayeon Kim, “BigHit”). It is a general consensus in BTS fandom that it is the release of The Most Beautiful Moment In Life or HYYH series, marked by the May 2015 music video for “I NEED U,” that started the full-fledged storytelling. This guess is supported by the fact that BU marks appear at the explanation section of music videos that were released only after I NEED U (see Table 3). First appeared at the backside of BTS WINGS CONCEPT BOOK, the word BU was slipped into the contents of BTS (see Figure 1). It has not been confirmed, but most fans believe this acronym stands for BTS Universe. Considering the massive contents that contribute to the “world building”, the word universe does not seem like an exaggeration. Over the past couple of years, BTS have constructed a kind of a parallel world filled with fictional characters that are inspired by and acted by the members themselves. Not all music videos are directly related to this fictional storyline of BU. The music video of “FIRE”, for example, is not marked with BU, whereas the short description of the music video for “Blood Sweat & Tears” includes “BU
content certified by BigHit Entertainment”. Nevertheless, music videos are only a part of BU contents. The BU characters’ story is offered in multiple forms, fractured in pieces or scenes. The story was connected and continued in albums, music videos, short films, album booklets, books, comics, and even logo designs. This section will attempt to analyze this scattered storyline. Since the fictional characters in BU follow the birth name of each BTS member they are based on, the names of BU characters will be written in italic to differentiate them from real people.

Figure 3. BigHit Entertainment logo and BU logo at the backside of BTS WINGS CONCEPT BOOK, BigHit Entertainment, 2017.

Used Mediums

Videos. Video contents are uploaded to ibighit channel, BTS Japan Official channel, and Universal Music Japan channel. Music videos and short films that are tagged with BU are “I NEED U”, “RUN”, “HYYH on stage: prologue”, “I NEED (Japanese Ver.)”, “RUN (Japanese Ver.)”, “EPILOGUE : Young Forever”, “WINGS Short Film (#1 BEGIN, #2 LIE, #3 STIGMA, #4 FIRST LOVE, #5 REFLECTION, #6 MAMA, #7 AWAKE)”, “Blood Sweat & Tears”, “Blood Sweat & Tears (Japanese Ver.)”, “LOVE YOURSELF Highlight Reel (‘起’, ‘承’, ‘轉’, ‘起承轉結’)”, “Euphoria : Theme of LOVE YOURSELF ‘起’ Wonder”, and “FAKE LOVE”.

Books & booklets. BTS WINGS CONCEPT BOOK published in 2017 was quite
obscure in showing the actual events of BU storyline. It was more of an overview of the process of cultivating the album concept based on Hermann Hesse’s *Demian*. Nevertheless, it did hint at some character settings of BU. In a photograph of idea notes used for WINGS Short Film production, it is revealed that *Yoongi* WINGS album was followed by the Love Yourself series that was consisted of three albums: LOVE YOURSELF 承 ‘Her’, LOVE YOURSELF 轉 ‘Tear’, and LOVE YOURSELF 結 ‘Answer’. Each album package had disparate four versions that contained different concept photos and different “HYYH The Notes” (versions L, O, V, E / versions Y, O, U, R / versions S, E, L, F). These album booklets or HYYH The Notes contained story puzzles that were expressed in the form of journal entries written by the seven main characters, *Seokjin*, *Namjoon*, *Yoongi*, *Hoseok*, *Jimin*, *Taehyung*, and *Jungkook*. 花樣年華 (HYYH) The Notes 1, another publication that came out in March 2019, was similar to a compilation of these entries.

*Twitter.* As explained in the first section of this chapter, the account @Smeraldo_Books was used to promote the webtoon and publications (HYYH The Notes 1) based on BU storyline. This account has an official certification mark that confirms that it is run by the company. On the other hand, the account @FlowerSmeraldo lacks this confirmation. Nonetheless, the tweets posted on this account display links that lead to blog posts on a flower called Smeraldo, a fictional flower that continue to pop up in BU video contents.

*Webtoon.* BigHit Entertainment brought the BU plot into comics form in 2019 under the title HYYH Pt.0 <SAVE ME>. From January 17th 2019 to April 11th 2019, the online comics series or webtoon was posted on Naver. Composed of fifteen episodes, the webtoon express the story that is scattered throughout other mediums, such as videos, album booklets, twitter posts, BTS WINGS CONCEPT BOOK, and 花樣年華 (HYYH) The Notes 1.
Summary of BU Storyline & Characters

The theme that Acknowledging that there is not a set “original story” written in text and that BTS are continuing to release new albums and contents, here is a sum-up of BU storyline revealed through various sources, especially the recent webtoon series.

BU Storyline. Seven boys, Seokjin, Namjoon, Yoongi, Hoseok, Jimin, Taehyung, and Jungkook, meet at a high school, where they share good times together. Despite being short-lived, the shared precious moment help them to break away from their painful situation. The
year they are together at school is marked as Year 19 (which is believed to be equal to 2013 in real time). Nevertheless, their fates are intertwined through not only the good times but also the tough times. As they go separate ways and drift away from one another, harsh reality and briefly avoided wounds come after the boys. When Seokjin comes back to Korea after two years of living abroad, he sees Jungkook in front of the high school and passes by Namjoon who is working at a gas station. This day is marked as April 11th, Year 21 (which is believed to be equal to 2015 in real time). However, he does not talk to them out of guilty conscience that he abandoned others. After about a month, on May 22nd, Seokjin dreams of the other six drowning in water and finds out that Namjoon is under custody for not paying settlement money after getting into a fight on the night Seokjin passed by him. When Seokjin finally goes to see Namjoon in the prison, he tells Seokjin tragic news that Jungkook and Yoongi have died, that Hoseok has been hospitalized, and that he has lost contact with Taehyung and Jimin. After the conversation, as Seokjin comes out of the prison, he runs into Taehyung, who is then arrested for killing his abusive father. Seokjin goes to the beach where the seven visited together by himself. There, he encounters a supernatural being, portrayed as a dog-like creature in the webtoon, who suggests him that it can endow him with power to go back in time and relive a certain time loop. While Seokjin thinks he is dreaming, he actually goes back to April 11th, not knowing what exactly happens. Seokjin continues to relive April 11th, the day when Jungkook jumps off of a building and Yoongi sets fire to his motel room. He goes through a number of unsuccessful attempts to save them, because others’ behaviors change and they end up in different situation or location as Seokjin makes different decisions. One time he manages to save Namjoon, Jungkook, and Yoongi on the fateful day of April 11th, but is reproached by Yoongi, who is in despair, that he was brought back to living hell. A month passes by without much progress and Taehyung visits Namjoon in his trailer home after being chased by the police for drawing graffiti. That night Taehyung dreams of Jimin
drowning. Meanwhile, *Jimin* has been forcefully hospitalized by his parents for having seizures. He accidentally meets *Hoseok* who is hospitalized for narcolepsy. *Taehyung* and *Namjoon* visit *Hoseok* and the group reunites at the hospital. Nonetheless, the reunion is short-lived. *Hoseok* falls from the stairs when he tries to follow a woman who resembles his mother, who abandoned him as a child. Seeing *Hoseok* in pain, *Seokjin* goes back to April 11th again. This time, *Seokjin* saves *Hoseok* first when he tumbles on the bridge due to his narcolepsy. Again, he saves *Yoongi* from a burning room and brings him to a hospital. Frustrated, *Seokjin* does not even try to come up with a rational explanation for his weird behaviors and this leaves *Hoseok* and *Namjoon* confused. While chasing *Seokjin* at the hospital, *Hoseok* manages to not fall from the stairs thanks to *Jimin*. *Jimin* confesses that he wants to escape from the hospital and *Seokjin* tries to stop others from helping him, believing that too much outer interference will lead to fail. *Jimin* insists to go out and *Seokjin* ends up helping him. However, time goes back again with *Jimin* jumping out of *Seokjin*’s car when the car heads to the arboretum that is deeply related to his trauma. *Seokjin* fails to save everyone in the following loop when *Taehyung* stabs his abusive father to save his sister. Another time loop begins from April 11th and *Seokjin* is determined to save everyone this time. After saving others, he picks up *Taehyung* from the police station on May 20th. *Taehyung* then confesses about his dreams, where he sees the repeated tragedies happening to all of his friends in the past time loops. After this conversation, *Taehyung* gets off *Seokjin*’s car and runs toward his home. *Seokjin* has a ominous premonition and tries to stop *Taehyung* from killing his father. *Seokjin* is stabbed by *Taehyung* and wonders whether he has managed to save his friends before his death. *Taehyung* screams in despair and time goes back. Again, *Seokjin* wakes up alone in his room. The webtoon is finished with *Seokjin* who thinks that he cannot do anything by himself no matter how many times he goes back in time and decides to cooperate with his friends.
When the music video for “I NEED U”, the apparent starting point of BU, first came out in May 2015, it did not reveal all of this information. This was a puzzling video. The lyrics of “I NEED U” sounds like a typical K-pop song, lamenting over broken heart wounded by a heartless love interest. For example, the chorus goes like this: “I need you girl / Why am I in love alone, why am I suffering alone / I need you girl / Why do I keep needing you when I know I’ll get hurt all over again” (“I NEED U”). The video showed seven boys sharing joyful moments when they are together but suffer from individual pains when separated. It does show several scenes that made sense as BU expanded over time. For instance, in the music video for “I NEED U”, Seokjin is oddly aloof from reality when he is alone and is associated with flower imagery throughout the video. Namjoon endures poverty and works at a gas station. Yoongi sets fire to his motel room. Hoseok takes pills and is seen tumbling to the ground out of blue. Taehyung stabs his father when he attempts to hit his sister. Jimin is constantly struggling in a bath tub and almost drowns himself in the water. Finally, Jungkook wonders around out on the street at night. When the closely related videos, “HYYH on stage : prologue” and “RUN” was released in October and November same year, fans came up with numerous “fan theories” on what actually happened in this fictional world. One such theory was that Seokjin was the sole survivor among a group of childhood friends. Another suggested that Seokjin was a supernatural being observing others. Some claimed that all of the events were happening inside dream, and others proposed that Seokjin was a person and other six characters were personified personalities inside him. When a wormhole image appeared in the music video of “Blood Sweat & Tears (Japanese Ver.)”, however, the time loop theory gained strength. As more fractured scenes and cues were given, fans came up with the idea that Seokjin is either traveling through time or traveling across different parallel universes (“BTS STORYLINE”; “[Mini Theory]”). The theory gained support when “LOVE YOURSELF Highlight Reel ‘起承轉結’” video was released in August 2017. The video
displays date stamp at the bottom. In this video, Seokjin wears a suit, tries to hand over Smeraldo flower to a woman, and then sees her getting hit by a car on August 30th. However, he is again seen with date stamp August 30th, but wearing a casual clothes. In addition, a flower vase next to him stumbles in both scenes, and Seokjin catches it beforehand for the second time. It seems unlikely that a year has passed in between the two scenes. Thus, it is generally agreed that these scenes are proof that BU story is based on time loop Seokjin is going through. The repeated images and keywords in slightly disparate context have given hints to fans who gathered all pieces and came up with their own big picture of what is happening to the seven characters in BU (see Table 6).

Table 6

BU Characters and The Repeated Motifs & Imageries of Each Character

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characters (Members)</th>
<th>Repeated Motifs &amp; Imageries</th>
<th>Character Backstory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Seokjin</strong> (Jin)</td>
<td>Betraying friends, death of a loved one; Flower (Smeraldo), butterfly, camera/camcorder</td>
<td>Forced by his father and the principal to spy on other students; Witnesses the sufferings of his friends; Appears to repeat certain period of time loop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yoongi</strong> (Suga)</td>
<td>Death of a loved one, self-harming and suicide; Fire, piano, guitar, lollipop</td>
<td>Lost his mother in a domestic fire; Having a feud with his authoritative father who despises his passion for music; Was expelled from school trying to cover Jungkook from a teacher’s violence; Tries to commit a suicide by setting a fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Namjoon</strong> (RM)</td>
<td>Poverty; Alcohol, “살아남아야 한다” (You need to survive)”, hair elastic</td>
<td>Struggles to live through poverty; Works at a gas station to support himself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hoseok</strong> (J-hope)</td>
<td>Abandoned child, narcolepsy; Pills, chocolate bar, cake</td>
<td>Was abandoned by his mother as a young child; Suffers from narcolepsy and often takes pills knowing that it will not work on him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jimin</strong> (Jimin)</td>
<td>Posttraumatic Stress Disorder; Water, Pulkkot Arboretum, hospital</td>
<td>Suffers from a traumatic memory of childhood; Forced to be hospitalized by his parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Taehyung</strong> (V)</td>
<td>Domestic violence, stabbing his father; Diving into water, graffiti</td>
<td>Struggles with abusive father who commit violence to him and his sister when drunk; Gets chased by the police because of his graffiti</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Jungkook**  
| (Jungkook) | Accidental death (or suicide?) by falling from a tall building; Drawing/canvas/sketchbook | Ignored and abused by his birthmother, step father, and step brother; Gets beaten up wondering the streets at nights |

| **Characters**  
| (Members) | **Images in the Webtoon & Videos** |

| *Seokjin*  
| (Jin) | |

| *Yoongi*  
| (Suga) | |

| *Namjoon*  
<p>| (RM) | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Hoseok</strong> (J-hope)</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Image" /></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Jimin</strong> (Jimin)</th>
<th></th>
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<td></td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Image" /></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Taehyung</strong> (V)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Image" /></td>
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</table>
4.3 Popular Icon/Factual Object: BTS as Celebrities and as Individuals

To analyze BTS as factual fan object or popular icon, music is still a significant element. The fact that the group have debuted as “hip-hop idol” especially makes their songs and the lyrics even more relevant in analyzing BTS as popular icon and factual fan object. Hip-hop is a musical genre that stresses the “authenticity” through self-confession in the self-written lyrics.

Stylistic Intertextuality

*Hip-hop and authenticity.* Authenticity in popular music has emphasized the ethical and political value. Authenticity in western popular music was often linked with the political
activism of the 1960s to differentiate rock from pop music. As opposed to the commercial pop, rock music was, or established itself to be, against the mainstream, independent, creative and artistic. Folk music and blues are generally considered as “more authentic”, having its roots in regional community. Nonetheless, in the 1970s, funk rock criticized “mainstream” rock as artificial and commercial. After 1980s, authenticity was granted to pop and dance music, which were previously condemned for their commercial nature unlike rock (Suwan Lee, 121). Despite the critique that this concept of authenticity and judgment based on it are all myth, some scholars deny Adorno-like view. Jeong quotes Roy Shuker’s claim that popular music reflects intricate interrelationship among companies’ profits, producers’ intention, and the listeners’ perception and usage of musical text (8). The public, being aware that a certain musical piece is created with commercial intention, are still able to encounter direct and intense emotional experience, rediscover their identities, and feel joy. Jeong concludes that authenticity in popular music can be understood in two prospects: the originality and sincerity of the work/creator and the extent to which the said work/creator form an organic relationship with the community (8-9).

Almost always, K-pop idols do not limit themselves to one specific musical genre. Usually based on dance music, K-pop takes versatile forms; the group may take different total look and change their musical style accordingly, composers or producers may experiment with mixture of genres, or they simply follow the latest trend. It is true that BTS also have hundreds of tracks and they do not fall under single category. Nevertheless, BTS have asserted the group’s identity as “hip-hop idol” from their very debut in 2013 or even before that. Music critic Youngdae Kim points out that “the word 'hip-hop idol’ is an oxymoron” considering musical history. Originated from the urban ghettos of America in the 1970s, hip-hop has explicitly asserts the racial identity of black music and “obsesses over the authenticity of messages” (52). Surely, there has been the aforementioned scholarly dispute
on whether a certain musical genre or a certain artist was more “authentic” than its counterpart. Nevertheless, the general perception of the musicians and listeners of hip-hop was that it should be genuine or authentic. On the contrary, idol music has stood as the antipode of hip-hop. Originating from vocal harmony groups of the 50s R&B genre, the easy-listening music sung by the systematic and carefully-controlled groups were far from voicing one’s own story. This American pop idol system was adopted in J-pop of the 70s and then in the 90s K-pop. Ironically, hip-hop has always been present in K-pop ever since Seo Taiji and Boys revolutionized K-pop in the 1990s (53). Nevertheless, many idol rappers were not appreciated as “real” due to the industrialized aspect of idol music. In this context, BTS is quite distinct. Youngdae Kim comments that “BTS is a team that has inherited the contexts of both Korean hip-hop and idol music, and they are simultaneously evolving in a new direction” (54-55). Instead of using rap or hip-hop as one of many musical elements, BTS embraced the genre as their identity. The group emphasizes its members’ ability to write lyrics and produce songs. It should be noted that BigHit Entertainment initially planned to create a hip-hop crew not a hip-hop idol. In 2010, the company scouted RM, then an amateur teenage rapper who performed in underground hip-hop scene. In September 2010, the company held “HIT IT” auditions to recruit new members of BTS and early candidates were rappers. The company did change the direction of the group and BTS was finalized with seven members who all participate in dance performance. K-pop idol groups are usually centered around vocalists and rappers take sub-roles. On the other hand, there is one main rapper (RM), one sub-rapper (Suga), and two sub-rappers (J-hope and Jungkook), composing four members who do rapping in their songs. Not only the rappers but also the vocalists were all encouraged to participate in the producing process.

This emphasis of autonomy is expressed in the series of interview featuring the CEO, music producer, visual director, and the choreographer of Big Hit Entertainment. Sihyuk
Bang, or professionally known as “hitman” bang, is the founder and co-CEO of Big Hit Entertainment and is a crucial person in forming the group BTS. In the interview, conducted less than a month after the group’s debut, the interviewer comments, “Usually, when a new idol group comes out, people ask ‘What kind of concept is their company going for?’, but I have come to believe that as for BTS, every person involved tend to put the members at the center of everything” (“Idol Maker: Sihyuk Bang”, own translation). Bang’s answer to this is as follows:

We wanted to recruit kids who definitely knew what they wanted to do in the first place, and we are satisfied to find exactly what we were looking for. We cannot depend 100% on the members. They do the basic things and the company complements what is needed. BTS is special since they discuss with the managers and control their own schedule….Because the members have to produce their own music, they also need to manage their time. If they cannot do that, we don’t get the next album….The members’ beliefs and thoughts account for more than half of BTS’s concept. (“Idol Maker: Sihyuk Bang”, own translation)

Even from the early days, the company has stressed the members’ participation and contribution to their albums. Bang concludes his interview showing his faith in the members, saying that “Even though most members began their path in music and dancing since they were early teen, they all struggled in their own place to achieve their dreams and ended up working with Big Hit. There is this genuine passion. And that is the reason why I trust them” (“Idol Maker: Sihyuk Bang”, own translation). Similar attitude is observed in the coinciding interviews. Pdogg, the producer, mentions that he went through hours of discussion with BTS members, starting from what should be the theme of the lyric. He comments that “important thing is to speak about oneself and form a bond of empathy out of it” and that “the company
does not nurture them to be artists, but they may one day be accepted as artists if they continue doing their music” (“Idol Maker: Pdogg”, own translation). Visual director Sunghyun Kim also echoes this principle in his remark: “We do decide a certain concept and lead the members, but I believe a better result comes out when we incorporate their personal taste” (“Idol Maker: Son”, own translation). This series of interview reveals that the company has envisioned a group whose musicality focused on hip-hop and scouted members who agreed to the direction they were heading and were eager to participate in the process from the very beginning.

**Strategic Intertextuality**

Heavily inclined toward hip-hop, BTS’s musical and the interrelated intertextual contents show several characteristics. Three major characteristics that are evident in their works are self-confession, social criticism, regionality.

*Self-confession and social criticism.* The members’ participation is reflected on the list of copyright holders of many songs and repeatedly mentioned in the dialogues, interviews, and live videos of the members themselves. Also, the songs speak for themselves. Even from their debut (or if one also counts non-commercial tracks, even before their debut), BTS has continuously embedded criticism on Korean society in their songs. Especially, for their first two title tracks released in 2013, deal with the dream and happiness of teenagers. The theme that transpierce throughout the entire work of BTS is youth, more specifically what the youth (including BTS members) are going through. The first “School Trilogy” albums each had a theme of dream, happiness, and love of the teenagers. Their debut title “No More Dream” criticized the rigid Korean society where students are forced to study: “Adults and parents infuse tight-laced dream to us” (“No More Dream”). The accompanying track “We Are Bulletproof Pt.2” addresses what they sacrificed to become an idol star. BTS confess that “I stayed up all night at the practice room / Instead of school, dancing and singing” and assert
with confidence, “Throw a stone at me if you’ve done as much as I did” (“We Are Bulletproof Pt.2”). “N.O”, the group’s title track for the second album O!RUL8,2?, begins with a question: “Good house good house good car good car / Can those get you happiness?” ("N.O"). These early songs talks about the exasperation teenagers experience. In 2014, BTS released their very first full-length album DARK&WILD. The last track of this album before the Outro track is a song titled “So 4 More”. BTS compare their second year as K-pop idols to the second academic year at school. The general public is described as school teachers and the members borrow the power of uplifting trendy trap beat to make somewhat blunt jokes about harsh reality of the entertainment businesses. RM raps, “Teachers didn’t give pressure last year / Saying that I’m just a rookie and that it’s still okay / They sat me down and taught me how cold the world is / with several subjects / Bias, mean comments, double standards, smack talk, and disinterest” (“So 4 More”). A few years later, after gaining unexpected success, BTS playfully changed the lyrics of this song during their Prom Party (small scale fan meeting stage) on their fifth debut anniversary, June 13th, 2018. For one thing, the word “sophomore (second grade)” was replaced by “fifth grade”. RM’s part was changed into this, “Teachers pressure us / Saying that we did great with all the Billboard awards and news” and finishes his verse with a cool attitude, “Bias, mean comments, double standards, and smack talk / Hey here’s a piece of my interest for you / Shut up, WE ARE BTS” (“2018 BTS PROM PARTY”).

The next phase of BTS, The Most Beautiful Moment in Life or HYYH series, revolve around “the most beautiful moment of life”, or the youthhood, painted with beauty and unstableness. Among the songs listed in the HYYH Pt.1 album, “Dope” stands out with its intense title. The use of shallow-looking slang word for the track title and addictive sound may give somewhat casual impression without looking at the lyrics. On the contrary, the song is a confession of hard work. Opening up the song with RM’s “Welcome to BTS”, the
following lyrics portray the arduous process the group has gone through to get to the top. “I worked all night, every day, while you were playing in the club”, sings Jimin. RM’s verse acknowledges the financial difficulties and social problems of modern day Korea. He mentions the new word “Sam-po generation”. Sam means the number three in Korean and po is the first syllable of the word pogi, which means giving up. Sam-po refers to the three things young people give up due to the economic unstableness, which are being in a romantic relationship, getting married, and having children. Whereas the older generation blame the younger generation for not working hard enough, the environment is totally different. RM asks, “Why are you killing us before we can even try?”, calling out those who criticize millennials. Then he goes on to say that “The media and adults say we have no willpower and look down at us as if we’re investments”, followed by Suga’s sharp one-liner, “Enemy” (“Dope”). HYYH Pt.2 album also had another intriguing track that is full of playful criticism, which is “Silver Spoon”. Originally in Korean, the song’s title is “뽑새 (crow tits)”. The two motifs are often repeated in later songs by BTS. First of all, “spoon” is a common metaphor used in Korea to describe the difference between the rich and the poor. People from rich families are born with golden spoons, silver spoons, or even diamond spoons, whereas poor people are born with “dirt spoon”. This metaphor not only addresses the general gap between the rich and the poor, but also refers to the generational gap. The image of crow tit is used in a similar way. There is a Korean proverb that goes “if a crow-tit tries to walk like a stork, it will break its legs (뽑새가 황새를 따라가면 다리가 깨어진다)”. It means “put your ambition to fit into the size of your capabilities” but implies that people should remain where they are born into. BTS attempt to embrace their underdog nature of their career, which started at a small company, by identifying them as crow-tits.

Some of the apparent evidence of the member’s participation in writing lyrics to talk
about themselves would be the album review videos done by Suga and RM. For the earlier albums (2 Cool 4 Skool, Skool Luv Affair, and HYYH pt.1), Suga posted review videos on YouTube BANGTANTV channel. In these videos, Suga tears plastic vinyl packages and go through the album song by song. In his review of their debut album, 2 Cool 4 Skool, Suga explains the main theme of the album and the title track, dream of the youth. He mentions his part, “[Wanted] future job number one, public officials? It’s not a forced dream, rather a relief pitcher”, emphasizing that he “wrote this to express because [he] really hated people just mindlessly following what their parents tell them to be without their own will” (“Suga’s 2 cool 4 skool Album Review”, own translation). Suga is also quite objectively self-aware when he acknowledges what many listeners would say about the song: “Many listeners say that this track sounds like a 90s idol song. But back then, they sang about why the world distorted them or their rebellious attitude. Now, it’s different. ‘Don’t worry about college, I’ll at least go to some school’ It really is full of our authentic thoughts” (“Suga’s 2 cool 4 skool Album Review”, own translation). Later albums (WINGS, You Never Walk Alone, Love Yourself 承 Her, Love Yourself 轉 Tear, Love Yourself 結 Answer, and Map of the Soul: PERSONA) are reviewed by RM, via the live videos streamed on V Live. In the latest album behind video, RM reveals that he wrote 80~90% of the lyrics, excluding two other rappers’ parts (“RM-MAP”). It is notable that this transition of platform, from pre-recorded video to live streaming with live chat function, has enhanced the direct communication the artist and the fans.

Regionality. Another characteristic of BTS as hip-hop idol group is that they emphasize the regionality. Even though the group was nominated as honorary ambassadors for Seoul to promote tourism, no member of BTS is from Seoul (Hyunbin Kim, “BTS to Promote”). It is quite common for contemporary K-pop group to include members who are of foreign nationality or is a second generation Korean emigrant, so as to attract foreign fans and
cover their global activities. Nonetheless, BTS is composed of members who were all born and raised in Korea. Not unlike the American division of hip-hop style into West Side and East Side, the members of BTS often express their regional roots in their songs. It seems that this is reflected in the stage names of the members. All three rappers, RM, Suga, and J-hope, have stage name, whereas vocalists are not prone to this tendency. Only V uses a stage name that is drastically different from his birth name Taehyung. Jimin and Jungkook both use their birth names as stage names. Jin is a stage name but it is based on the member’s birth name Seokjin. Opposed to the rappers, to whom revealing regional connection and having stage persona have more significance, the vocalists are less tied to this kind of hip-hop genre rule. Nevertheless, as a group, BTS have released many songs that express regionality, whether it was based on regional roots of individual members or the identity of K-pop artist in the global market.

It is evident that a number of songs in their early albums feature lyrics intentionally using Korean regional dialects. Even before the group made its official debut, the rappers had released a song titled “Paldogangsan (팔도강산)\(^{24}\)” in 2011, in which each rapper wrote his own lyric using regional dialect from his hometown. The song was rewritten to include vocalist members and was included in their second album, O!RUL8,2? in 2013. Youngdae Kim comments that the song deviates from “the general tendency of idol music, which normally highlights the trendy dimension and downplays the regional flavors” (38). Suga raps “when it comes to satoori (dialect), Keyongsando (the province where he comes from) is the best” and J-hope counters with Jeollado dialect. There is even a short exchange inserted in the middle, in which the two rappers argue over which region is better. Then RM comes in as a mediator using standard dialect, saying “Why keep fighting / They’re the same Korean

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\(^{24}\) Literal meaning is “eight provinces, rivers, and mountains”, but it is interpreted as “the scenery of all parts of Korea”. This song is also referred to as Satoori Rap, which literally means “dialect rap”.
language in the end / Look up, we’re under the same sky” (“Paldogangsan”). This incorporation of dialects and emphasis on regional identity show up in other songs, such as “Where Did You Come From (어디에서 왔는지)” released in 2014 and “Ma City” from 2015 album HYYH Pt.1. “Ma City” is a track in which each member talks about his love and pride of hometown. In this song, J-hope’s lyrics express his love for his hometown Gwangju, and among the lyrics is this part: “Dial 062-518” (“Ma City”). 062 is the regional number for Gwangju and 518 makes a reference to May 18 Gwangju Democratic Uprising of 198025, a mass protest against the then military government occurred from May 18th to 27th, 1980.

The references to individual roots evolved and in a way expanded as time went by. In their relatively recent works, BTS emphasize the group’s national root. Two songs released in 2018 especially incorporate Korean regionality. In June, during the Festa period celebrating the group’s fifth anniversary, the three rappers released a non-commercial track titled “Ddeang (땡)” on SoundCloud. The title is a Korean onomatopoeia that can be used in a number of situations. Co-produced by Suga, the song is a hip-hop track filled with eastern instrumentals and it addresses how far BTS have come in spite of the harsh acrimony. Unlike for a diss track, there is no real swear word in the lyrics. Instead, the rappers refer to various usage of the word “ddaeng” in Korean culture, including a Korean card game Go-stop (셋다, seotda), a variation of Korean card game Hwatu (화투).

About two months after releasing “Ddeng”, BTS dropped their repackage album LOVE YOURSELF 結 ‘Answer’, which concluded their Love Yourself series. The title track of this album was “IDOL”. It was a quite interesting track in numerous ways. The track is certainly not gugak (국악, Korean traditional music); it is based on South African EDM genre

25 South Korea had already gone through decades of governmental oppression on personal freedom and political opposition. After Doohwan Chun took control of the military via an internal coup, the military declared martial law in May 1980. http://eng.518.org/sub.php?PID=0201&ckattemp=3
Gqom and also incorporates catchy English lyrics here and there, unlike many K-pop songs. Nevertheless, there are elements of Koreanness in the song and its music video. Two days before its release on 24th of August, a forty-second-long teaser was released on YouTube. Opening up with the piercing, metallic sound of kkwaenggwari (꽁과리, a small flat gong used in gugak), this abbreviated “teasing” version of the track integrates gugak sounds, using virtual Korean instruments offered by Seoul National University. The actual track, however, omits this element and instead focuses on African house beats. Music critic Youngdae Kim does point out the rather striking resemblance of gugak rhythms and the polyrhythm of African beats, commenting that this approach is understandable and “the Koreanness of ‘IDOL’ is expressed in a passive, rather unconventional way” (266). The song opens up with RM and J-hope’s part that almost sounds like a self-declaration: “You can call me artist / You can call me idol / No matter what you call me / I don’t care / I’m proud of it / I’m free / No more irony / Cuz I was always just me” (“IDOL”). The chorus and hook are filled with chuimsae (추임새) or ad-lib responses inserted in between Pansori (판소리, Korean epic chant) performance, such as “eolssu (열쑤)”, “jihwaja (지화자)”, or “deonggideok kungdeoreoreoreo (덩기덕 쿵더러러러, a repeated rhythmic pattern used in gugak)” (“IDOL”). The music video also display a number of elements inspired by Korean tradition, including the hanbok (한복, Korean traditional clothes) aspired fashion style, the tiger (the animal that has been regarded to symbolize the Korean peninsula), the Korean word “사랑 (love)”, the monochrome ink-and-wash painting as the backdrop, and the hip-and-gable roof (see Figure 5). The song goes on with the repeated lyric: “You can’t stop me loving myself” (“IDOL”). In “IDOL”, BTS are not shy at all to assert their identity as K-pop idol, emphasizing the both side of it. Kim assesses that this is a pleasant surprise coming from a
group that has won the Billboard Music Awards’ Top Social Artist Award two years in a row in 2017-18 (and they won again this year, in 2019) and has “become one of the hottest musicians in the world” (273). Rather than staying as an attempt to localize western music style, the song is a “provocation” that is certainly aware of the global audience (273).

The group’s end-of-the-year award show performances enhance this. On December 1st, 2018, BTS performed “IDOL” at the 2018 Melon Music Awards. The striking characteristic of this performance was that the music was rearranged to incorporate the gugak elements teased in their teaser. At this award show, BTS performed three song from their 2018 release: “FAKE LOVE”, “Airplane Pt.2”, and lastly “IDOL”. The first two performances were shown without pause, but before going on to the last performance there was a short video segment. Showing clips from their music video and concerts, it was narrated by the members’ dialogue saying that they achieved what they used to dream as trainees and that they are happy despite all the hardship. Then it was concluded with quotation of RM’s acceptance speech at the 2017 Billboard Music Award: “Please ARMY, remember what we say, love myself, love yourself.정말 사랑하고 감사합니다. 더 멋진 방탄소년단 되겠습니다 (We really love you and are truly grateful to you. We will try to be a cooler BTS26)”.

The performance opened up with the three members dancing to the chorus melody of “IDOL” using gugak rhythm and instruments: J-hope lit up the stage with his modern style of dancing with a group of samgomu (삼고무, literally means three-drum-dancing) dancers, Jimin continued with graceful fan dance, and lastly Jungkook showed off a powerful talchum (탈춤, mask dance) performance. Then this intro performance was followed by pungmul (풍물) drummers and masked dancers performing Bukcheong Lion Dance (북청 사자놀이), which are both Korean music and dance tradition, and then finally led up to the entire BTS

26 For the most part, RM spoke in English but he intentionally chose to finish his speech in Korean.
members’ main stage (see Figure 6).

Figure 5. retrieved from “BTS (방탄소년단) 'IDOL' Official MV.” YouTube, uploaded by BigHit Entertainment, 24 Aug. 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pBuZEFGYXA6E&feature=youtu.be.
Figure 6. BTS members J-hope, Jimin, and Jungkook performing Korean tradition dance for the intro stage before “IDOL” retrieved from “[BANGTAN BOMB] 'IDOL' Special Stage (BTS focus) @2018 MMA - BTS (방탄소년단).” YouTube,
BTS have expressed multiple times in interviews that they will continue to create their album and songs with Korean language. In a recent interview with the Time, RM says, “We don’t want to change our identity or our genuineness to get the number one. Like if we sing suddenly in full English, and change all these other things, then that’s not BTS. We’ll do everything, we’ll try. But if we couldn’t get number one or number five, that’s okay” (Bruner “BTS”).

4.4 ARMY as Active Fandom

K-pop fandoms in general are very active participants in terms of their ardent,
strategic support for their stars. Surely, one can observe relatively “common” fan activities such as writing fan fictions, drawing fan arts, and uploading fan videos. However, K-pop fandom activities go far beyond the boundary of pleasure. There are strategies to earn higher score (usually based on the sales number of physical albums, the ranks of the song on the chart of online music streaming services, and social media index—often based on the music video view count on YouTube-) at weekly music live shows to get the award to the group. For instance, when an idol group makes a “come back”, meaning they release a new album, fans will share a recommended list to stream the newly released tracks, so as to put the songs on the higher ranks on the chart of music streaming services. Melon, one of the most commonly used music streaming service in Korea, has an hourly, daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly chart of the most listened tracks during a certain period of time. Even if one repeats a certain song for an hour, the listen count will only be one during that hour. Thus, many idol fandoms have a strategy team that encourages other fans to follow their “streaming list” that is carefully devised to fit as much songs as possible in about an hour (see Figure 8). The higher the song’s rank on the chart is, the higher score the artist gets on the music live shows. This strategy applies to the end of year award shows, where Daesang or the grand prize is given to the artist who has had the most successful year. There are also “Popularity Awards” in many award shows that are given to the artist who got most votes on popularity votes conducted online. Not surprisingly, the votes are conducted by fans and sometimes the organizers even require payment to get more voting rights.

There are also various fans, nowadays usually are active on Twitter, who perform specific kinds of fan activities. They are not drastically different from fans who write fan fictions or draw fan arts. There are “home masters” who take photographs of idol members

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27 This was based on the early days of these amateur photographers when they usually had a separate home page to upload their photos. Now it is more common for one to have a Twitter account, but the name stayed.
and post the high quality photos online. There are also fans who create gif files, translate Korean into other languages or vice versa, post information on the group’s schedule or broadcasting appearance, and many more who have specialized mission. Fans sometimes hold their own exhibition with the photos taken by fans. When birthday of a member or debut anniversary approaches, people organize donation event under the fandom name or the artist’s name. Also, fans are the principal agents who come up with various fan theories and create a solid narrative based on fragmented story pieces. Fans voluntarily gather their ideas and participate in completing the fictional world. Thus, narrative contents of K-pop idols are far from the conventional top-down media production. Rather, it is a reciprocal process that is only possible with the participation of fans as authors or producers.
Figure 8. The recommended streaming list for the latest BTS “come back”, Retrieved from a Twitter account of “BTS Streaming Team”, https://twitter.com/teamarmyforbts.

BTS’ fandom, ARMY (meaning Adorable M.C. for the Youth) surely bear the aforementioned characteristics of K-pop idol fandom. In addition to creating the countless fan theories based on BU storytelling, what is striking is that the international fans are also very
active in promoting BTS in their own country. For example, one of the factors that influence Billboard Chart ranks is radio play. Thus, BTS fans in North America sent flowers and cards to radio stations, in order to request the radio DJs to play BTS songs or to thank them for playing BTS song on their station (“ARMY Sending”). At the beginning of 2018, American fans of BTS set grand goals, such as getting the newly released songs and albums in Billboard Chart, getting Recording Industry Association of America’s gold certification, and helping the group to participate in various American music award shows (see Figure 9). Even before the group’s second comeback in August 2018, BTS and ARMY had achieved almost every goal on the list (Nam and Bongbong “One”). Both albums released in 2018, *LOVE YOURSELF 轉 ’Tear’* and *LOVE YOURSELF 結 ‘Answer’* ranked number one on Billboard 200 Chart. Both title tracks, “FAKE LOVE” and “IDOL” got into the top 10 on Hot 100 Chart and achieved gold certificate from the Recording Industry Association of America. The group performed at 2018 Billboard Music Awards and had performed in 2017 American Music Awards. One last goal, getting the group to the Grammy was not realized in 2018. However, BTS did participate in 2019 Grammy Awards as presenters.
BTS is known for their participation in producing their own music. Even though their songs are usually entitled in English and contain catchy English phrase for the parts in chorus, still the majority of their songs are written in Korean. The quite personal and regional lyrics written in Korean may seem as not very convenient for foreign listeners, especially for BTS who have massive global fanbase. However, ARMY applaud at this fact. Fans also adore BTS members using satoori, or dialect, and actually study various historical/regional references. For an instance, when the group released their third full length album *LOVE YOURSELF 티어* ‘Tear’ on May 18th, 2018, one of the biggest fan translators, ARMY Salon, posted an English article on the Gwangju May 18 Democratic Uprising of 1980. In an interview with music critic Youngdae Kim, Myungji Chae, the translator behind the account, reveals her concerns
that “because we usually trend hashtags on Twitter to celebrate on the day of comebacks, I was worried that international ARMYs who don’t know Korean might confuse the hashtag for the democratic movement” (Youngdae Kim 170). She posted an article on the matter and introduced a related Korean film to explain the historical context. This recently made the headlines again, when BTS did performance in Gwangju on April 28th, 2019. Some international ARMYs visited the May 18 National Cemetery to commemorate the sacrificed in the uprising (Nava “One BTS Song”).

Another intriguing fandom activity of BTS fans is the “White Paper Project”. In October 2018, one of the BTS members, Jimin, was involved in a controversy. Taken from the group’s YouTube Premium tour documentary series Burn the Stage, a screenshot of Jimin wearing a T-shirt that had Korean people celebrating their liberation from Japan in 1945 was at the heart of the issue. The images included the depiction of atomic bombing of Nagasaki and this led to a controversy. On November 8th, TV Asahi suddenly canceled BTS’ appearance on their music show. BigHit Entertainment published a statement on November 13th which seemed to quiet the controversy. A group of fans from various national, cultural, and academic background gathered together for the White Paper Project. They tried to address two aspects of the happening: first is the misleading statements about BTS on the media and the second is the broader historical context that divide the Koreans or Asians from international fans in terms of their reaction to this debate. This was a remarkable project, carefully covering the issue at hand without emotional inclination.

All of these fandom activities are voluntarily done by the fans who are interested in BTS and are eager to collect interrelated texts to create a large picture.
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

5.1 Conclusion

This thesis aimed to achieve following goals:

1. To answer the following question: Can K-pop idols be considered as media text based on intertextuality and transmedia storytelling strategies?
2. To suggest a tripartite model of K-pop idol industry that is composed of the company, the idol, and the fandom.
3. To propose that K-pop idol can be interpreted as text that is combination of popular text (fictional) and popular icon (factual) based on the concept of intertextuality.
4. To analyze the transmedia storytelling strategy of BTS, the K-pop group that has earned massive global popularity, based on the said tripartite model and intertextuality.
5. Provide a meaningful contribution with an English-based article that covers both Western/English-language-based and Korean-language-based researches on fandom studies.

To answer the first question, the second chapter was dedicated to the historical progress of hallyu, or Korean Wave, and K-pop to explain the current situation of the third generation K-pop idols, where the companies employ various storytelling tactics to attract fans and artists communicate with fans more than ever. Then Chapter III focused on the literary and media theories regarding text, intertextuality, and transmedia storytelling. The concept of text was originally used in literary theories and denoted specific written texts with the author. Nonetheless, the abundance of mediums has led to the expanded usage of the term text to include any kinds of texts: TV shows, movies, music, fine arts, comics, etc. Along with the evolution of the term, the concept of intertextuality also became an important element in interpreting the text. No text exists as its own. Texts, once stood as individual at
the moment of production, become part of an intertwined web of texts. The application of these theories in musicology and celebrity studies was given in order to provide a theoretic background to my suggestion of K-pop idol as media text, a combination of popular text (fictional fan object) and popular icon (factual fan object). Chapter IV first tried to list the major contents of BTS that are available in numerous forms and on a variety of platforms. The company is in charge of managing an intricate storyline based on transmedia storytelling strategies, allowing the interpretation of BTS as popular texts or fictional fan objects. It is also possible to view BTS as popular icon or factual fan objects who

5.2 Limitations

This thesis is largely inclined to giving an overview of the historical background and theoretical convention in the field. The initial intention was to conduct interviews or online surveys. Unfortunately, I lacked the time and resource to actually do it. Most are textual analysis and a rather subjective observation. Also, the sheer amount of contents that were available was too much to handle in a limited period of time and page.

I deliberately have put aside the gender issue and ethical issue in fandom to bring the spotlight to the often overlooked idol group members. Nonetheless, I agree with Tiziana Terranova’s concern on the free labor of fans (33-58). Terranova points out that the various fan activities to make transmedia storytelling possible are voluntary and yet are always required by the industry or the production company. The free labor of fandom is apparent evidence of participatory culture, but it should be acknowledged that the industry exploit their voluntary free labor. Fans are the most eager, free laborers who invest their own time and effort to create secondary productions or increase the value of their adored object. I hope future researches on K-pop idols and fandom address this issue.
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