

The Role of Weverse Social Media In Building BTS Boygroup Fans' Loyalty

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Abstract

Keywords:

Weverse, Social Media, BTS, Fan Loyalty

This study aims to analyze the role of Weverse's social media in building fan loyalty to the BTS boy group. Weverse is a digital community platform that allows direct interaction between artists and fans through various features such as comments, chat, live streaming, as well as access to exclusive content and official merchandise purchases. This research uses a qualitative approach with phenomenological methods. Data was collected through indirect interviews in the form of an open-ended questionnaire disseminated through Google Forms, which was designed to allow respondents to deliver narrative answers based on their personal experiences. The research subjects consisted of five members of the ARMY fandom who were active in using the Weverse platform. The results show that the real-time interaction and live streaming features in Weverse are able to form parasocial relationships that strengthen fans' emotional attachment. In addition, access to exclusive content and ease of transactions on the Weverse Shop also encourage loyal behaviors such as repurchases, cross-purchases, and recommendations to other users. This loyalty is reflected in the consistency of fans in following BTS's activities on Weverse even though other alternative platforms are available. This research confirms that Weverse not only serves as a communication medium, but also as an effective strategy in strengthening fan loyalty and consumption behavior through immersive emotional experiences.

INTRODUCTION

Social media has become an inseparable part of human social life in the 21st century. Its development allows interaction and exchange of information between individuals and groups to take place more easily, quickly, and globally. Through social media, users can exchange information, share activities, access photos, videos, and various other content only with an internet network. This phenomenon shows how rapid the development of social media is, which is marked by the emergence of various platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter (X), LINE, Weverse and so on. The presence of these platforms not only facilitates communication and social interaction without having to meet face to face, but also significantly changes the way humans communicate, obtain information, and participate in digital life.

In addition to being a means of communication and social interaction, social media has also developed into a very effective digital marketing tool. Digital marketing strategies allow companies to build more personal relationships with consumers, increase engagement, and drive long-term loyalty through immersive digital experiences. Platforms such as Weverse are concrete examples of how digitalization can be utilized to create a community-based loyalty ecosystem. Weverse's success in building emotional connections and driving consumer behavior among BTS fans shows that a similar approach can be adopted by other brands. For example, fashion,

cosmetics, or even FMCG (fast moving consumer goods) brands can develop their own digital community platforms to provide exclusive content, priority access to new products, and two-way interaction facilities between brand ambassadors and consumers. This can increase engagement, create emotional value, and build customer loyalty in a sustainable manner. Therefore, this study is not only relevant to the entertainment industry, but also provides strategic insights for various business sectors in implementing community-based and experience-based digital marketing.

Weverse is a digital community launched by HYBE Labels on July 1, 2019. (Adityarani & Sinduwiatmo, 2024). Weverse itself is very different from other social media platforms because this platform was officially produced to present content and direct interaction with Kpop idols. (Hirwiza & Lubis, 2023). This is done with the aim of providing up-to-date information about idols and under direct supervision by the company regarding valid information and activities that will be carried out by the idol. One of the groups that actively utilizes the Weverse platform is BTS (Bangtan Sonyeondan), a boy group from South Korea that has become a global phenomenon. In 2025, the number of BTS fans on Weverse reached 27.9 million members. This shows that Weverse has become one of the popular social media platforms among fans. BTS was formed on June 13, 2013, which has seven members, namely Kim Namjoon (RM) as Leader and Rapper, Kim Seokjin (Jin) as Visual and Vocal line, Min Yoongi (Suga) as Rapper, Jung Hoseok (J-Hope) as Rapper and Main Dancer, Park Jimin (Jimin) as Lead Vocal and Dancer, Kim Taehyung (V) acts as a vocalist and dancer, while Jeon Jungkook is the main vocalist and dancer in the BTS group.

BTS itself is known as a boy group from South Korea that is currently very popular. BTS's global popularity cannot be separated from the role of social media, which has helped them win various national and international awards thanks to the wide support from fans on various digital platforms. (Lynch, 2022). Their success is also greatly influenced by the role of ARMY, the name for their fans which is an abbreviation of Adorable Representative MC for Youth. ARMY is spread across various countries, and the number of BTS fans is also reflected in the publication on the official website of Census BTS ARMY 2020.

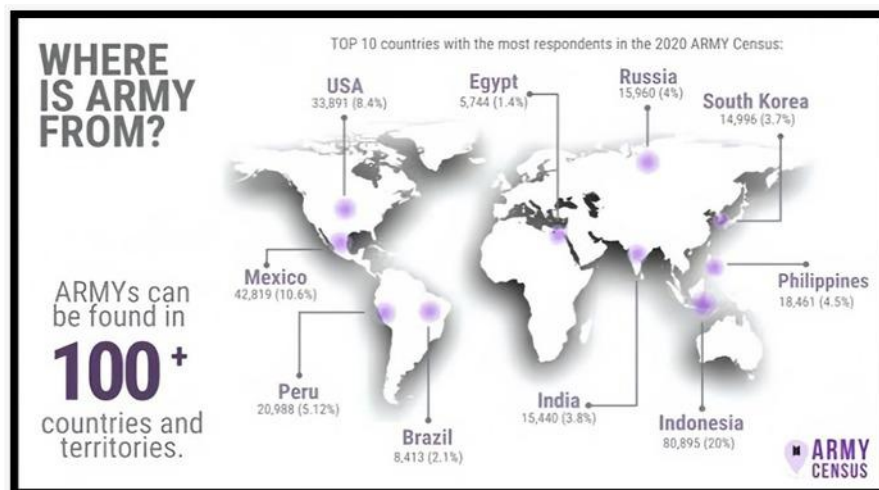


Figure 1. The Countries with the Most BTS Fans in 2020

Source: BTS ARMY Census, 2020

The 2020 BTS ARMY Census research report shows that out of the top ten countries, Indonesia is the first country with the most BTS fans, namely 20% or 80,985 fans. Then the next country is Mexico with 10.6%, the United States 8.4%, Peru 5.12%, the Philippines 4.5%, Russia

4%, India 3.8%, South Korea 3.7%, Egypt 1.4%, and the last country is Saudi Arabia with 1.42%. ARMY can be found in more than 100 countries and regions. This shows that BTS fans, namely ARMY around the world, are very large.

Weverse provides a number of features designed to make it easier for fans to access information related to their idols. One of them is the hide from artist feature that displays daily activity updates from the idols they follow. Through this platform, idols can interact with fans through video uploads, photos and comment columns. Not only that, Weverse is also equipped with a translation feature that helps fans understand messages from their idols even though they speak different languages.(Sitorus & Fakhur Rozi, 2023). Weverse also presents entertainment content such as video variety shows, games, and others that can be accessed through free and paid services. Fans must buy a membership to get exclusive services. By joining as a member, fans will have various benefits, namely the opportunity to buy presale concert tickets, get special photo/video updates, can buy fankit members, get membership cards, and so on.

실적요약 - 2023년 2분기

매출액 2023년 2분기 6,210억원 : 전년 동기 대비 +21.2%, 전분기 대비 +51.2%
영업이익 2023년 2분기 813억원 : 전년 동기 대비 -7.9%, 전분기 대비 +54.9%

(단위 : 백만원)

	2022 Q2	2023 Q1	2023 Q2	증감률	
				YoY	QoQ
매출액	512,218	410,635	620,990	21.2%	51.2%
직접 참여형	325,883	234,490	436,446	33.9%	86.1%
앨범	210,890	184,288	245,890	16.6%	33.4%
공연	84,959	25,229	157,512	85.4%	524.3%
광고, 출연료, 예니자먼트	30,033	24,973	33,044	10.0%	32.3%
간접 참여형	186,335	176,144	184,545	-1.0%	4.8%
MD 및 라이선싱	98,783	68,920	111,907	13.3%	62.4%
콘텐츠	70,693	87,253	50,818	-28.1%	-41.6%
팬클럽 등	16,858	19,971	21,819	29.4%	9.3%
영업비용	423,907	358,123	539,651	27.3%	50.7%
영업이익	88,310	52,512	81,340	-7.9%	54.9%
영업이익률(%)	17.2%	12.8%	13.1%	-4.1%p	+0.3%p
Adjusted EBITDA*	107,625	72,082	106,368	-1.2%	47.6%
Adjusted EBITDA rate(%)	21.0%	17.6%	17.1%	-3.9%p	-0.4%p
당기순이익	98,929	23,023	117,403	18.7%	409.9%

* Adjusted EBITDA : EBITDA+차량연료비, EBITDA에 사용권장상장비는 가산되지 않음
HYBE BUSINESS PRESENTS

Picture1. Weverse Membership Revenue in Q2 2023

Source: HYBE Earning Report 2023

Based on the financial statement data of HYBE Q2 Earnings Report 2023, weverse membership users increased as seen from the revenue results for the second quarter of 2023, revealing that the fan club originating from the weverse application grew 29.4% year-on-year to 21.81 KRW (\$16.15 million). The increase in membership users is based on the purchasing decision of weverse users to buy memberships whose price is a consideration. One of the superior features of Weverse is the Weverse shop, which allows fans to buy official merchandise from artists who are members of this platform.(Minzheong, 2021). The products sold in the weverse shop are very diverse, ranging from merchandise such as stickers, tumblers, bracelets, key chains, to exclusive collectibles such as photocards, CD or DVD albums, books, and decoration kits. Through the weverse shop, fans have direct access to buy original and quality products without having to worry about the authenticity of the goods.

Boygroup BTS often live streams on Weverse to interact directly and share information about new albums, tour itineraries, and daily activities. BTS interacts by answering questions and comments from fans during live streaming. BTS uses this platform to build their branding, by promoting their work and building relationships with fans all over the world. By building and maintaining strong relationships with fans through Weverse, boygroup BTS has succeeded in

creating fanatical fans, fans show a high level of loyalty such as extreme support. (Hidayat & Rahmat, 2024). One real manifestation of the high loyalty of fans is their tendency to buy various merchandise products released by HYBE, the company that houses the boy group BTS. The support shown by fans for the boy group BTS is often seen in the purchase of merchandise, ranging from lightsticks, albums, to limited edition products sold on Weverse Shop. Fans show an extraordinary level of loyalty by not only buying products regularly, but also in ways that are often considered extreme, such as buying in large quantities or following the release of merchandise with high enthusiasm. These products not only have functional value as collectibles, but also become a symbol of their recognition and love for the boy group BTS. This extreme support not only benefits the boy group BTS, but also contributes to HYBE's success as a global entertainment company.

Previous research has confirmed that one of Weverse's main strengths is its ability to build interactive and parasocial relationships between artists and fans, which significantly increases fans' emotional engagement. (Hidayat & Rahmat, 2024), (Indriani & Kusuma, 2022) examined the social interactions of ARMY fandom on Weverse and found that fans use the platform to interact more closely with BTS and fellow fans, as well as to obtain information that is not available on other social media. However, although this emotional connection has been widely discussed, there is limited research examining how this interaction affects fan loyalty, especially in terms of their decisions to purchase products or subscribe to exclusive services on Weverse. Furthermore, there is no research that explores fans' motivations for spending money to gain exclusive access and how this relates to their consumption behavior. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring the relationship between emotional engagement, fan loyalty, and BTS fans' consumption behavior on Weverse.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach. Sugiyono (2010) explains that a qualitative approach is called a naturalistic research method because it is used to examine scientific conditions. Qualitative research methods are based on postpositivism by viewing a phenomenon as something that can be classified, measured, and observed. The method that will be used is phenomenological, which is a type of qualitative research that sees and hears clearly and in detail related to the explanation and understanding of individuals based on their experiences. The purpose of phenomenological research is to explain the experiences experienced by someone in life including interactions with people in the surrounding environment. Phenomenological research prioritizes finding, understanding and expressing phenomena. The data sources for this study are primary data and secondary data. The primary data used in this study with data collection techniques in the form of indirect interviews with the objects studied. By determining the subject of this study, the researcher used the Purposive Sampling technique. The Purposive Sampling technique is a sampling technique from data sources based on certain considerations related to the phenomenon

being studied. By using the purposive sampling technique, the researcher will select respondents who can produce a stronger understanding of the topic with accurate results. Interviews were conducted with five respondents who met the criteria for respondents in this study, namely BTS fans (ARMY) who use the Weverse platform. Female respondents are aged 17-29 years, using the Weverse platform for at least 6 months. Have or are currently subscribing to army membership, have a BTS collection or merchandise, know the usefulness of the features provided by Weverse, actively comment and send posts to BTS members. Secondary data is data or information that already exists and is collected to complete the data needs of the study. Secondary data is not obtained directly but is obtained through documents, literature, documentation, and previous research articles. To collect data, researchers use data collection techniques, namely interviews, documentation and literature studies. In this study, qualitative data analysis techniques use the Miles and Huberman model, namely data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions.

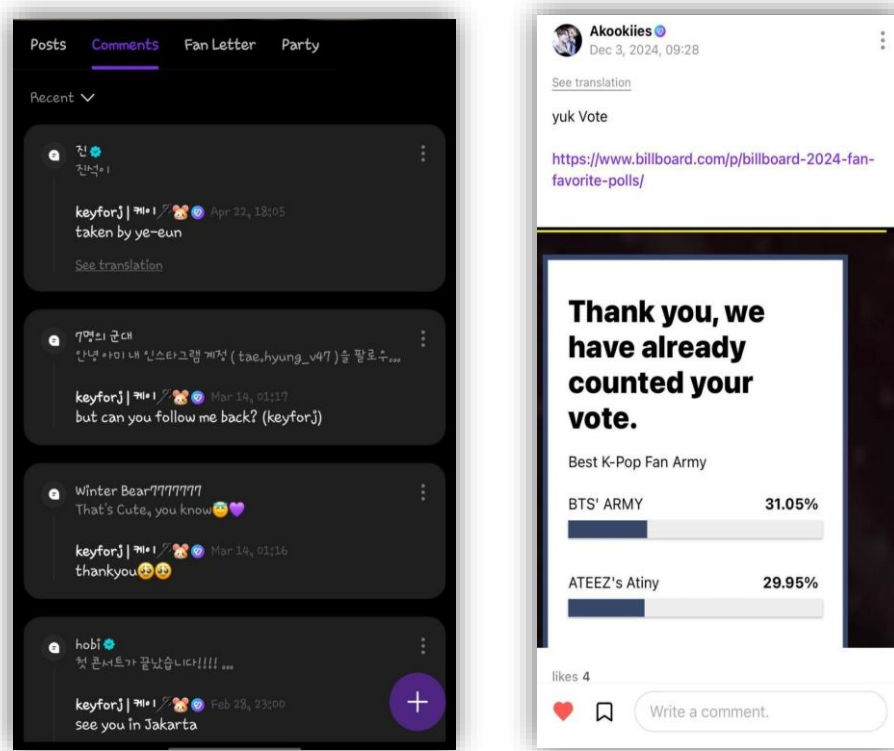
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to analyze the role of Weverse social media in building fan loyalty, especially in the ARMY community (BTS fans). Data were obtained through in-depth interviews with five respondents who actively use Weverse. The results of the study are presented based on the established variable indicators. Most informants use Weverse because they want to get closer to BTS and get information directly from the artist.

1. Direct Interaction

Based on the interview results, all respondents stated that the direct interaction features on Weverse such as comments, chat, and live streaming make it easier for them to communicate with BTS in real-time. Respondent 1 stated, “My experience was very pleasant because I felt closer to BTS. Through chat and comments I can convey my support directly and see their responses (HM).” This is in line with the research (Indriyani & Herlina, 2021) that live interaction is a real-time, two-way communication that increases fan engagement.

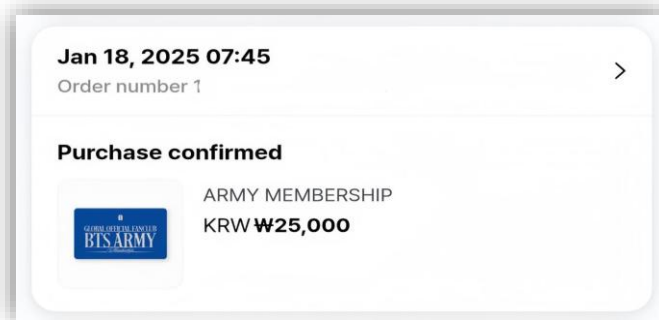
Respondent 5 added, “Weverse is really fun, besides being able to interact with BTS members, you can also interact with fellow ARMYs so you can know each other’s activities” (KA). This explains that interactions do not only occur between fans and BTS, but also between fellow ARMY fans, which strengthens community solidarity. This statement supports the findings (Ciek Julyati Hisyam et al., 2024) which emphasizes Weverse's role as a means of interaction between fans to work together to build strong bonds.



Picture 3. ARMY's interaction with BTS and fellow fans on Weverse
Source: Respondents

2. Exclusive Content

The majority of respondents admitted that access to exclusive content such as BTS photos, videos, and personal posts that are only available through subscription or purchase increases their closeness to their idols. This is in line with respondent 3 who stated, "I feel that exclusive content makes my relationship with BTS feel more special. Even though I have to pay, I feel that the content is valuable and strengthens the sense of closeness because I can access things that not everyone can see (S)."



Picture4. Official proof of purchase of ARMY Membership
Source: Respondents

However, there are differences of opinion, where respondent 2 thinks that exclusive content does not really affect closeness because BTS's activities can also be seen on other platforms. Respondent 5 said "Actually, there are also many ARMYs who are willing to spread paid content for free on other public platforms so it's not really that exclusive (KA)." which means

that many fans share exclusive content for free on other platforms so that the exclusivity value is reduced.

3. Live Streaming

All respondents agreed that the live streaming feature on Weverse has an important role in building emotional closeness with BTS, "Yes, I think live streaming on Weverse increases my closeness with BTS. When they go live it feels like they are chatting directly with us as fans." Even though they can't reply directly, they often read comments from ARMY and their responses make me feel happy (HM)."

This statement strengthens the research(Darmawati, 2024) This reveals that the parasocial relationship between ARMY and BTS fans is formed through intense interaction on the Weverse platform, especially through live streaming sessions, so that they can interact directly and in real time, allowing fans to ask questions, send comments, and receive direct responses from BTS members. This kind of interaction creates the impression of a two-way relationship and strengthens the emotional bond between the two.

However, respondent 5 expressed complaints regarding the convenience of use, "Yes, but now the ads are quite annoying and the translation is now paid, you have to subscribe, especially for languages that are not common in the world, for example Indonesian (KA)." This complaint shows that the presence of advertisements and changes in the translation feature policy which is now paid are factors that reduce the convenience of enjoying live streaming, especially for users who need translations in Indonesian. This situation is an important note for Weverse platform managers to reconsider their service strategy in order to improve user experience.



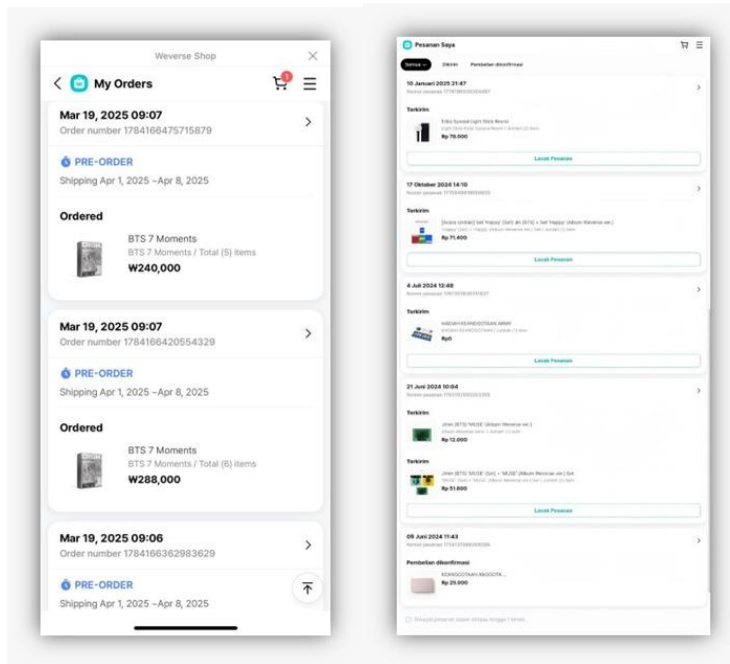
Picture5. ARMY and BTS's Closeness Through Live Streaming on Weverse

Source: Respondents

4. Repurchase

All respondents admitted to having repurchased BTS products on Weverse. The decision to repurchase was based on satisfaction with the quality of the product and previous transaction experiences. Respondent 4 added that repurchasing was also a form of support for BTS. "Yes, I have repurchased several times because the quality of the previous product made me not hesitate to buy again on the same platform (E)." This statement is in line with the definition expressed

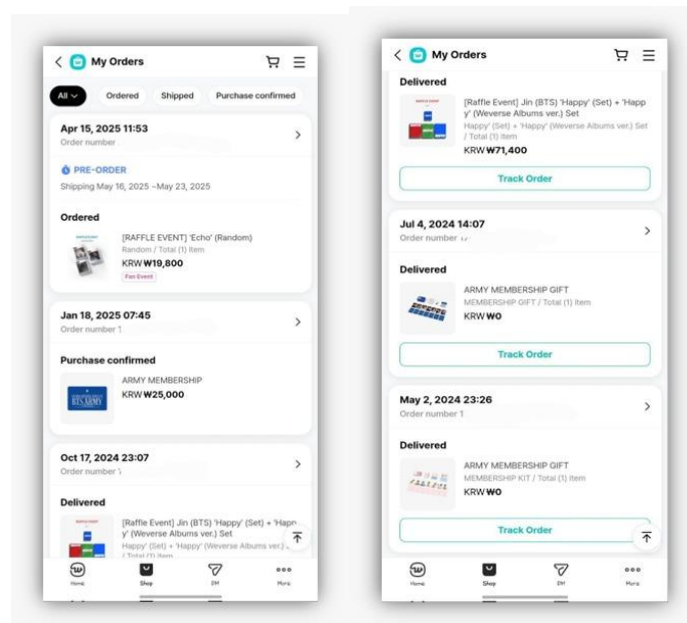
by(Ekaprana & Jatra, 2020)which states that the intention to repurchase is influenced by the level of consumer satisfaction with the products they previously purchased.



Picture6. ARMY Loyalty in Repurchasing BTS Products
Source: Respondents

5. Cross Purchase

All respondents were known to buy various types of BTS products on Weverse, not limited to just one type of product. The main reasons that drove them to make these various purchases were the existence of special benefits or bonuses such as Pre Order Benefit (POB), guarantee of product authenticity, and the desire to provide comprehensive support to BTS. As expressed by Respondent 2, "Yes, I still choose the Weverse platform for transactions because the content/products are guaranteed to be authentic. Not infrequently I also get interesting benefits or bonuses (G)." This finding is in line with the theory put forward by(Jill Griffin, 2015)that loyal customers tend to make cross-buys as a form of trust and long-term commitment to a brand.



Picture7. Cross-Purchase Proof by ARMY

Source: Respondents

6. Recommend Products

The majority of respondents admitted to having recommended Weverse to friends, family, or fellow ARMY because they were satisfied and trusted the platform. Respondent 2 said, "Yes, I recommend it to friends because the activities informed through Weverse are reliable, such as information on music releases, activities, Festa, tour information, albums, and other merchandise (G)." Meanwhile, Respondent 5 stated, "Yes, I recommend Weverse, but not only specifically to BTS fans, but to all fans whose idols are on Weverse. If asked the reason why, it's just so that Weverse is seen more by other K-poppers (KA)."

This statement reflects the variation in the level of satisfaction and motivation in providing recommendations. However, in general, the act of recommending a platform shows a high level of loyalty. This is in line with the findings in the study (Nurdin & Abidin, 2023) which states that the quality of recommendation systems in e-commerce can increase customer loyalty through mediating user trust.

7. Fan Loyalty

All five respondents expressed their commitment to continue following BTS's activities through Weverse consistently in the future, even though other platforms are available. Respondent 4 emphasized, "Yes, as long as BTS is still part of the Weverse platform, the platform is still interesting for me to follow (E)." This statement reflects a strong affective loyalty to the Weverse platform. This finding is in line with research by (Amoroso & Ackaradejruangsri, 2024) which shows that brand commitment is an important factor in forming customer loyalty and the intention to continue using digital services consistently.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussion of this study, it can be concluded that Weverse social media has an important role in building fan loyalty towards BTS. Direct interaction features such as comments, chat, and live streaming on Weverse provide an opportunity for fans to communicate in real-time with BTS, which strengthens emotional relationships and strengthens solidarity among fellow ARMYs. In addition, access to exclusive content, although there are some differing opinions regarding its exclusivity value, still provides a more immersive experience for fans. Live streaming is also a key feature that deepens the parasocial relationship between BTS and fans, although complaints about paid advertising and translation indicate that ease of use still needs to be considered. In addition, repeat purchases of BTS products on Weverse are one indicator of fan loyalty, where satisfaction with the product and previous shopping experience encourages fans to buy more products, even buying various types of products as a form of full support for BTS. This loyalty is also reflected in the tendency of fans to recommend Weverse to others, both fellow BTS fans and other K-pop fans. Fan loyalty to continue following BTS's activities on Weverse, despite the existence of other alternative platforms, reflects their long-term commitment to BTS

and Weverse. Overall, Weverse not only serves as a communication platform, but also as a means to strengthen fans' loyalty, engagement, and support for BTS in the long term.

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