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Construction Of The Symbolic Reality Of The K-Pop Community On Twitter

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Abstract

This study aimed to find a symbolic interaction model for the BTS fanbase through exchanging messages in fan community themes that create group awareness and produce feelings of togetherness. The research was conducted through a qualitative method, a virtual ethnographic approach. The research subjects are fanbase accounts that actively provide various information on Twitter. The object is fanbase account posts that lead to the dramatization of BTS content. Data was obtained through observation of selected accounts and Focus Group Discussion with ARMY. The criteria for selecting informants are 1) an active account uploading information related to BTS; 2) accounts that ARMYs follow have at least 50,000 followers; 3) the account gets a lot of interaction, comments, retweets, or quote retweets; 4) The selected ARMY is a Twitter account that has been following the selected account and have contact with that account. The study results show that the building of the ARMY community on Twitter is on constructing a shared symbolic reality. The forms are visual videos, photos, wordplay or combination of these. ARMY utilizes fantasy themes to interact with fellow ARMYs to build closeness and a solid sense of kinship. This study also provides an overview of the model for constructing ARMY's symbolic reality on Twitter.

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INTRODUCTION

The development of love for Korean culture (Korean Wave) or Hallyu is increasingly attracting attention. In Indonesia, the Korean Wave phenomenon began to be felt in 2002 when the Korean drama serial entitled Endless Love (Autumn in My Heart). After that, it continued to develop until in 2009, it began to penetrate the field of music with the emergence of Korean Pop, or K-Pop, in the form of boy

bands and girl groups (Anwar, 2018; Jeong & Lee, 2017; Mandas et al., 2019) K-Pop itself does not only represent music but also introduces culture through hairstyles, clothing, or costumes (Nastiti., 2010)

The large number of K-Pop groups then gave rise to various fans or fans who were widespread throughout the world. Then fans or fans who have the same interest in one idol will join a community known as fandom or fan kingdom (Taqwin, 2016).

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Hollow (Eliani et al., 2018) interprets fandom as a term used to mean various things and activities related to fan activities and hobbies. Forums or particular communities (fandoms) are used for mutual sharing. These fans play an essential role in the success of idols, where there is a tendency to follow their idols' latest musical developments and activities (Fajariyani, 2018)

The rapid development of K-Pop is also inseparable from the development and sophistication of technology which is accompanied by the integration of the internet network in the life of the world community. With the support of digital technology integrated with the internet network, this opens up great opportunities for fans or fans to be able to participate, interact, and communicate through communities on social media.

Activities from fans can be found on various social media platforms because social media plays an essential role in communication, namely as an effective means of communication (Pramesthi, 2021). Fans in a community can exchange ideas through social media without being limited by space, distance, or time.

Talking about the activities of the K-Pop fan community on social media, of course, this cannot be separated from Twitter. Twitter is among the most popular

online social media applications, ranking the 2nd largest globally (Haffner, 2020). Allows Twitter users to upload short messages or "tweets" with a maximum of 140 characters in text, photos, videos, or audio (Hadna, 2016).

Social networking sites like Twitter make it easy for fans to carry out various activities. Twitter has revolutionized news consumption, allowing users to get and share information instantly and with users worldwide. These users also have the power to dictate which events are more newsworthy than others (Santero, 2016).

One of the K-Pop fan communities in the world's spotlight is the fans of the prevalent boyband group BTS. BTS fans are known as Adorable Representative MC for Youth (ARMY). ARMY communicates and interacts through personal accounts as well as large-scale fan accounts. This fan account actively uploads the latest information about BTS, streaming guides on various platforms that are correct for fans, guides on voting, various projects or movements related to members and related ARMY, translating Korean into various languages that make it easier for ARMY to understand posts uploaded by BTS members, agencies, as well as news from various media, also translate BTS songs into various languages. From the ARMY fan community on Twitter, many movements have emerged related to

the political, economic, cultural, health, and social fields that have caught the world's attention. Is reflected in the results of Park et al.'s research in 2021, which raised the issue of ARMY's collaboration in the Black Lives Matter movement by sharing messages via Twitter with the hashtag #MatchAMillion, which managed to raise 1 million USD (Park et al., 2021).

When the admin or manager of a personal account or fanbase communicates and interacts with their followers, both when uploading videos, photos, text messages, and using unusual languages—the line with Borman's symbolic convergence theory. Convergence or convergence is related to how the personal symbolic worlds of two or more individuals meet each other, approach one another, and even overlap. At the same time, the term symbolic refers to the human tendency to provide explanations and give meaning to various symbols, signs, events experienced, or even actions carried out by humans. This reality is created through communication. When groups share common symbols, communication becomes more accessible and efficient (Suryadi, 2010).

This research needs to be done considering that communication that dramatizes messages through wordplay or sentences, pictures, and others is intended to arouse enthusiasm and satisfaction in

interacting with ARMY. Dramatization is part of ARMY's fantasy theme on Twitter as well as the commodification of the media content in it. A dramatization in every personal upload or fanbase account manager or admin creates a fantasy chain that can make ARMY more cohesive or interrelated. ARMY is becoming more solid, with various fantasy themes exchanging meanings and values. The centralized meaning that occurs through this fantasy exchange creates a symbolic reality. Symbolic reality is formed from individual interpretations of symbols uploaded by ARMY community accounts on Twitter. Even some content has created new meanings and becomes a new culture for ARMY fans through social construction from the virtual world to the real world (real life).

The rise of K-Pop fans or fans on Twitter has made fans devote themselves to actively interacting and seeking to share information, which causes fans to have their own fantasies about the reality obtained through these fanbase accounts. So it is not surprising that the K-pop fandom has been labeled with negative stereotypes attached to its fans all this time. K-pop fans are considered to be excessive, obsessive, hysterical, crazy, addictive, and consumptive (Nastiti., 2010). Many studies have been conducted with a focus on discussing people who are fans to the point

of having an excessive obsession known as celebrity worship (CW) or worship of celebrities (Brooks, 2021). The worship also has several levels, starting from the lowest level (entertainment-social), moderate level (intense-personal), to a high level (borderline-pathological) (Maltby et al., 2006).

Judging from various things related to the ins and outs of K-Pop fans using Twitter accounts in fangirling activities, the results of research conducted by Yuniasti and Kusumastuti in 2021 regarding the use of the Twitter account @ARMYTEAMIID as a medium of communication between BTS or ARMY fans proved to be very effective according to the needs needed by the fans (Yuniasti, 2021). Meanwhile, several researchers have previously studied the symbolic convergence that occurs in the community, such as research on gamer groups conducted (Kurniatmastria, 2021) with an auto-ethnographic approach, with results showing that fantasy forms of symbolic convergence in gamer groups are role-playing, jokes, and speech codes. Then research (Imarshan, 2021) regarding the Pageant Lover community shows that symbolic convergence in the Indonesian Pageant Lovers community on Instagram occurs through a process of fantasy themes, fantasy chains, fantasy types, and rhetorical visions. If Imarshan's research found four

concepts of fantasy analysis (Oro et al., 2020) examined the Silky Band Kupang community, the results showed only three of the four concepts of fantasy theme analysis: fantasy themes, fantasy chains, and fantasy types. In contrast, research (Elsakina, 2016) on the Stand Up Indo Pekanbaru community produced findings related to forming fantasy themes in symbolic convergence, namely in symbolic cues. Indriani and Prasanti also researched symbolic convergence in the WhatsApp social media community, with findings in the form of a theme that was formed was awareness of the Covid-19 virus, with a chat culture shown in groups consisting of four categories, namely, use of everyday language, stickers facilitated by the application, screenshots of images from other websites, as well as mixed languages between Indonesian and English (Indriani & Prasanti, 2020). Another study (Mutiaz, 2019) regarding the formation of symbolic convergence of influencers on Instagram found that celebrities build interactions with their fans using fantasy themes to produce togetherness, closeness, meaning, motives, and feelings together as a result of the construction of shared symbolic reality.

So far, there have been many studies related to K-Pop fandom. Unfortunately, these various studies only discuss psychology, and most use celebrity worship theory. It is the first time anyone has

researched the construction of symbolic reality with a symbolic convergence theory approach through virtual ethnography in communities on social media Twitter. The difference between this study and previous symbolic convergence researchers is in the subjects and objects of research, where the study is usually a small community. Meanwhile, in this study, the online community that was examined was on a larger scale, with several ARMY fan accounts on Twitter on a global scale. The purpose of this research is to analyze the interaction and arrangement of fantasy themes in the symbolic reality construction process produced jointly by ARMYs who actively interact with each other in the Twitter fanbase through exchanging messages in the form of fantasy themes that create group awareness, generate motives, the meaning and feeling of togetherness with fellow ARMY. The novelty of this research is trying to find a symbolic reality construction model in the ARMY fanbase community on Twitter.

METHODS

Methodology

To solve a problem, this study uses a virtual ethnographic approach. The virtual ethnography that is carried out is micro ethnography, namely in the form of a single social situation. Virtual ethnography is

carried out by joining fanbase accounts that are the subject of research so that they can be directly involved and know for sure the process of constructing the symbolic reality that occurs.

Research references are also tied to the Fantasy Theme Analysis (FTA). To operationalize this theory, the researcher first understands the dramatization of messages or fantasy themes that build motivation among ARMY in communicating and interacting through the fan base on Twitter. The next step is to analyze the fantasy chain formed from the increased conversation intensity (likes, comments, retweets, and quote tweets). This is followed by analyzing the fantasy type to determine the narrative framework of the repetition of ARMY's fantasy theme. Moreover, the last step is to analyze the rhetorical vision, which is related to the fantasy theme that has developed and expanded beyond the ARMY community or group to become the fantasy of the wider community.

The subjects of this study were account owners and followers of the ARMY fan community on Twitter. The object of this research is posts from selected fan accounts, whether in the form of narration, videos, or photos, that lead to dramatizing content related to BTS. The required data is collected through virtual observation.

Observations were made to see the ARMY's discussions or conversations and to obtain information from archived photos, videos, and articles related to the ARMY's symbolic reality construction on the fans of the Twitter account. The researcher also directly followed the account for more than one year, from the beginning of 2022 to July 2023, to observe what messages or content were discussed by the ARMY. Symbolic convergence theory is relevant in this study to recognize the various developed themes and how chain themes are formed through interactions that discuss information related to BTS.

The data is also equipped with a Focus Group Discussion (FGD), which involves several ARMYs who are followers of the account under study. The selection of informants to be involved in the FGD was carried out through a purposive sampling technique. The criteria for selecting the informants were 1) an active account uploading information related to BTS; 2) accounts that ARMYs follow have at least 50,000 followers; 3) the account gets a lot of interaction, comments, retweets, or quote retweets; 4) The selected ARMY is a Twitter account that has been following the selected account for a long time and often makes contact with that account.

The data collected was then analyzed by describing systematically, factually, and

accurately the relationship between the phenomena studied regarding Borman's Fantasy Theme Analysis (FTA). Adapted to the nature of analysis in qualitative research, namely the phenomenon that occurs accompanied by interpreting the meaning contained therein. The data analysis process was done using the analysis step by collecting good observation data on the Twitter fanbase account by interviewing and reviewing literature. Then the data is reduced to choose which data is appropriate to answer research problems related to the exchange of meanings of ARMY, and finally perform, data presentation and analysis related to the symbolic reality construction of fans on Twitter. The data were then analyzed by source triangulation by comparing and re-checking information from sources during interviews, observations, and documentation related to ARMY's symbolic reality construction through fanbase accounts on social media Twitter. In this way, in-depth analysis can be obtained regarding the process of constructing symbolic reality, as well as knowing the picture of the motivation of ARMY fans to support their idols very loyally. Then it can be assembled into a construction model of the symbolic reality of the fanbase community.

Literature

The theoretical basis of Symbolic Convergence Theory (TKS) is a reference in the implementation of this research. Symbolic convergence theory explains the process of forming content themes that function as rhetoric dramatically to connect audiences with messages. Borman further explained this theory as an interactive process in which individuals meet by telling their fantasies, dreams, hopes, or fears in shared symbols, as well as explaining an analytical framework that captures the dynamic development of the formation of meaning in groups. The language often contains dramatizing messages involving members introducing brief examples of wordplay, allusions, analogies, humor, and fairy tales to detailed narratives. At the same time, fantasy does not provide fictitious stories or erotic desires. Fantasy is a story, humor that contains emotions. (Imarshan, 2021; Indriani & Prasanti, 2020; Zanin et al., 2016).

The communication process created from this symbolic convergence includes dramatized ¹⁵ messages, fantasy chains, fantasy themes, fantasy types, and rhetorical visions (Indriani & Prasanti, 2020) When members begin to talk briefly about puns, humor, analogies, and the like, it sometimes results in a uniform message known as a fantasy shift. While the fantasy chain can go on repeatedly, it leads to a fantasy theme.

Fantasy themes then create shared understandings of past and future actions and can serve as references for similar issues, resulting in fantasy types. The group's rhetorical vision then emerges as the group develops some fantasy. This symbolic convergence theory emphasizes that a group can achieve solidarity and cohesiveness through the shared ability to read and interpret cultural codes, signs, and texts that lead to the formation of a shared reality (Suryadi, 2010).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The construction of the symbolic reality of the K-Pop lover community is inseparable from the theory of symbolic convergence itself. ¹⁰ The symbolic convergence theory is a theory that can be used to study group or community communication. ¹² Borman's symbolic convergence theory is also known as Fantasy Theme Analysis (FTA). In this case, when group members introduce humor, word games or allusions, fairy tales, analogies, or specific detailed narratives, it can produce a similar message known as fantasy change. (Zanin et al., 2016). Fans control K-pop idols through their hopes and fantasies about their idols. Fans want their idols to be perfect figures, able to satisfy their perceptions. (Alfitriah & Alyatalatthaf, 2023; Saeji, 2018)

This study's construction of symbolic reality is related to the messages exchanged via social media Twitter, especially ARMY accounts. Every upload from ARMY's personal account and the BTS fanbase is the main ingredient for fantasy exchanges that form solid community interactions. Moreover, in this study, the construction of symbolic reality that is analyzed includes several elements, namely message content, dramatization, fantasy chains, and symbolic clues (Mutiaz, 2019). ARMY Twitter continuously shares these elements accounts, both personal and base accounts.

The first is to look at the elements of the message content to dissect how the interactions that form the construction of shared symbolic reality occur. Regarding the message's contents, when the FGD researchers shared an image that read "BTS Lock Down," ARMY automatically knew the meaning of the words. Where this sentence has its own meaning for ARMY, the meaning is that ARMY only needs to focus on BTS and ignore any form of distraction or distraction outside of topics related to BTS and ARMY. This sentence usually appears when there are comeback activities from BTS as a group and members of BTS members themselves, as happened in the past year when the members of personal BTS were busy releasing solo albums.

Furthermore, one of the discussion participants explained that she often saw ARMY accounts, both on base and on mutual, sharing uploaded words or sentences, video clips, member photos, or specific stories related to BTS and ARMY. As a fandom that supports their idols, ARMYs actively connect with each other through comments, other ARMY posts, or even chat via direct messages (DM). Some ARMYs follow certain fanbase accounts, such as @7btsupdates, @INDOMY, @ARMYTEAMID, and others. But some know fanbase activity without being a follower and usually know specific uploads that are shared through other ARMYs that are mutual.

"...I usually look on Twitter. Friends on Twitter notify by mentioning the account. Sometimes also chat via DM, so I understand when there are things like that." (ARMY1, FGD, 12 August 2023)



Source: Twitter akun @

Pictures 1. Narrative fantasy "BTS Lock Down"

Based on the results of observations and FGDs with several ARMYs, it was also

found that the construction of this symbolic reality occurred over a long period. This can be seen from dramatic messages through sentences that started from uploading the @BTS_twt account as the group's official account. Upload the dramatization sentence "Teamwork Make The Dream Work." The sentence was first uploaded on March 20, 2013. Even though it was ten years ago, this short sentence is still being used and exchanged among ARMY. Especially when other ARMYs are voting for an award or regarding comeback goals for streaming on various platforms. This sentence means that with ARMY, there is BTS, and vice versa. Alternatively, this sentence is a form of ARMY's motivation to do something



teamwork makes the dream work.

2013. 3. 20. 오전 3:05

1,078 RETWEETS 689 FAVORITES

together to achieve success.

Source: Twitter akun @BTS-twt

Pictures 2. Fantasy Message Content "Teamwork Makes The Dream Work"

Another term or play on words that have undergone dramatization is "Apobangpo" (아포방포) or AFBF, short for ARMY Forever Bangtan Forever. This phrase was first introduced by a BTS member, Jeon Jungkook, in 2019. Then a

phrase from a BTS V member in 2016, namely "BORAHAE" (보라해) or I Purple You. Until now, this word continues to be used in interactions within the ARMY community on Twitter. Moreover, that word only has a special meaning for ARMY and BTS, not other fandoms. Based on these findings, the existing fantasy exchanges become the commodification of message content and meaning. The community has succeeded in developing a fantasy theme well over time.

They are turning to the second element of symbolic convergence theory, namely dramatization. This element is inseparable from the elements of the message content. The dramatization of the contents of this message forms a fantasy theme. The fantasy theme of the dramatization of message content increases the desire to communicate and interact (Caesaria & Wulan, 2018). Based on observations on several BTS fanbase accounts on Twitter, regarding the first element of the message content, the fantasy that is presented is usually in the form of uploading short stories, ideas or ideas, slogans, jokes, and even inside jokes related to BTS and ARMY, either in the form of narrative sentences, photos or visuals, videos, or a combination of these. While the FGD results show that the dramatization that occurs in the ARMY community is more

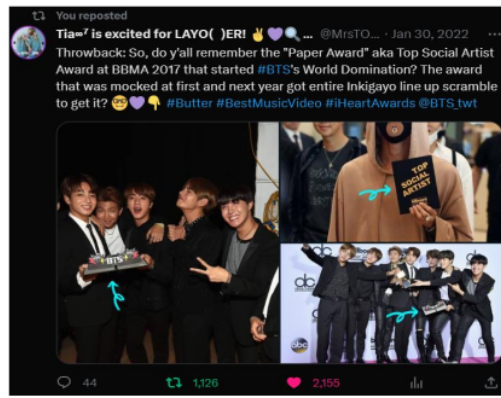
towards visual and word games in the form of video edits, photos with captions, play on words or sentences, and sharing various life stories.

"...I see more uploaded videos from other ARMYs. The video shows BTS's journey from debut to now. The video has sound and pictures, so it's easier to understand." (ARMY2, FGD, 12 August 2023)

The upload is full of emotional expressions from fans (fans). When the uploads contain dramatizations of sensational messages, they bring lots of likes, and comments and increase the number of followers. It is not uncommon for these uploads to be commodified by other groups or communities outside the AMRY community.

An example of a dramatization of wordplay is an upload from the ARMY account @MrsTOH2O in January 2022. It can be seen that this account wrote a story in the form of sentences and photos of members to invite other ARMYs to remember the BTS struggle. At first glance, the sentence seems normal and nothing strange. However, it turns out that ARMY dramatized a sentence, namely, "Paper Award." ARMY constructed this sentence as a mention for the Top Social Artist Award at the 2017 BBMA's. This sentence is quite famous among ARMY. It is proven that the Costigan got 1,111 reposts, 2,154 likes, 15

quotes, and 84 bookmarks. The comments ARMY gave on the upload also emphasize similarities in motives and meanings for what is exchanged. One example of this comment is @serotoninJin, who wrote: "I still remember when they started making Twitter access after BTS won, LMAO." And then the uploader's account replies with "yep."



Source: Twitter akun @MrsTOH2O

Pictures 3. Fantasy Message Content "Teamwork Makes The Dream Work"

The dramatization of the message on symbolic reality forms a fantasy chain that the ARMY community exchanges. The fantasy chain creates a shared understanding or common ground in the community, which allows ARMY to communicate empathetically. This fantasy chain itself originally came from BTS, then appeared on ARMY's fanbase and personal accounts, which were continuously used and exchanged. The messages exchanged led to constructing BTS as a role model for the

younger generation. For ARMY, the figure of BTS who works hard is worth emulating. This shows conformity with the results of research conducted by (Rismayanti et al., 2022) regarding teenagers where teenagers have many ways to find and 'meet' their idols. Teenagers believe in their idols' social media appearance and perceive that the contents show the natural character and personality of the idols

Furthermore, ARMY's Twitter accounts have successfully constructed reality by uploading videos, member photos, and playing on words and sentences. This is the process of constructing messages, developing them into fantasy themes, forming fantasy chains, and, finally, creating symbolic clues. Symbolic clues resulting from exchanging messages on these Twitter accounts that ARMY is family, motivation or enthusiasm, friends to share, and mood boosters. As two ARMYs expressed during the FGD:

"...if I am more enthusiastic. The problem is like this; for example, it is down. Especially now that I am tired of going to college, so if we open Twitter, we can see ARMY friends who have been successful and got good grades in college, so they take more of the positive side. It makes us excited with the word affirmation." (ARMY1, FGD, August 12, 2023)

"....ARMYs as a family continue as friends to make stories or share with each other, motivate each other, and make our moods rise. For example, when you are tired, see ARMY comments or posts, and see the fanbase support each other, it can make us think other ARMY

can do it; So do I?." (ARMY2, FGD, August 12, 2023)

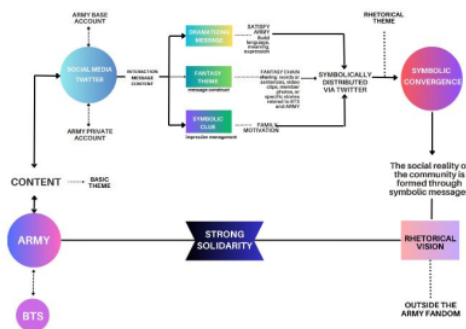
One ARMY who participated in the FGD also said that community fantasy that fosters a sense of family makes the community more solid. This shows that the symbolic convergence theory related to the interactive process of the development of meaning creation in groups actually occurs. In this case, interaction and communication occur between fellow ARMYs on Twitter. ARMY as fans both become social agents to share content. According to the explanation from (Littlejohn; & Foss, 2012)), symbolic convergence is a process of content themes as dramatic rhetoric, functioning to connect the audience with the message. So that in the process of symbolic convergence or the formation of this symbolic reality construction, Twitter has played a role in building closeness, togetherness that creates cohesion among ARMY.

"...on Twitter, they often share related content, and ARMYs are solid. They support it until BTS becomes successful like this. Everyone helps each other, no matter how small they will be willing to help" (ARMY3, FGD, August 12, 2023)

In simple terms, this process can be seen in Figure 4. Figure 4 is a model of the ARMY symbolic construction or convergence process on Twitter. It can be seen that the beginning was from ARMY itself. Army has content that is then shared

on social media, Twitter. There, interaction and communication occur between ARMY accounts, both personal and fanbase accounts. The unique use and choice of words become a dramatized form of message and attract other ARMYs on Twitter.

convergence: message content, dramatization, fantasy chain, and related symbolic clues. The convergence that is formed creates togetherness, a sense of belonging, and even a feeling of being part of the family. It ultimately makes the ARMY community more solid in supporting their idol, BTS. This togetherness forms what is called a rhetorical community. Namely, the communicated message was originally only understood by the ARMY internal fandom, then it expanded widely on Twitter and the real world, extending beyond the ARMY community.



Source: Processed Research Data, 2023
Pictures 4. ARMY's Symbolic Reality Construction Model on Twitter

Every ARMY on Twitter shares some kind of meaning or commonality with each other, which then turns into a "fantasy" and allows the group of people to connect through it. Uniqueness fantasy makes the group alive. As a communication scholar, we learn that the existence of fantasy even determines the purpose-driven destiny of the company or anyone's interest. In other words, by stating fantasy already forms a group discussion in ARMY fandom.

Moreover, as previously explained, that process involves four elements in

This study's findings align with several previous studies on the theme of symbolic convergence. As is the result of research (Mutiaz, 2019), which also provides a symbolic convergence scheme involving elements such as fantasy themes, dramatizations, and symbolic clues to the program on Instagram. This research also describes a model of the ARMY symbolic convergence process on Twitter. It is just that there is a difference that is added; namely, in the findings, it is seen that there is a high formation of solidarity in the convergence process.

This research also strengthens the findings of previous research conducted by (Imarshan, 2021; Kurniatmastria, 2021; Oro et al., 2020), namely starting from the form of symbolic convergence found in the

ARMY community on Twitter in the form of word games or sentences, videos, and member photos. . Made especially for the ARMY community. In analyzing the convergence of the ARMY community, this research involves elements of message content, dramatization, fantasy chains, and symbolic clues. This is also in line with research findings, where the messages exchanged by the ARMY are the result of adopting words or sentences made previously by the BTS themselves.

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