

How music fans shape commercial music services: a case study of BTS and ARMY

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Introduction

We investigate the music group BTS and its fan community, ARMY, as a case study to better understand how music fans interact with commercial music services. This work aims to fill the gap in prior MIR user research by:

- 1) Investigating the contextual factors that influence users' engagement with music services
- 2) Attending more closely to music fans as an important subset of users

Research Questions

- What does the case of BTS and ARMY tell us about the current landscape of music fans, specifically related to how they interact with commercial music services?
- What are the implications for designing and providing commercial music services for these fans?

Study Design and Method

A multimethod approach employing virtual ethnography and content analysis to explore ARMYs' activities and social interactions in online environments (various social media including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Reddit, TikTok, YouTube, Daum BTS fan café, Vlive, and Weverse).

Data collected from social media threads were qualitatively examined and coded into categories representing prominent themes identified in the observation phase, taking a deductive approach.

DURATION
APR ▶ **MAR**
13, 2019 20, 2020

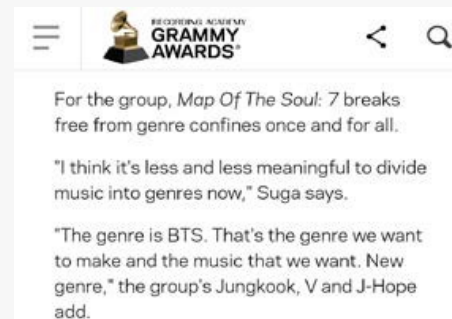
DATA FROM @bts_twt
3,195
tweets

DISCUSSION THREADS FROM r/Bangtan WITH KEYWORDS SUCH AS:
#genre #radioplay #streaming
#donation #award #grammy

Findings and Design Implications

Perception of music genres

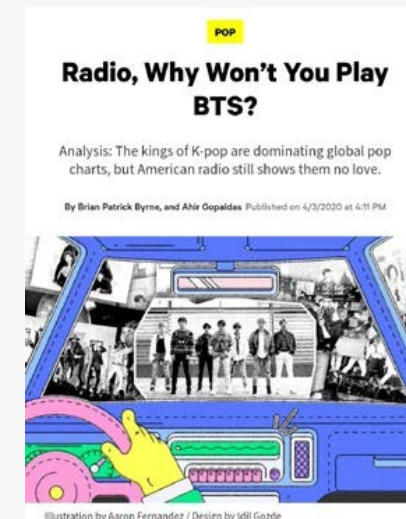
Kpop music is known for its hybridity embodying a fusion of multiple music styles. This is becoming more prevalent in the music industry in general, fueled by increasing global collaboration among musicians and producers around the world.



Design implication: Think of alternative means to show the connections of music, such as faceted or network-based approaches, rather than relying on music genres, especially genres represented in a hierarchical structure.

Desire for agency and transparency

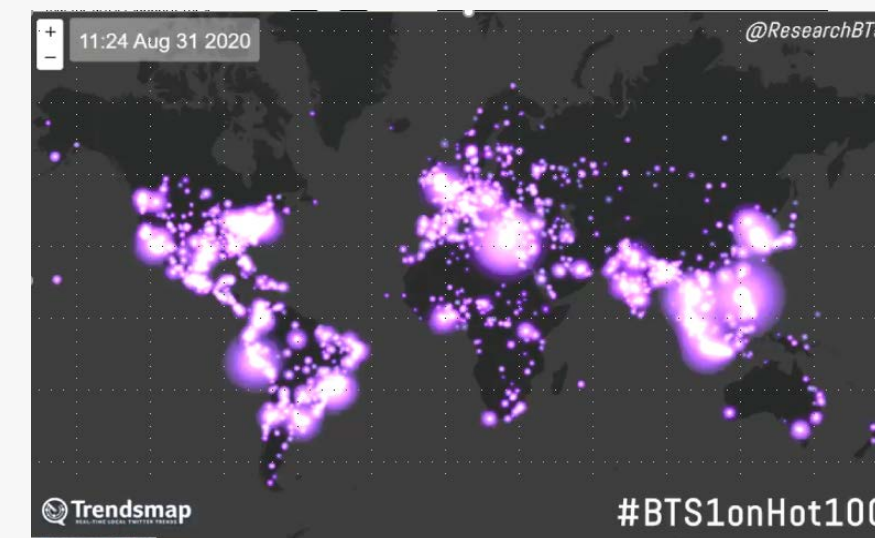
Fans' strong desire for more agency is a critical reason why certain streaming services have become increasingly relevant and supported by users. Many fans opt to use music streaming services where they believe they have more control over how they interact with music as opposed to radio where gatekeepers decide what to play. Transparency is also extremely important for fans, and they will ask for "receipts" showing how the usage and popularity are measured in commercial music services.



Design implication: Recognize that users want more agency and provide transparency in how usage and popularity are measured, when possible.

Participatory fandom

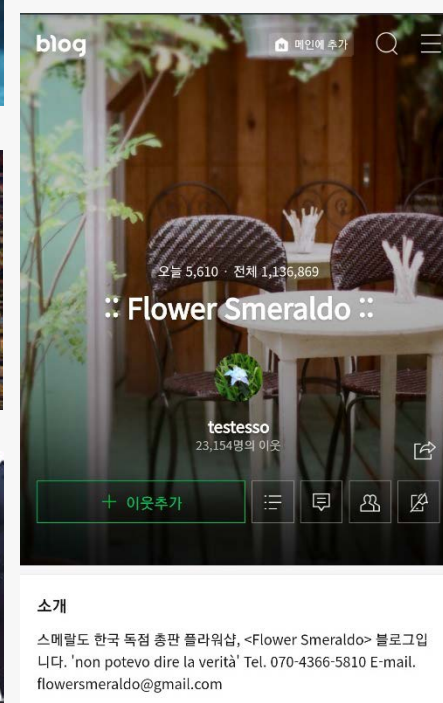
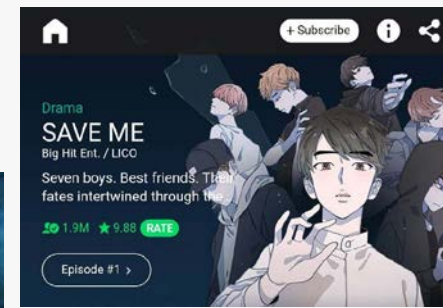
Fans engage in a wide variety of activities beyond listening and enjoying music, such as interacting with artists and other fans through social media and offline events. Many fans donate a significant amount of time and resources to helping other fans or supporting causes that the artists support. These organized movements are for strategically supporting the artist, and in some cases, also to express discontent and disapproval of outdated and unjust customs and systems, like management of music awards.



Design implication: Consider ways to promote artist and fan interactions in a two-way communication model (e.g., fan-suggested playlist to artist) and features that can support fan activities to achieve group goals (e.g., gifting music streaming codes).

Importance of non-musical factors

To understand the whole narrative created by BTS, fans have to not only listen to the music, but also connect clues in MVs, printed books, and webtoons containing episodes from the fictional universe. These non-musical contents enrich the fans' music listening experience by helping them better understand the creator's intent behind the music.



Design implication: Consider incorporating more visual and non-musical content into music streaming services, along with metadata pointing to related works, to promote fans' engagement.

