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Mental Health, Community, Commitment, and the Growth of Individual Identity in the Participatory Fandom of the BTS ARMY

Cover Page Footnote

Page one, footnote 1 at the end of "South Korean music group BTS". 1. The members of BTS will be referred to by their stage names in this study, as sources address them varyingly as their legal and stage names. Their names are also in the Korean format through which they are commonly addressed, which is their last name prior to first. Their legal names, and their stage names, are as follows: Kim Namjoon, whose stage name is RM, Kim Seokjin, called Jin, Min Yoongi, called SUGA or Suga, Jung Hoseok, called J-Hope, Park Jimin, who does not have a stage name, Kim Taehyung, called V, and Jeon Jungkook (also spelled Jeongguk), who also does not have a stage name. Page 1, footnote 2 after "BTS, in Hangeul" 2. Hangeul is the Korean alphabet. Page 2, footnote 3 after "now on Weverse" 3. Weverse is a global fan platform - and subsidiary of Big Hit Entertainment - that supports official fan communities (Nam, 2019). Page 4, footnote 4, after "Hallyu" 4. Hallyu is the Korean Wave, or the growth in South Korea's arts and culture in other (often surrounding) countries (Park & Chang, 2019, p. 262). Page 7, after "a fan account" 5. A fan account is an account dedicated to whatever the fan "fans" over, such as celebrities or a TV show. The account is largely dedicated to that topic, in this instance BTS, and posts frequently about it. Similarly, within the BTS ARMY a common characteristic of fan accounts is to have the account clearly visible as a fan by everyone else. Their profile photo is of a BTS member, or a drawing of one, or something that is clear to other fans as pertaining to BTS, and the same with their Twitter layout, which will identify them as an ARMY by having BTS mentioned somewhere. Currently, a majority of Twitter ARMYs have small "7"s next to their name to identify themselves, in regards to BTS' most recent album: "Map of the Soul: 7." The fan account mentioned posts regularly about BTS, has them mentioned in the bio, and has a profile photo of one of the BTS members. Page 12, after "compared to being selected" 6. Question 3 allowed for multiple answers to be selected. Page 14, after "This is seen in the responses of Figure 11" 7. See Appendix B.

MENTAL HEALTH, COMMUNITY, COMMITMENT, AND THE GROWTH OF INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY IN THE PARTICIPATORY FANDOM OF THE BTS ARMY

By Sydney Haulenbeek

ABSTRACT— The BTS fandom is incredibly large with millions of digitally active fans. Participants, called ARMY, show a high level of commitment and involvement that has led to the fandom breaking engagement and performance records. The growth of individual identity among collective fandom, especially the impact that digital fandom participation has on their physical lives, was studied through a survey distributed to ARMYs on Twitter. The data, which was composed of 978 responses, was split into groups of highly involved (HI) fans and less involved fans (LI). The data suggests that ARMYs who spend more time involved in the fandom and fandom activities experience a higher positive impact on their habits, and are more involved in their physical communities, as well as experience a high positive mental health impact and low negative impact. However, more research is needed to acquire a more detailed report on the growth of individual identity in participatory cultures, although this study should be considered as an outline of the basic factors in which fans experience influence: financial, mental, social, and lifestyle.

Keywords: participatory culture, fandom, BTS, fan studies, mental health, brand loyalty, digital identity, community

I. INTRODUCTION

During award season they rack up millions of votes. They have a digital tutoring center, magazines and newsletters, book clubs and fitness groups... that meet through Twitter chats. Voting and streaming accounts collect high followings, with many – such as @btsanalytics or @BTS_National – having more than a million followers. It is a community, populated by dozens of millions of people, and its sociocultural influence is largely dismissed by the research community, leaving its impact undiscovered. This is the BTS fandom, called ARMY.

Fandoms are a collected group of people who follow and communicate over specific topics ranging from books, TV shows, sports teams, music groups, and beyond. Fans have been

cataloged and presented for the prolific impact they can serve to have not only within their fandom but also through other means. They often serve as activists and play a part in political campaigns (Gray, et al, 2017, p. 1). Fandoms, and their fans, fall under the category of participatory culture, which is defined by Henry Jenkins as cultures that meet four requirements: affiliations (community), expressions (producing new creative forms), collaborative problem solving, and have a circulation of media and content.

One of the most prevalent fandoms when it comes to meeting the outlines of participatory culture is the BTS ARMY, a fandom that circulates around the seven-member South Korean music group: BTS. BTS, in Hangul “방탄소년단”, translates to “Bulletproof Boy Scouts”, although they have since changed the English meaning of their name to “Beyond the Scene” (BTS, n.d.). Conversely ARMY, or A.R.M.Y, which in the original Hangul is spelled “아미”, stands for “Adorable Representative M.C. for Youth” (ARMY, n.d.). The association of the English word “army” to the military was taken into account with the naming, as comparisons were drawn between the “bulletproof” members and the military (ARMY, n.d.). As the fandom refers to itself as “ARMY”, rather than “A.R.M.Y.”, and as the same trademark placed by BTS’ company, Big Hit, was placed on “ARMY”, this study will continue to refer to the fandom as ARMY and fans as ARMYs (“Big Hit Entertainment,” 2018). There is also the official ARMY membership, which was previously only open to Korean or Korean-speaking fans on a forum called Daum Fancafe but is now on Weverse as BTS Global Official Fanclub (“BTS Official,” 2019); however, many fans do not have the membership (it is renewable yearly, and costs \$30) and are still active in the fandom. All ARMYs referred to are fans of BTS rather than defined by their involvement in the global official fanclub.

Much of what separates other large fandoms from ARMY has to do with the group, BTS, that they follow. BTS' albums encompass messages about mental health, youth, society, struggles, and more recently, in their "Love Yourself" series, self-love (McLaren & Jin, 2020). BTS also publicly emphasizes and participates in these messages; they conducted a two-year joint campaign with UNICEF called the LOVE MYSELF campaign, as well as partnered with UNICEF on their #ENDviolence campaign (UNICEF, 2019; 'About "LOVE," n.d.). In 2018, at the UN General Assembly, RM, the leader of BTS, spoke, saying: "No matter who you are, where you're from, your skin colour, gender identity: speak yourself."

Members of BTS are also quite philanthropic, and although they don't publicly speak about their donations, news of it often makes its way through the fandom. One member, Jin, joined UNICEF's Honour's Club after a donation topping 100 million won (\$84,000 USD), and after donating for more than a year (Kim, 2019). Other members, such as Jimin, J-Hope, and Suga, have donated similar amounts to varying causes (Kim, 2019). Their philanthropy has often resulted in ARMY responding digitally. When BTS canceled tour dates in South Korea due to health concerns around the coronavirus [COVID-19], ARMYs began a movement to donate their ticket refunds with some even donating in the name of ARMY or BTS (Benjamin, 2020). This followed Suga's 100 million won (\$84,000 USD) donation to a disaster relief organization in his hometown, Daegu, helping residents among the COVID-19 outbreak (Benjamin, 2020). ARMY has reportedly raised over \$330,000 in donations towards the coronavirus (Storey, 2020).

There also is a fan collective called One In An ARMY (OIAA) that seeks out worldwide non-profit and charity organizations and conducts monthly promotions to encourage donations towards each charity's cause ("About Us," n.d). They attribute their work towards their interest in BTS, and a large majority of BTS and ARMY related donations are filtered through them

(“About Us,” n.d). ARMYs also hold fandom-wide fundraisers in honor of [BTS] members’ birthdays, often pertaining to the interests or hobbies of the person at hand, as BTS does not receive gifts and prefers donations to charities instead (“Why Are You Running”, n.d.). In 2019, for RM’s birthday ARMYs donated almost \$10,000 to plant over 1,000 trees as a birthday gift in acknowledgment of his concern towards environmental issues (Ahmed, 2020). Other fundraisers vary from helping to fund centers for children with disabilities, supporting the recovery of survivors who have experienced extreme human cruelty, and building classrooms in Maria Del Carmen (“Archive,” n.d.). OIAA has reported that ARMYs have raised almost a million dollars since they first began tracking contributions and have raised thousands of dollars more in non-monetary donations (One In An ARMY, personal communication, March 12, 2020).

ARMY is one of the largest, if not the largest, fandoms operating currently in terms of social media power. BTS boasts 25 million Twitter followers, and they’ve been #1 at Billboard’s Social 50, a popularity and engagement chart for 178 weeks, for over three years (“Billboard Social,” n.d.). They’ve won the fan-voted Top Social Artist award from Billboard the past three years and hold multiple Guinness World Records for fan engagement, varying from most Twitter engagements overall to most-viewed YouTube music video in 24 hours (Billboard 2019, “List of Records”, n.d.). BTS dominates on Twitter, racking up hundreds of thousands of retweets in minutes, and hold the title for the most retweeted Tweet of 2019: a video of BTS member Jungkook lip synching to Billie Eilish’s “Bad Guy” that received more than a million retweets and is currently the 9th most retweeted Tweets of all time (Rolli, 2019). To gauge the scale of their engagement impact, they’ve been attributed to leading the growth of Hallyu to nearly 90 million fans (Kelley, 2019). In 2018, a study was conducted that determined that BTS contributes 3.4 billion U.S. dollars to the South Korean economy every year, and were the reason

one in every 13 tourists visited the country (“BTS Worth,” 2018). In a two-month tracking of celebrities and their Twitter mentions in 2018, BTS saw over 36 million mentions (Blake, 2018).

And with this engagement comes a great deal of fan dedication, as fans run data-driven accounts like “BTS on Billboard” and “BTS Voting Team” that focus on creating hashtags and beating records (Blake, 2018). The utilization of participatory culture on brand enhancement has been noted in the past (Utami, 2016); however, there is a gap in research concerning the impact that being involved in the BTS ARMY has on the individual, particularly concerning committed participants’ mental health and their community outside the fandom. Thus, the focus of this research is to document commitment in digital participation and its relationship with the individual in the BTS ARMY, presenting the foundations for impact assessment within personal-growth centric participatory cultures.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature concerning boy group fandom is often extremely specified, particularly in the vein of K-Pop, or Korean pop music. It is also largely location-oriented with the whole of the fandom rarely being the focus. Instead, the participation of fans of a certain nationality is investigated. This is seen frequently; for example, see Rinata and Sulih (2019)’s work on fanaticism and social media production in Indonesia, Hübinette (2012)’s research as to Hallyu’s presence in Sweden, or Meza and Han (2014)’s analysis on the prevalence of K-Pop on Twitter in Spanish-speaking countries. K-Pop fans are largely analyzed within a local lens rather than through a widespread analysis. Furthermore, research concerning fans is broadly defined, as content concerning K-Pop fans ranges between fandoms or has a multi-faceted focus. This is the case with Hübinette who investigates fans of Hallyu in an encompassing manner – such as those who enjoy K-Dramas, K-Film, and comics as well as K-Pop – without looking specifically at any particular K-Pop

fandom. This is also the case with McLaren and Jin (2020), who looked at the transcultural nature of K-Pop fandom in Canada and who conducted research on fans of varying K-Pop groups, although focused on BTS fans after their prevalence in their results.

There is also a production-oriented theme in research on Hallyu, K-Pop fandom, and even boy group fans, often leaving a gap when it comes to identify or personal impact outside of an academic or contributory lens. Rinata and Sulih (2019)'s work focused on Indonesian fans' social media usage, and their production of fanfiction and video content. Research done by Korobkova on One Direction fans discussed content creation within a single-fandom community, specifying the sharing of fandom-centric content to the academic world (Korobkova, 2014, p. 24). Korobkova views fandom as creating factors of identity but believes the interrelationships lead to the formulation and display of varying personas instead of significantly affecting an individual's life, thus distinguishing itself from this study's theory that participation in fandom has cross-effects when a fan is living the non-fandom related parts of their life.

In McLaren and Jin's 2020 mixed-methods study on the affective identities of K-Pop fans, they discovered that a significant part of Canadian fan interest towards BTS was because of their message as fans identify with experiences of hardship. In an interview included in their study, a fan references the "positivity and importance" that the message 'Love yourself' from the BTS' "Love Yourself" album series conveyed in her life, citing that it had changed "her perception of herself," thus contributing to identifying the meaning behind ARMY devotion (McLaren & Jin, 2020, p. 119). Yet, no research prevails to establish any distinctive elements of correlation between online influence and the physical lives of the participants. McLaren and Jin's study presents the impact of the message that ARMYs define as having occurred in their lives and on their perception of their own identity; however, there is still a research gap concerning the

different factors and elements of impact and whether ARMYs see crossover influence on their physical environments.

This study seeks to fill this gap by analyzing the quantitative data of the personal responses of individual ARMYs in regards to the impact that they feel their participation in a primarily digital community has on their life. These gaps will be filled through drawing together analysis of highly involved participants and less involved participants. This will serve to provide information on ARMYs concerning the depth of impact that the community has on individual identity and participants' lives.

III. METHOD

In order to properly reach out to ARMYs, a survey was distributed covering the focus of the research, mental health, community, and commitment in the BTS fandom through a BTS fan account within their community on Twitter. It was distributed through a fan account in order to keep the appeal of the survey specific to ARMY, marking the interest population. This also helped to deter people uninvolved in the fandom, as it was only posted within the fandom, and would be difficult to find by outsiders who don't follow the group. It was further spread through ARMY "update accounts", or accounts that spread news about fandom events and accomplishments and that share information about what BTS is publicly doing in addition to planning hashtags. These are all entirely fan-run and sometimes geographically based.

Of the update accounts, 75 were contacted that had following counts above 5,000 people and ranging up to a million. All of the accounts reached out to had their direct messaging open, and the request to retweet, or share the survey, was communicated through private messaging. Update accounts that met the following requirements that did not have open direct messages were not contactable and were not reached out to. All accounts were discovered through

Twitter's search system: when "BTS" was searched, they were the most frequent accounts that loaded and were not label owned.

Eight of these accounts agreed to share the Tweet containing the survey and it generated 978 responses. While most update accounts are non-geographically oriented, 6 of the accounts that shared the survey were location-based, and the survey was distributed to their followers in the Philippines, California, the United States Midwest, and the whole of Europe (including specifically Austria and Italy). The account that it was distributed through the United States Midwest has a following population of largely United States followers as they make up 66% of its followers. In the 75 accounts that were contacted, 31 of them were location-specific, and compiled the outreach attempted to create a near-global outreach on the population in order to be properly representative, with the locations of the update accounts contacted ranging from Guatemala to India.

The survey contained six questions and an informed consent clause. Participants were required by the survey host to attest their consent by clicking "I agree" before they could submit their responses. "BTS ARMY" and "ARMY" were also further clarified as meaning "fans of BTS" and not limited to official BigHit fan club members or the ARMY Membership. This was to discourage any skewing interpretation that may have caused participants that are a part of the fandom but who haven't purchased a fan club or fan cafe membership from BigHit from associating the term as specific to the paid members. No personal information was collected from participants.

The first thing survey takers were asked was to rank their involvement in the BTS ARMY on a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being labeled "Very briefly involved" and 10 "As involved as possible." The goal of requesting this information was to organize results based on

involvement and determine if people who ranked themselves as less involved felt less emotionally or mentally impacted by the community or were less committed. The same was to be investigated with those who declared higher involvement.

The second question asked participants if being an ARMY impacted the way they were choosing to live outside the digital fandom and presented three response options: Yes, sometimes, not at all. The next question, Question 3, used the participation inquiry as a prerequisite, asking fans to select the way(s) in which they are impacted. Multiple answers could be selected. Question 3 had responders select different factors of impact, varying from financial impact to impact on habits and their physical community, and whether it was a positive or negative impact. It also provided the option to select “It impacts me [positively]/[negatively] in another, unlisted way,” allowing responders to communicate unlisted impacts. The first listed option was “I replied no” to keep responders that had previously stated they were not impacted from being forced to select an option that stated they were (thus preventing the skewing of results).

The final three questions return to mental and emotional health, and the impact, if any, that being an ARMY has on the members of the fandom. Question 5 asks ARMYs to rank the fandom’s influence on them in the same manner that they submitted their commitment, on a scale from “It has never [impacted my emotional or mental health]” to “it does on a frequent basis.” Because this question was general and asked only about influence – not whether the influence was positive or negative – the two questions after this specify further. Question 6 asks, specifically, if being a part of the BTS ARMY has a positive impact, and Question 7 asks if it has a negative impact. They were not combined because of the potential that there might be both

positive and negative aspects, and, if so, it was important that participants had the opportunity to indicate that.

Item nonresponse was avoided largely within this study as the host through which the survey was created and distributed, Google Survey, provides an option that requires specific questions to be answered before submission. All of the questions presented in the survey were marked as “required”, and an individual’s response would not be collected if answers had not been selected on all the questions. Nevertheless, three questions – Question 3, 5, and 6 – all had answers that could be selected in terms of an “opt out.” Question 5 and Question 6 had answer options that allowed survey takers to indicate that they were indifferent or not impacted. Question 3 followed up with Question 2 and allowed those who had responded to Question 2 to say that the way they choose to live has not been impacted to indicate that again instead of selecting another result that may have skewed the data.

After submission, because no personal information was collected, it was impossible to determine individual data and remove it. Because of this participants were told that if at any point they declined to answer, they may exit out without previous answers having been saved, but post submission it would not be possible to retrieve and remove individual data and answers.

IV. RESULTS

The responses signified that most ARMYs consider themselves to be extremely involved, as 70.2% of responses rated themselves on the higher end of involvement, falling between 8 and 10 on the scale listed on Question 1. The most frequently selected answer for involvement was 10, as more than 31% of responders, 306 of the 978 responses, classified themselves “as involved as possible.” In order to analyze the impact that being more involved in the fandom has on a person

and the way they're choosing to live outside of the fandom as well as the facets of impact, the results were split into two groups: low involvement (LI) and high involvement (HI). The LI group included responses from participants who ranked themselves between 1 and 5 in involvement, with one being defined as "very briefly involved." There were 97 responses in this grouping. HI participants are participants that fall between 6 and 10. There were 881 responses in the HI grouping. Please note this difference in available graphs; the respondent levels for LI are far lower because they make up less than 10% of surveys received.

How involved are you in the BTS ARMY?

978 responses

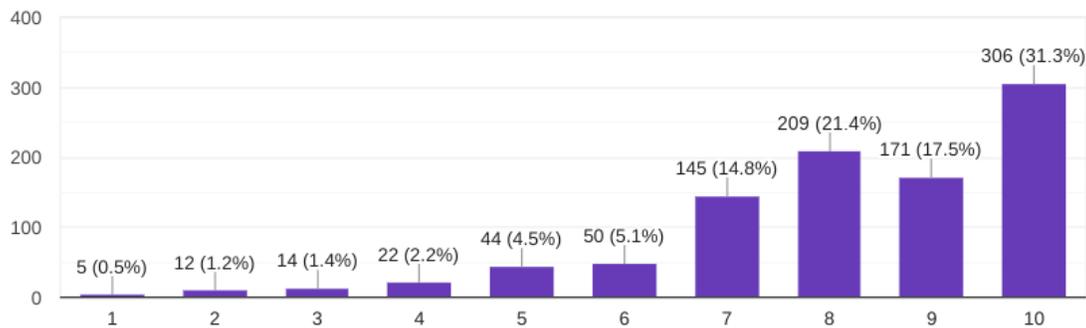


Figure 1: An overwhelming majority of ARMYs that responded ranked their involvement “as involved as possible,” with those that did making up the highest number of responses, marking the fandom as a whole as incredibly participatory. Out of all the responses, ARMYs that rated themselves the highest pertaining to involvement, or the top half of HI (8 through 10), made up 70.2% of all survey takers.

HI participants indicated that being a part of the BTS ARMY impacts the way they choose to live outside of the fandom far more than the LI group did as 65.6% of HI indicated that being an ARMY has changed the way they're choosing to live outside of the fandom in Question

2. Another 30.8% said that they are sometimes impacted, and only 3.5% of HI said that their participation doesn't have an impact on their physical community. LI was far less decisive as 50% of the responders selected that they were "sometimes" impacted, and 40% said that they were definitively by selecting "yes." Only 10% of LI answered "no," being an ARMY hasn't changed or impacted the way they are choosing to live outside the fandom.

LI participants expressed that the fandom "doesn't impact [them]" more than HI participants, as the first answer option for Question 3 was selected by 12% of the LI population, compared to being selected only 3.7% of the time by HI participants. Returning to item nonresponse, only 2 responses out of the 978 total "opted out" of this question and answered "I replied no[, I'm not impacted]" after saying that they were, in some way, impacted in Question 2, making nonresponse for this question statistically insignificant. LI responses to Question 3 also suggest that LI participants experience half the amount of negative impact on habits compared to HI participants: 3% to HI's 6%. Both groups showed similar trends in financial influence with HI having a 5% lead above LI in financial impact (28% compared to 33% in impact on them), and LI reported more unlisted negative impact than HI did: 2.7% to 6%.

Both groups had similar demographics concerning the positive impact on habits and unlisted positive impact, but HI reported higher percentages. In LI, 54.6% of responders indicated that being a part of the BTS ARMY positively impacts their habits, and 64% said they were positively impacted in an unlisted way. In HI, 73% of survey takers selected that the fandom positively impacts their habits, and 71.2% that it positively impacts them in an unlisted way. HI also said that they were more involved in their physical community because of the BTS ARMY with 25% of the HI participants indicating this and 14% of the LI participants. LI indicated less involvement in their physical community due to being a part of ARMY than HI

did, despite HI being more involved in the fandom, as the less involved response was selected by 6% of LI respondents and only 4.7% of HI.

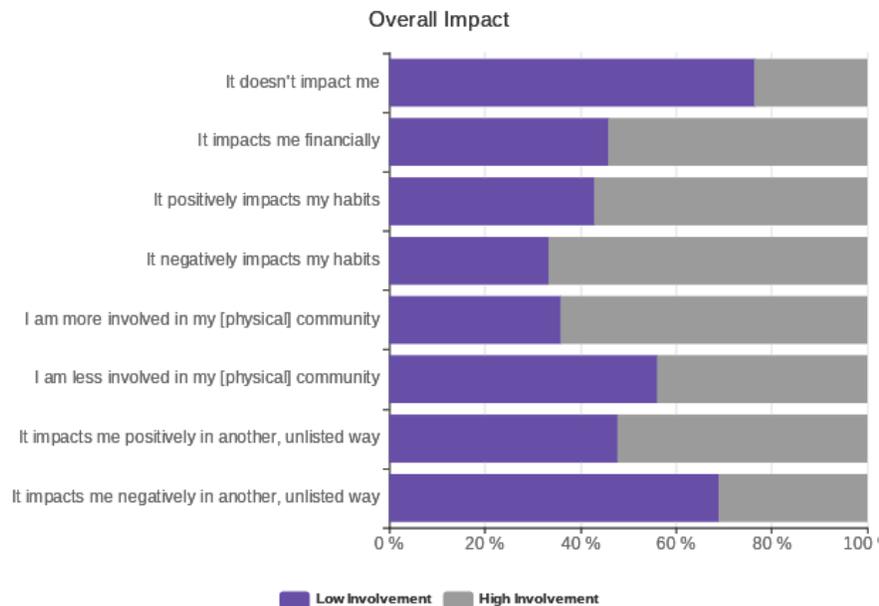


Figure 2: This displays responses to Question 3 with LI being presented as purple and HI as grey. They have been compared here by the percentages that make up the results for each one of the groups, rather than group size, so that they can be compared more clearly.

Both HI and LI returned high responses to Question 4 where they were able to mark on a scale how much their emotional or mental health had been impacted in any way at all by being an ARMY, but LI had far more variation in the answers. In HI, 90.3% of responses were firmly at the top half of the influence scale (from 7 to 10), indicating that the survey takers in HI have their mental and emotional state influenced frequently. All the other responses for HI for Question 4 amounted to only 9.7%. In LI there were still highs at the upper end of the scale with 8 receiving the most responses (22.7%) and its runner-up 10 also only making up 21.7% of answers. The remaining 55.6% of LI responses was distributed among the rest of the options

varying drastically from HI where the vast majority of participants labeled themselves as being influenced emotionally or mentally on a frequent basis with very few responses on the lower end.

HI reported a higher positive impact on mental health than LI did with 79.2% of HI participants selecting that they are positively impacted on Question 5. In LI, 63.9% said they were positively impacted. In both groups the lowest percentage of responses selected that they weren't positively impacted: for HI it was only 1%, and with LI it was 6.2%. Comparatively, in Question 6, both groups reported extremely low negative impact, as only 2.6% of HI said that yes, they are negatively impacted by their involvement, and 4.12% of LI. In LI, 69% of survey takers said that no, they aren't negatively impacted, and in HI 74% selected the same. In both of these questions, more participants in LI indicated that they were indifferent, thus opting out of answering, with 6.2% of LI in Question 5 not answering and the same amount in Question 6. Contrarily, HI had a higher answering percentage rate, as only 1% indicated indifference in Question 5 and 2.6% in Question 6. Both HI and LI held clear majorities in the answers to both the positive and negative impact questions: that they are positively impacted and not negatively impacted.

V. DISCUSSION

In separating the data into two separate groups, it was clear the differences that HI and LI indicated in their responses. HI had higher positivity results pertaining to the fandom and their involvement and reported lower negativity across questions. They experienced a higher positive impact on habits than LI – although also were 3% higher in documenting the negative impact on habits than LI – and were more involved in their physical communities as well as more financially involved and positively impacted in other unlisted ways. They also signified that they experience an impact on their life outside of the fandom and that their mental health is positively

influenced. LI had similar results on a lower scale. They too demonstrated financial impact and had high numbers of positive impact on habits, community involvement, and unlisted, positive ways. However, LI had lower high-end numbers compared to HI, and responses were spread more continuously across answer scales than HI where graphs show that answers to the questions are often grouped together. This is seen in the responses of Figure 11 and the more distributed responses on Figure 12.

Therefore, the results suggest that deeper involvement impacts individual mental health and living styles as participants expressed different levels of fandom impact on their physical lives such as financial impact, influence on involvement in their community, and impact on their mental health. While the prevalence of this impact varied between HI and LI, likely due to their difference in participation, there is a correlational trend between involvement in HI and the high positive impacts that their results show. LI also seems to have experienced a degree of positive impact on community and on their mental health despite being less involved. Both groups indicated very low levels of negative impact. This suggests that being a committed member in the participatory fandom of the BTS ARMY impacts mental health and lifestyle decisions (community and finances) in varying positive and negative ways, although predominantly positively.

VI. LIMITATIONS

In distributing the survey and collecting results, a main goal was to get a representative population. Unfortunately – as there is no way to define what a representative population within the fandom is due to its magnitude and fluctuation in the mediascape – the results may or not be realistically representative on a global scale. However, for all intents and purposes, effort was taken to reach as international a population as possible as can be seen by the accounts that were

contacted and contributed to distributing the survey. This study was further limited through its method of distribution as fans were able to select that they had unlisted impacts that varied both positively and negatively but were not able to answer neutrally (other than on questions that provided a scaling option) nor was there a free response option.

VII. IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Nevertheless, this study and its research demonstrates the impact that being an ARMY has on the individual. It shows the different elements of lifestyle and mental growth that may occur in involvement with it, and that a majority of ARMY – despite how they rank their involvement – indicated that they have experienced. Through this research a gap is also filled: the fandom impact of the BTS ARMY and its transference to the physical lives of its participants. This is separate from physical, fandom-oriented events and instead concerning their day-to-day lives when they are not interacting with other ARMYs and BTS, but rather their physical community. This research and its methods can be used in the future to continue to track the effect that BTS and personal-growth centric artists have on fans, and to identify subdivisions of factors in participatory cultures and the ways that they engage, which leads to more positive communication. It also provides the means for examination of the different elements of community and participatory bonds in high-performing and engaged fandom, and how they contribute to individual growth and self-concept. As a directive, the factors discussed in this study can be considered as an outline through which fans experience influence from the participatory culture that they engage in, varying from financial impact to mental, social, and lifestyle-oriented [in this study, concerning habits]. This would allow future researchers to build a more detailed report of the growth of individual identity in the BTS ARMY.

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Appendix A: Informed Consent and Survey

Mental Health, Community, and Commitment in the Participatory Fandom of the BTS ARMY

Thank you for taking the time to participate in my research! My goal in conducting this survey is to determine the impact that being involved in the BTS ARMY has on emotional health, lifestyle decisions, and community participation.

Before you begin the survey, I'd like to state that participating in this survey is completely voluntary. If at any point you decline to answer, you may exit out of the page without your previous answers having been saved.

Within this survey, when referring to the BTS ARMY or ARMY, please be aware that the definition is "fans of BTS" and not limited to official BigHit fan club members.

This research will be included in a senior capstone for a Virginia student. Thank you so much!

* Required

By clicking "I Agree" you are attesting that you have read and understood the information above and freely give consent/assent to participate. *

I agree

How involved are you in the BTS ARMY? *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Very briefly involved As involved as possible

Has being an ARMY charged or impacted the way you are choosing to live outside of the digital fandom? *

- Yes
- Sometimes
- Not at all

If you said yes to the previous question, in what ways are you impacted? Please check all that apply. *

- I replied no
- It impacts me financially
- It positively impacts my habits
- It negatively impacts my habits
- I am more involved in my [physical] community
- I am less involved in my [physical] community
- It impacts me positively in another, unlisted way
- It impacts me negatively in another, unlisted way

Has being a part of the BTS ARMY impacted your emotional or mental health in any way, positively or negatively? *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

It has never It does on a frequent basis

Does being a part of the BTS ARMY positively impact your mental health? *

- I am indifferent / this doesn't impact me
- Yes
- Somewhat
- No

Does being a part of the BTS ARMY negatively impact your mental health? *

- I am indifferent / this doesn't impact me
- Yes
- Somewhat
- No

Appendix B: Graphs of Survey Results

Figure 1

How involved are you in the BTS ARMY?

978 responses

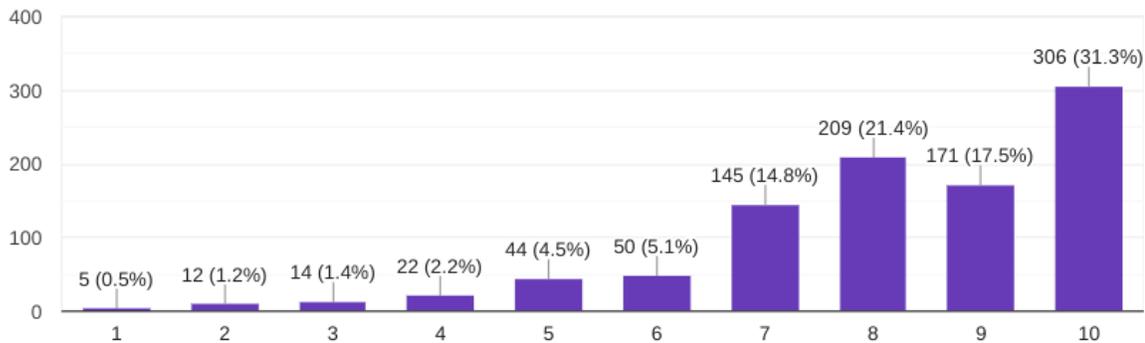


Figure 2 (Pertains to Question 3)

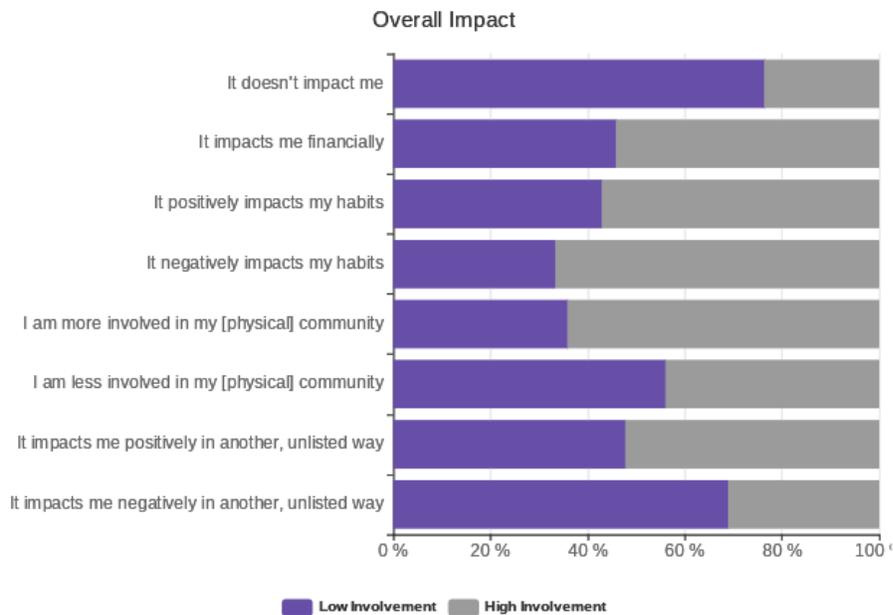


Figure 3 (Pertains to Question 3)

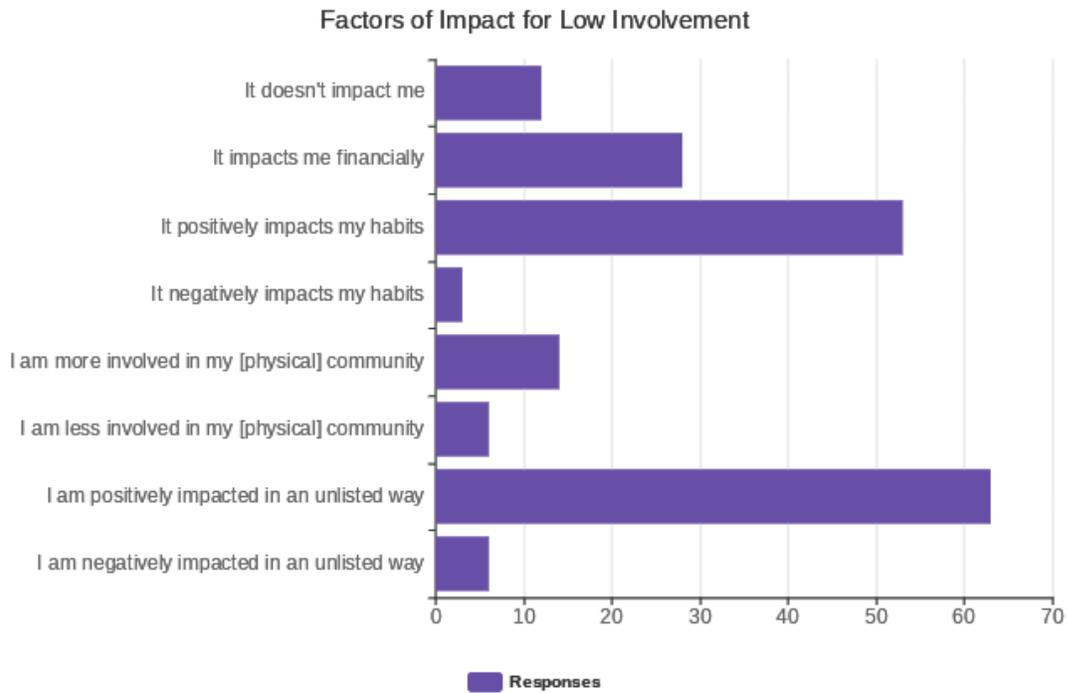


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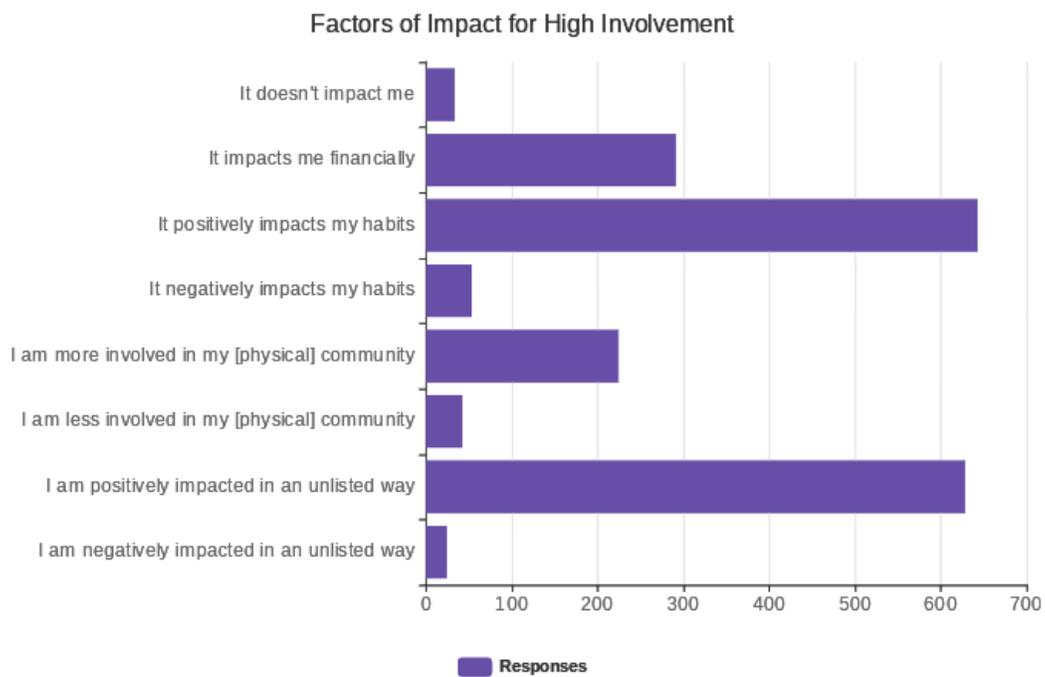


Figure 5 (Pertains to Question 3)

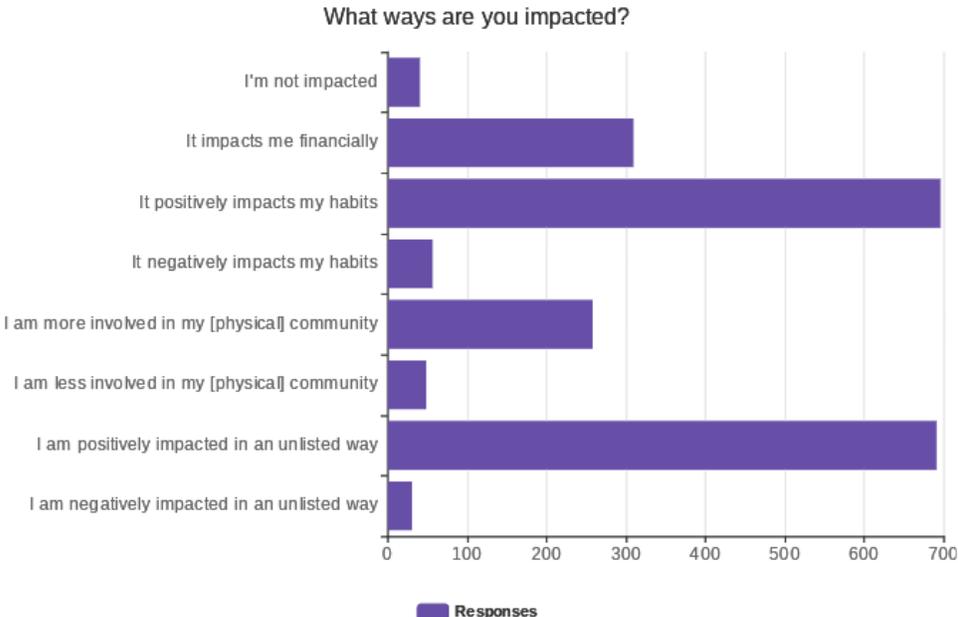


Figure 6 (Pertains to Question 2)

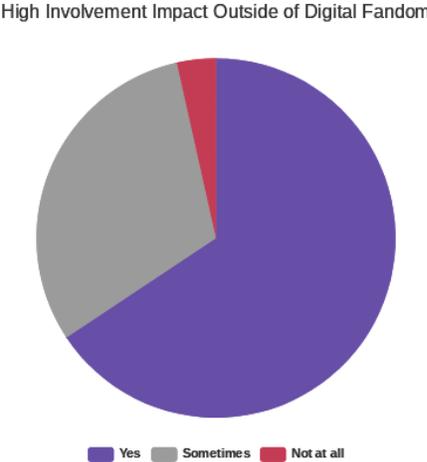


Figure 7 (Pertains to

Low Involvement Impact Outside of Digital Fandom

Question 2)

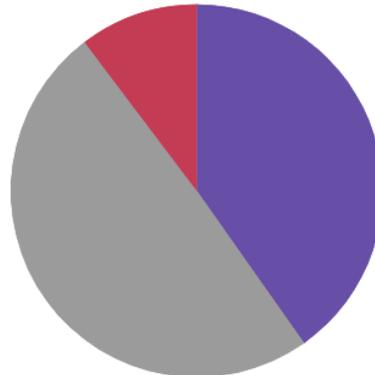


Figure 8 (Pertains to

Low Involvement Positive Impact on Mental Health

Question 5)

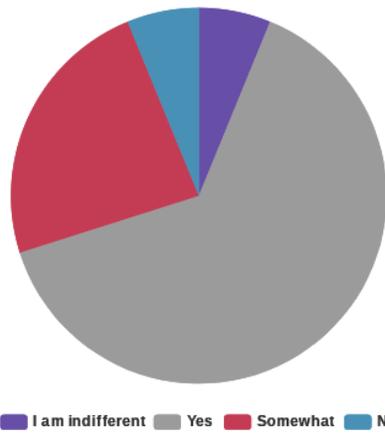


Figure 9 (Pertains to Question 5)

High Involvement Positive Impact on Mental Health

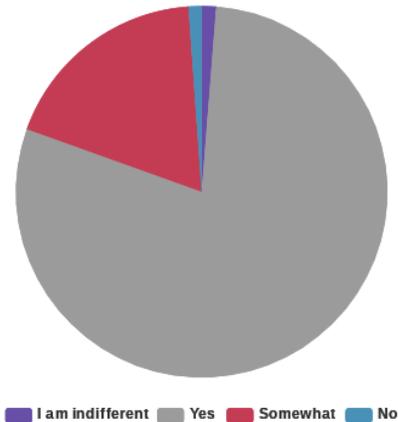


Figure 10 (Pertains to Question 6)

Low Involvement Negative Impact on Mental Health

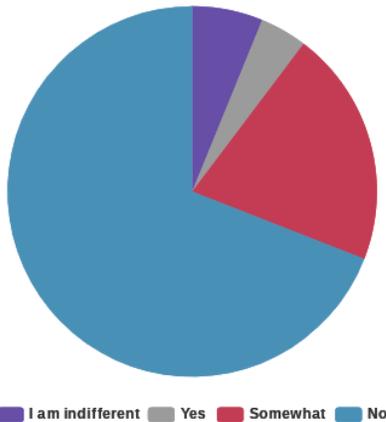


Figure 11 (Pertains to Question 6)

High Involvement Negative Impact on Mental Health

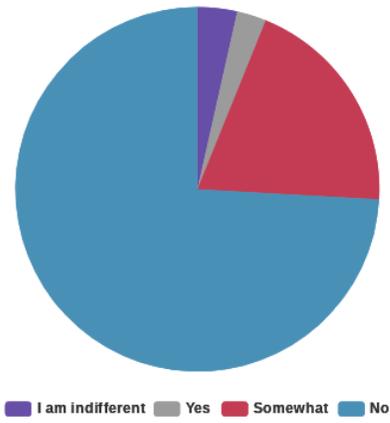


Figure 12 (Pertains to Question 4)

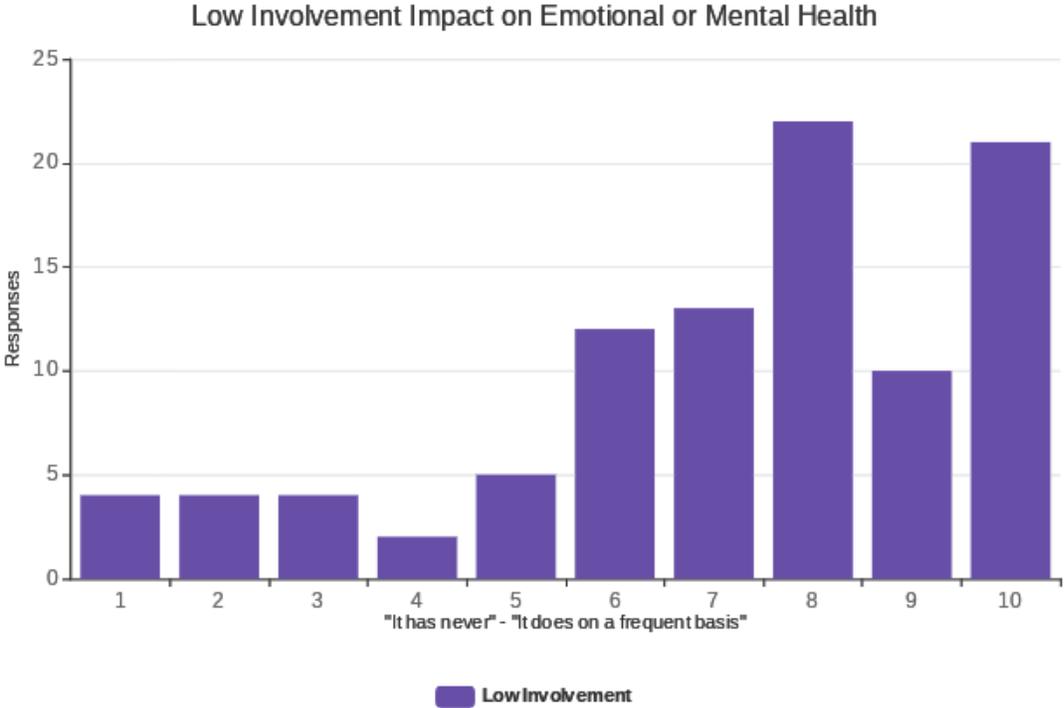


Figure 13 (Pertains to Question 4)

