

Analysis of the Influence of BTS on K-pop

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Abstract: Over the past decade, the global music industry has witnessed a remarkable surge in the popularity of Korean pop (K-pop), with the South Korean boy band Bangtan Sonyeondan (BTS) emerging as one of the leading forces behind this phenomenon. This paper aims to analyze BTS's impact on K-pop worldwide by examining various statistical indicators, such as album sales, social media engagement, and global music charts. Firstly, the work delves into BTS's album sales, production value, and consumption stimulus, which serve as a tangible marker of their global influence. By analyzing data from the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI) and Billboard, it becomes evident that BTS consistently dominates album sales, breaking numerous records and crossing cultural boundaries. Their abilities to connect with diverse audiences worldwide showcases their unrivaled impact on K-pop's expansion. Furthermore, this work explores the power of impacts on culture in amplifying BTS's influence. By examining data from platforms like National Gukak Research Institute, also including analysis on value transmission and cross-culture communication, it becomes evident that BTS boasts an enormous online presence. Moreover, the band's ability to captivate fans globally and the role as cultural ambassador for K-pop are demonstrated. In conclusion, this paper provides compelling evidence of BTS's profound impact on K-pop worldwide. Through their exceptional album sales, impressive social media engagement, and groundbreaking chart achievements, BTS has successfully elevated the genre's global presence, paving the way for wider recognition and acceptance of K-pop in the music industry.

Keywords: K-pop, BTS, music industry, statistics, culture

1. Introduction

The popular music style known as K-pop was developed in South Korea in the early 1990s. The genre has gained a massive following globally, with its unique blend of catchy melodies, intricate choreography, and visually stunning music videos. Over the years, K-pop has evolved to encompass a wide range of musical styles, including hip-hop, R&B, electronic direct marketing (EDM), and so on.

BTS is a seven-member boy band that debuted in 2013 under Big Hit Entertainment [1]. Since then, they have become one of the biggest names in the K-pop industry, breaking numerous records and achieving unprecedented success both in Korea and internationally. BTS has won multiple

awards, including Billboard Music Awards, American Music Awards, and MTV Europe Music Awards, and has been named one of Time magazine's "100 most influential people" twice.

Hip-hop, pop, and R&B are all elements of BTS's music style, and their lyrics frequently touch on social topics including mental health, self-love, and societal pressures [2]. Their music has resonated with fans all over the world, and they have been praised for their ability to connect with their audience on a personal level. Besides, BTS has also been recognized for their innovative approach to the music industry. On social medias like Twitter, Instagram, and Weverse, they have millions of followers and a significant social media presence. They have also released a mobile game, a webtoon series, and a documentary series, among other projects, to engage with their fans and create a unique brand identity.

Given BTS's success and influence in the K-pop industry, this paper aims to determine the extent to which BTS has influenced the popularity of K-pop, as measured by various metrics such as album sales, concert attendance, and social media engagement. Through this work, BTS's role in shaping the K-pop industry and its future trajectory can be better understood.

2. Influence on K-pop

BTS has been credited with diversifying the sound of K-pop by blending various genres, including hip-hop, R&B, EDM, and rock, with their own unique style. This has influenced other K-pop groups to experiment with different musical styles. Their emphasis on storytelling and introspective lyrics has set a trend in the industry, encouraging artists to explore deeper and more personal themes in their music. BTS's use of complex choreography and synchronized performances has become a hallmark of K-pop, inspiring other groups to incorporate intricate dance routines into their performances.

In 2018, BTS's album "Love Yourself: Answer" became the first K-pop album to reach number one on the Billboard 200 chart, staying on the chart for multiple weeks. BTS's "Love Yourself" world tour, which began in 2018, sold out stadiums and arenas across the globe. The tour was one of the highest-grossing tours of that year with a total revenue of approximately \$196 million.

According to the Korea Creative Content Agency, the export value of K-pop music reached \$496 million in 2019, with BTS being a major contributor to this growth. BTS's music videos have achieved record-breaking views on YouTube. Their music video for "Boy with Luv" featuring Halsey garnered over 74.6 million views within 24 hours of its release, breaking the platform's record at the time.

Given above, BTS has significantly impacted the K-pop industry by expanding its global reach and appeal, resulting in a surge in international fans, album sales, concert tours, and merchandise sales, thereby boosting the overall economic growth of the industry. Culturally, BTS has broken barriers and challenged societal norms, promoting self-love, mental health awareness, and social issues through their music, leading to an increase in diversity and acceptance within the K-pop community.

3. Influence on the Economy

According to an academic report, BTS generated 481.3 billion won (135.5 billion won in Busan and 345.8 billion won in Seoul) in economic benefits from their "Fifth Magic Shop" concerts in June 2019 alone. Busan and Seoul accounted for 1.6 percent and 0.9 percent of 2018 gross domestic product (GDP), respectively.

In this section, it aims to analyze the economic influence of BTS, focusing on their album sales, production value, and consumption stimulus they generate.

3.1. Album Sales

BTS's album sales are a direct measure of their economic impact. Each album sold generates revenue for the group, their management company Big Hit Entertainment, and the broader music industry, including distributors and retailers. BTS debuted in 2013 and has since released several albums that have achieved significant commercial success. Their 2016 album "Wings" was their first to sell over one million copies in South Korea. They have since surpassed this milestone with several other albums, including "Love Yourself: Answer" (2018), "Map of the Soul: Persona" (2019), and "Map of the Soul: 7" (2020), all of which sold millions of copies worldwide [3].

Their album sales have not only generated substantial revenue for their management company, Big Hit Entertainment, but also contributed to the broader music industry. For example, the success of BTS has boosted the global profile of K-pop, leading to increased interest in other K-pop artists and groups. This has been termed the "BTS effect".

3.2. Production Value

BTS also invests heavily in the production of their albums and merchandise. Their albums often include photobooks, posters, and other extras, which add value for fans and justify higher prices. Their merchandise includes clothing, accessories, and collectibles, is also of high quality and generates significant sales.

In December 2018, the Hyundai Research Institute (HRI) published a report highlighting the significant economic impact of BTS on South Korea. The study estimated that BTS generates approximately 4 trillion won (\$3.54 billion) as economic value to the country annually, with an added value of 1.42 trillion won (\$1.26 billion) per year [4]. This contribution to South Korea's GDP was found to be comparable to that of Korean Air, according to Statista's analysis of 2018 company revenues.

An updated report in 2019 revealed that BTS's overall economic effect on South Korea amounted to 5.56 trillion won per year, equivalent to around \$4.9 billion. This achievement is particularly noteworthy as no other Korean artist has previously generated such a substantial economic impact in the country. Notably, renowned Korean artist PSY's song "Gangnam Style" contributed an economic value of 1 trillion won, while actor Bae Yong Joon's drama "Winter Sonata" brought about an economic value of approximately 3 trillion won (\$2.72 billion) during their respective peaks [5]. While, BTS surpassed those records.

The HRI also estimated that BTS's economic impact over a ten-year period might reach a staggering 56.2 trillion won (\$49.8 billion), outpacing the 41.6 trillion won economic impact of the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympics. Additionally, the institute predicted that BTS may generate an economic value of 41.8 trillion won during the 2014-2023 period.

Moreover, an academic report highlighted the specific economic effect of BTS's "BTS 5th Muster (Magic Shop)" concerts held in Busan and Seoul in June 2019. These concerts alone contributed 481.3 billion won to the economy (135.5 billion won from the Busan concert and 345.8 billion won from the Seoul concert). In terms of the respective cities' GDP in 2018, this amounted to 1.6% for Busan and 0.9% for Seoul.

3.3. Consumption Stimulus

The number of foreign visitors to South Korea climbed by 15.1% in 2018, according to the Korea Tourism Organization, with a notable surge in travelers from nations where BTS is well-known [6].

The "BTS Tourism Effect" has also been observed in specific locations mentioned in BTS songs or visited by the members. For example, the city of Busan saw a 95% increase in foreign tourists after BTS mentioned it in their song "Spring Day".

BTS members' everyday style and endorsement have influenced the fashion industry. Brands like Gucci, Louis Vuitton, and Fila have collaborated with BTS on exclusive merchandise and collections.

The "BTS Makeup Effect" has also been observed, with beauty brands experiencing a surge in sales of products used by the members. For instance, the Korean skincare brand Mediheal saw a 1,000% increase in sales of their sheet masks after collaborating with BTS.

The band's documentary film, "Burn the Stage: The Movie", grossed over \$18.5 million worldwide, becoming the highest-grossing global event cinema release at the time. BTS's online presence is also noteworthy. They are one of the most followed accounts on social media platforms like Twitter and Instagram, with millions of followers. Their impact on social media has led to the term "ARMY" (their fandom) being recognized as a powerful online community.

BTS actively engages in philanthropy and social issues. In 2020, they donated \$1 million to the Black Lives Matter movement, matching the donation made by their fans within 24 hours. Their partnership with UNICEF for the "Love Myself" campaign, aimed at ending violence against children and teenagers, has raised millions of dollars [7]. The campaign also inspired fans to launch their own charitable initiatives.

BTS has utilized various marketing tools to connect with their fans and create a strong sense of community. One of their most successful tools is their fan engagement through social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and V Live. The band regularly interacts with their fans, known as the ARMY, through live broadcasts, behind-the-scenes content, and personal updates. This level of engagement has fostered a deep connection between BTS and their fans. BTS has also utilized strategic partnerships and collaborations to expand their reach. For example, they have collaborated with global brands like Coca-Cola, Hyundai, and Samsung, leveraging their popularity to promote products and create brand synergy.

4. Influence on the Culture

Aspects of cultural export, value transfer, intercultural dialogue, and global influence have all been significantly impacted by BTS.

4.1. Cultural Export

BTS has been recognized as one of South Korea's most successful cultural exports. Their music and performances have introduced Korean pop culture, known as K-pop, to a global audience.

Firstly, BTS's success has led to an increased interest in learning the Korean language and Korean culture among their fans worldwide. Korean language learning apps and programs have reported a surge in downloads and enrollments. The World Economic Forum (WEF), an international forum attended by world leaders including business leaders, politicians and economists, has produced a special report on BTS and globalization. The reason for BTS' global success is that American culture is the world's main "global" culture (English becomes the global language), while Korean doesn't even make it into the top 10 most spoken languages in the world, which makes their success all the more surprising [8]. BTS introduced Korean culture and language to the world through music and ideas.

Secondly, according to the National Gukak Research Institute, the demand and interest for Gukak is also increasing, and more than 50 types of Gukak have been introduced so far. This is because BTS performed the worldwide hit "IDOL" live at the 2018 Melon Music Awards, which blended traditional Korean music and attracted audiences at home and abroad.

The Korean language group, Korean People, selected BTS as the "Best Korean Language Promoter of the Year 2018" in recognition of their efforts to promote and improve the Korean language worldwide.

4.2. Value Transmission

BTS is known for promoting messages of self-love, acceptance, and mental health awareness through their music and lyrics. Their positive and empowering messages resonate with fans globally [9].

The band's emphasis on authenticity and individuality has inspired their fans to embrace their true selves and overcome societal pressures. This value transmission has had a positive impact on their fanbase, known as the ARMY.

4.3. Cross-Cultural Communication

BTS actively engages in cross-cultural communication by incorporating elements from various cultures in their music and performances. They blend genres like hip-hop, R&B, and EDM with traditional Korean sounds. Their collaborations with international artists, such as Halsey, Steve Aoki, and Ed Sheeran, have facilitated cross-cultural exchange and introduced K-pop to new audiences [10].

Moreover, BTS's use of social media platforms, particularly Twitter and V Live, allows them to directly communicate with fans worldwide, breaking down language and cultural barriers.

5. Conclusion

It is evident that BTS has had a significant impact on K-pop worldwide, not only in terms of music but also on the economy and culture.

From a statistical standpoint, BTS's remarkable album sales, social media engagement, and chart achievements have solidified their position as global influencers. These indicators demonstrate their ability to transcend borders and connect with diverse audiences worldwide.

Moreover, BTS's impact extends beyond the music industry. Economically, their success has contributed to the growth of the K-pop industry, generating significant revenue through album sales, concert tours, and merchandise. Their dedicated fanbase, known as the ARMY, has also stimulated tourism as fans flock to South Korea and attend their concerts, boosting the economy.

Culturally, BTS has become a cultural phenomenon, breaking stereotypes and promoting inclusivity, diversity, and self-love. Through their music and philanthropic efforts, they have instigated meaningful conversations on mental health and social issues, influencing their fans and shaping pop culture worldwide.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this research. The analysis primarily relies on publicly available data, which may not capture the full extent of BTS's impact on the economy and culture. Future research should incorporate more comprehensive methodologies, including interviews and surveys, to gain a deeper understanding of the intricacies of their influence.

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