

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## Managing K-Pop Impressions on BTS ARMY Fandom in Jakarta

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**ABSTRACT**

K-Pop gained popularity in Indonesia through Korean dramas featuring songs sung by Korean singers. Indonesian K-Pop fans, especially the BTS group, the popularity of BTS amazed many fans and wanted to imitate everything BTS did to make them look like them. Behind it all, these fans live between as a fan and as ordinary people who carry out activities like other people in general. The theory used is impression management theory by Erving Goffman, which states that individuals must form and uphold an image that is in line with the role they want to present to the public, and the concept of dramaturgy theory which compares human interaction with theatrical performances with individuals playing specific roles to achieve goals, they are the front stage, middle stage, and backstage. Research on this topic uses impression management theory and dramaturgical theory, which explain that individuals and organizations present themselves in a certain way to achieve their goals. This research follows a constructivist paradigm and uses qualitative methods like participatory observation, interviews, and documentation.

**KEYWORDS**

BTS; Dramaturgy; Fandoms; K-Pop and Impression Management

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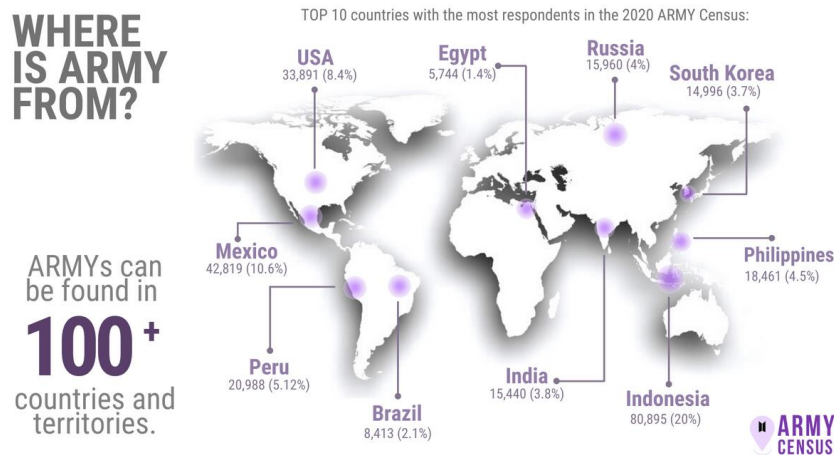
### 1. Introduction

The K-pop artist with the most followers today is BTS, whose fans are called ARMY, especially in Indonesia. This is evidenced by the number of tweets on Twitter that use the hashtag #BTS. #BTS is also the most used hashtag among Indonesian K-Pop fans that can be enjoyed through the media (Leksmono & Maharani, 2022). Twitter revealed that in 2021, discussions about K-Pop will again dominate conversations on Twitter, with the number of global tweets increasing from 6.7 billion in 2020 to 7.8 billion. This large number makes the quality of one-way relationships an inevitable new phenomenon today (Team, 2022).



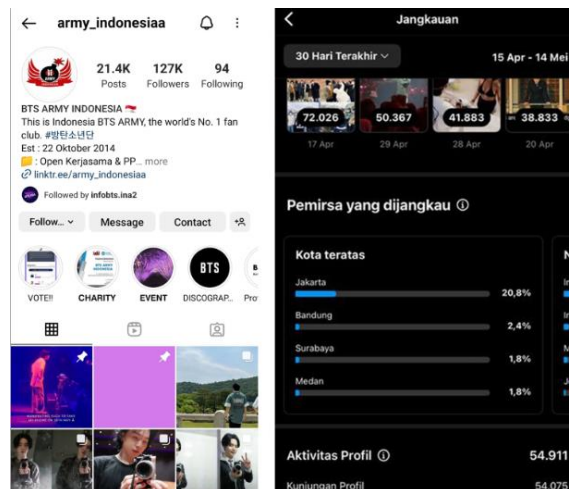
**Picture 1 Countries with the most K-Pop fans.**

By building a community where members have the same preferences (Kim & Hutt, 2021), as mentioned, one of the most prominent fan members currently owned by the BTS boyband has a fan called ARMY. The name ARMY itself stands for Adorable Representative M.C for Youth and was formed on July 9, 2013 (Jin, 2021). The number of ARMYs is relatively large and spread all over the world. Indonesia itself is the country with the highest number of ARMYs compared to other countries, even in South Korea itself. The census conducted by [btsarmycensus.com](http://btsarmycensus.com) in July-September 2020 showed that Indonesia was ranked first with 80,895 (20%). Mexico ranks second 42,819 (10.6%) than the United States 33,891 (8.4%), Peru 20,988 (5.12%), Philippines 18,461 (4.5%), Russia 15,960 (4%), India 15,440 (3.8%), South Korea 14,996 (3.7%), Brazil 8,413 (2.1%) and Egypt in tenth place with 5,744 (1.4%), (Grover et al., 2020)



Picture 2: ARMY censuses around the world.

Jakarta occupies number one with 20.8% of 127 thousand followers. With the help of the Instagram feature, it is clear that many of these ARMYs are domiciled in the city of Jakarta. Therefore, researchers chose the city of Jakarta to be chosen as a research city (Indonesia, 2023).



Picture 3 Cities with the most ARMYs.

These ARMYs communicate by managing impressions by forming characters' behavior resembling their dream BTS (Dewi & Nurudin, 2022). Transcultural and digital mediation of K-Pop in Latin America that fans' affirmation of their unique subcultural identity as followers of K-Pop leads them to act as cultural messengers, bridging the cultural gap between locals in their home country and the Korean people (Han et al., 2018).

This ARMY plays the role of an actor in the front stage area where they gather. They try to present the figure as an ARMY with all the attributes that smell of Korean culture, and there is where they are backstage, the area where they display their true nature that is different from the front stage, whereas an ARMY (Ismail & Haryati, 2020).

Various things liked by BTS Army towards idol bands, including the meaning contained in the lyrics of the songs they popularized. ARMY feels that BTS itself has made its transformation from time to time until now, where all events are poured out on each song. ARMYs indirectly feel closeness with their idols through song lyrics, and this affects the increase in closeness with their idols to the stage that they must sacrifice something in the form of time, finances, and commitment. As explained in the experience, "liveness" is central to the process by which fans feel emotionally close to their K-Pop idols, and this facilitates investment by fans in emotional interactions "in real life" with other fans (King-O'Riain, 2020).

In the daily process of forming the character of these ARMY individuals, they present themselves individually or in groups, especially displayed on social media (Yu et al., 2022). Jones and Pittman point out five types of self-presentation strategies commonly used by people based on the characteristics they use: ingratiation is referred to as "the most ubiquitous phenomenon of self-presentation" because it is strongly associated with the idea that others like us or have a good impression of us. In other words, an actor who applies this strategy will do a self-presentation that will make others think that the idea is liked by the actor. Intimidations are almost the same as ingratiation actors "trying to convince the target person that he or she is dangerous" in a bullying strategy. Intimidators may ignore their desire to be liked; they want to be feared and respected. The bullying strategy aims to make someone perceived as harmful or harmful by others, but the ingratiation strategy aims to make someone likable to others.

Jones and Pittman in (Grahmaulidya & Fardiah, 2023) found that the third self-presentation strategy is self-promotion. The academics say, "We call an actor doing 'Self-Promoting' when he or she seeks attribution of competence, either with reference to a general level of ability (intelligence, athletic ability) or a particular skill (typing excellence, ability to play the flute)." The author says that self-promotion remains a strategy in its own right, even though it is connected to the first two strategies. Self-promotion is different from ingratiation and is more concerned with others who associate competence with us than being liked. Self-promotion centers on competence, in contrast to bullying, and Jones and Pittman state that "we can convince others of our competence without threatening them or inducing fear in their hearts."

There is a difference between the self-promotion strategy and the fourth strategy, but both require the other person to respect them. It is very clear that many people want to be seen as likable and competent. Nevertheless, Jones and Pittman state that exemplification has strategic attributes that distinguish it from ingratiation or self-promotion strategies, and supplementation is the last strategy that can be used when one does not have the necessary resources for the other four strategies. Basically, it's "a strategy of advertising one's dependency on asking for help." (Al-Mamoory, 2023)

Strategies or tactics used to present oneself include flattery where, the act of making oneself look attractive by bragging, praising others, giving gifts, covering up weaknesses and showing off one's strengths. Improving yourself to take action to make others interested in you is to give a description. Intimidating, instilling fear in opponents by flaunting wealth, power, and emotion. For example, at this stage, he wants to show that he is a moral person, manifested in discipline, honesty, and self-sacrifice, and additionally, show one's own weaknesses; people need others.

Individuals who idolize BTS indirectly change their views, values, and lifestyle so that they can present a new identity. ARMY carries a special meaning and gives a new nuance to the world of BTS, the relationship that exists between BTS and ARMY, as well as the ARMY community itself; they support each other in various activities, there are common interests, display each other's talents and abilities, and there is emotional support and motivation for each other in the Army community, (Jenol & Pazil, 2020). The identity that must be displayed by an ARMY is certainly part of self-existence in the community that is built. In expressing their identity, ARMYs manage their impressions with the use of dramaturgical theory (Kristina, 20221).

ARMY's impression management is part of the theory of Dramaturgy, which explains how a person can present a performance to others and give a different impression in each session of the event by giving a front face and back face (Serpa & Ferreira, 2018). ARMYs become actors on their own stage and impress their audience, and according to Schlenker, impression management can occur because behaviors that create, control, and maintain an individual's self-image in the process affect the way other individuals perceive themselves. In carrying out their roles, these soldiers have the same life as women's daily lives in general (Liang, 2020). The focus of this research is to see, deepen, and understand how K-Pop lovers, especially ARMYs, do impression management, especially in their daily lives and in front of their communities.

**2. Method**

The in-depth interviews were conducted with five ARMYs ranging in age from 30 to 40 years old located in Jakarta, very active in community activities, and have jobs; those ARMYs who have different backgrounds and jobs but still give their time and even money to express themselves as ARMYs. The research was located in Jakarta because Jakarta is the capital of Indonesia and the center of entertainment and big business, and based on the results of fandom data, the largest fandom of ARMYs is located in Jakarta.

A method for conducting research that is formal and all-encompassing, long interviews are also known as in-depth interviews in popular parlance. Interview terminology is used by informants and researchers during these interactions. Research using this method can be done in conjunction with participant observation, or it can be done alone as an independent method. The fundamental purpose of an in-depth interview is to gain a full understanding of the informant's perspective on a phenomenon or event by asking many questions and getting many answers (Baxter & Babbie, 2008).

The research focuses on analyzing the formation and exchange of meanings between BTS and their fans. This paradigm comes from the source, so the result is that the correct construction occurs individually by ARMY in the face of managing the impression it takes from BTS. The qualitative approach is appropriate because the study wants to understand the phenomena that the subject experiences, which in this case is liking K-Pop and managing their impressions, and also, the observed phenomena require in-depth observation.

Data analysis is carried out by coding the interview results. These resource persons were found from the same community, assumed they had one impression, and managed impressions as self-expression to become an ARMY.

Further, in-depth interview excerpts are marked with NS1, NS2, and so on in the results and discussion. The validity of this study is carried out by conducting a confirmatory where the writing confirms back to the source after obtaining answers to the research questions asked.

**3. Discussion**

**3.1 Overview of Research Subjects**

The study participants consisted of five women who had varying ages. All resource persons are ARMYs in Jakarta, have been active as ARMYs for more than two years, and are active in the community. An overview of resource persons can be seen in the following table:

**Table 1. Resource Person Data**

	NS(01)	NS(02)	NS(03)
Age	36	38	30
Status	Married	Single	Single
Work	Housewives and Online Shop Owners	Psychotherapy and Counselor	Korean Tutor, Digital Media, Customer Care dan Lader Komunitas ARMY (X-ARMY)

When discussing the spread of pop culture, this cannot be separated from the entry of South Korean pop culture, which is very thick in Indonesia in this 1 decade period. On the other hand, Indonesia is known as a country that can easily accept and consume popular culture from other countries; it is easy for popular culture from outside Indonesia to gain acceptance and support from the Indonesian people. Several studies show similarities between Indonesians' acceptance of pop culture from South Korea and their openness to popular culture influences. So, it can be said that cultural globalization outside Indonesia is not a new genome. This acceptance applies to the recognition of K-Pop BTS as one of the fastest and most popular Korean pop culture products in Indonesia. K-Pop fans are increasing every year, so many K-Pop idols come to Indonesia to greet fans with concerts and meetings with fans (Heryanto, 2018). This meeting with fans is not far from the high fan community. These fans share information over the internet with other fans. For example, the presence of the internet on cellular phones increasingly indicates the dominance of internet speed. The Internet has not only increased the speed of news but also grown social networks such as Facebook and Twitter and groups consisting of hobbies, professions, and commonalities of fate. They join in a virtual community, also known as a virtual community (Iskandar & Isnaeni, 2019). With the spread of Korean pop culture strong enough to form a community of fans, among them is ARMY, a big fan of BTS.

Being a fan of someone or a music band is a manifestation of self that is displayed in everyday life or, even more extreme, doing various plastic surgeries so that he resembles his ideal. This research is to see and explore how BTS ARMY fans manage their

impressions by bringing K-Pop identity to them. Impression management is carried out by an ARMY in various aspects of his daily life, among one large influence of the meaning of lyrics in every song popularized by BTS.

### 3.2 Lyric

Song lyrics are a person's expression of something he has seen, heard, or experienced. In expressing his experience, the poet or songwriter performs a play on words and language to create appeal and distinctiveness to his lyrics or verses. This language game can be in the form of vocal games, language styles, or distortions of word meaning and is reinforced by the use of melodies and musical notations that are adjusted to the lyrics of the song so that the listener is more carried away with what the author thinks. The words in the lyrics are a means for the songwriter to express what he wants. Lyrics are part of music, that is, as a tool to convey the message. Song lyrics themselves can be used as a means of depicting important social reality, meaning that it is useful for humans to monitor the existence and relationship of their relationships in the reality of social life (Nathaniel & Sannie, 2020)

*"The messages on the music and the impression messages they do have a message." (NS1);* in other words, the message contained in each song has a deep meaning for the listeners, especially the fans.

Findings in the field explain that the lyrics of BTS's songs are the reason many fans make it as an encouragement in their lives because through these lyrics, BTS communicates to their fans, and in these lyrics, positive messages can be a guide in becoming life for their fans. It is known that what they write or convey in song lyrics and also what they say directly to the public through mass media and social media. Issues or topics that are often raised by BTS when making songs or speaking in front of the media can give a good impression to their fans (Ayu et al., 2020).

*"I learned a lot from their songs, oh they experienced that too." (NS2).*

The lyrics of BTS's songs that they made about life problems that all humans have faced and are facing now relate to what their fans are experiencing, which makes the relationship between BTS and their fans even stronger; this is a statement found by several sources. His fans who are going through this phase of his life see and find emotional support through what BTS gives through songs and what they say through the media. These positive things are taken by ARMYs, and they apply them to their daily lives (Alisya et al., 2023).

*"Many of their songs are inspirational and contained in their songs throughout their band career" (NS3).*

Another fact found is that among the many songs, the average feels that the song really inspires fans to stay able to survive in various situations and stay positive. Through what BTS does, their song lyrics and what they say, and those messages are all that can be an encouragement in going through this difficult time, and these ARMYs get positive encouragement and carry it into their daily lives (Lee & Nguyen, 2020).

It can be concluded that the beautiful song lyrics have a considerable impact on fans in managing their impressions. Front face that is carried out in front of the community and work colleagues makes the resource persons carry out different attitudes and are motivated in a better direction, while in other situations, the resource persons do back face in their personal lives such as in special homes and/or friendships. They behave to stay strong in life and sometimes cry in solitude; in other situations, they still maintain their appearance as they should by doing activities as usual and existing in front of the ARMY community to maintain the management of their impressions (Ringland & Wolf, 2021).

### 3.3 Motivation & Inspiration

The impact of BTS's popularity greatly affects the identity of their fans, from the lyrics written in the strains of songs and even their behavior tends to be imitated by their fans. Not infrequently, there are those who are more motivated and inspired by all their daily actions.

The works and activities shown by BTS are an inspiration and motivation for their fans to love themselves, spread positive things, and do good to others (Ryanda Aziza & Ria Dewi Eryani, 2022).

Through the lyrics and music video of this song, BTS tries to provide motivation for their fans (Aulia & Sukmawati, 2021). Being an ARMY has such a positive impact as helping individuals gain motivation in life. Fans are motivated to let go of worries over the social situation they are experiencing. BTS's music contributes to ARMYs' lives of personal growth, generating perspective change, and ARMYs use this music to boost mood, calm down, and motivate themselves (Wulandari, 2023).

*"inspired by their songs, so I recommend this to my clients to listen to as well"(NS2).*

*"Their kind and polite attitude and embracing fans was very visible during the show"(NS3).*

Findings in the field show how K-Pop feels in the eyes of its fans and has a considerable influence on the daily lives of its fans. They are motivated and inspired to do other good things in their daily lives. Fans go on a journey of self-realization, learning socially responsible behavior, involvement in community engagement, and developing a positive self-image (Woongjo & Shin-Eui, 2019). Through interactions with BTS on social media, ARMYs became deeply affected as they saw BTS as their role models and hence became involved in charity-like activities (Goss, 2020).

The figure of BTS is very very uploading and touches the personalities of his fans quite deeply. Their friendly, polite figure towards all fans has a great influence on the lives of their fans. What BTS gives contains an inspiring message about self-love; BTS invites young people around the world to be aware of the challenges that exist in the process of becoming an adult (Amany, 2022).

### **3.4 Self Love**

BTS's music draws influences from a variety of genres, including hip-hop, pop, and R&B, but their discography is more than just high-quality music and songs with deep lyrics that touch the hearts of music lovers and that cover themes such as age, mental health, self-love, and social pressure. Combined with a focus on creating meaningful music, it is in line with their record label's mission, "Music & Artists for Healing", which inspires millions of fans. In addition, BTS's involvement in UNICEF's #ENDViolence campaign, along with the Love Myself campaign, strengthened their standing as global leaders for social good (Evangelista, 2019).

BTS also attended the UN General Assembly in 2018 for the launch of Generation Unlimited, where BTS leader Kim Namjoon (RM) gave a speech advocating self-empowerment: "I want to hear your voice, and I want to hear your faith. No matter who you are, where you're from, the color of your skin, gender identity: speak for yourself. Find your name, find your voice by talking to yourself." These powerful words encapsulate BTS's characters and their music, which in turn encourages their fans, ARMYs, to also strive to empower themselves and others (Lufadeju, 2018).

*"Meet with ARMY to release stress, just get the good times, (NS3).*

The findings in this field can be said that meeting directly with fellow ARMYs can describe the fatigue of the burden faced, and this is a form of self-love. It turns out that when he is in a community, he tries to display a front face, namely happiness and the realization of self-love that he has. And when he returned to other daily lives, he felt the burden of fatigue coming again. The army community became a stage for him to express his fantasy and love for idols so that he forgot the back face he had for a moment (Lestari & Eriyanto, 2020).

BTS, in the activity of becoming musicians, also called about the importance of how to love yourself, which is certainly not easy. Through that, his fans were moved and opened his mind to self-love, as BTS conveyed. ARMYs feel they have more support, and with BTS's songs, they feel represented and have the motivation to always rise, especially BTS's songs with the theme of Love Yourself. They can become more confident and develop in a better and more positive direction by participating in interpersonal activities, such as counseling or self-motivation (Lukas et al., 2021).

*"So the stress release is also one of the until now maybe my song playlist now finally has a lot of BTS songs" (NS1).*

Other findings show the same meaning of how he manages impressions with songs in his actions to be able to dispel the fullness of the burden of the mind. Reinforced by the next finding, "*Fangirling is self-care me*" (NS2). From all the findings obtained, the self-love echoed by BTS in their songs can dispel the fatigue of their minds in everyday life by listening to music or seeing their content on various social media. Participating in ARMY community activities is also one way to release the fatigue in living their daily lives, and it is also added that it turns out that individuals do need a sense of belonging in a community (Allen et al., 2021).

Impression management in expressing self-love can remind that each individual must be able to accept all aspects that exist in the individual, aspects in the form of positive and negative. Visible and invisible aspects and also the state in which each individual can appreciate themselves for all that has been done (Yasmin & Fardani, 2019).

Actors, stage, and impressions will be clearly visible when fans gather in their community. They manage their impressions with varying acceptance from other individuals (Ezani, 2019). Like when one comments on the other in dress, makeup, attributes, even speaking style and facial expressions. Other intimate things follow with the exchange of opinions, complaints, and even jokes because, basically, every individual in society needs to be heard, appreciated, and accepted.

#### 4. Conclusion

The ARMYs take and manage the impressions of what is displayed through their song lyrics as well as from every activity they do in all their activities as musicians in their daily lives. Through the lyrics of the song, these fans get an encouragement to love themselves, as conveyed by BTS, something that relates to what their fans feel. BTS also provides motivation and inspiration for each of their fans through what they display in public spaces.

Selain itu ARMY juga menerapkan bagaimana cara mengeluarkan stress yang ada dalam diri mereka dengan cara self love dan mengikuti kegiatan komunitas seperti yang BTS tuangkan melalui lirik-lirik didalam lagu mereka dan juga melalui kampanye-kampanye yang BTS lakukan untuk menyerukan pentingnya mencintai diri sendiri. Pengelolaan kesan yang dilakukan ARMY kedalam sehari-hari kegiatan mereka membawa kesan yang positif untuk diri mereka dan dalam lingkungan sekitar mereka. Melakukan kegiatan dalam menyukai K-Pop dapat membawa hal positif bagi para penikmatnya.

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