

An Analysis of the Ups and Downs of BTS from the Perspective of Iranian Fans

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1- Introduction

Models – as a broader concept than celebrities- play a significant role in shaping the human personality of individuals and societies. Just like as lighthouses that guide the ships, they shed light on the existential journey of humans and communities. Therefore, from religious perspectives to contemporary psychological and sociological viewpoints, there is a consensus on the importance of models, emphasizing the necessity for humans and human societies to pay attention to them.

The crucial role that models play in the education of individuals and human societies has led both well-intentioned individuals and institutions, as well as those with malicious intent that seek to plunder the existence of human beings and human societies, to focus on models and to process desirable models according to their own wishes. Naturally, since ill-intentioned individuals and institutions cannot explicitly attract others with the proposal of bad and corrupt models, they strive to process seemingly valuable and elevated models to guide people towards their own nefarious goals, relying on these superficially attractive models.

An examination of how models have been processed throughout human history indicates that the general models processed at the societal level initially possessed only one notable characteristic. For example, Rostam¹ was a mountain of muscle, Barbod and Nakisa were astonishing musicians, and Cleopatra had a beautiful face, and so on. However, the decisive importance of models has led humanity, especially in recent decades, to seek more comprehensive and powerful models to achieve its goals. Consequently, by merging two streams of sports and art, there has been an effort to process two-dimensional models. For instance, Arnold, who had been a world champion bodybuilder for multiple times, stepped into the realm of art and acted in films.

In the new wave of model processing, if someone was interested in sports, they would watch films featuring individuals like Arnold, Stallone, Bruce Lee, and others. Similarly, if someone was interested in the art of cinema, they would also watch those same films and engage with their content.

Currently, the trend in model processing indicates that the overwhelming importance of models has led some institutions and social movements to process more multidimensional models to pursue their goals. Thus, the approach to the model processing has evolved from one-dimensional to two-dimensional

¹ Rostam or Rustam is a legendary hero in Persian mythology

models and has now shifted towards the processing of multidimensional models.

Among the institutions that have successfully processed multidimensional models is Big Hit Entertainment² (the company behind the K-pop group BTS). From the outset, this company has aimed to create a group by considering and implementing multidimensional models.

In its initial steps, Big Hit selected "beautiful boys" to form its group. These beautiful individuals, through years of training in singing, dancing, media, acting, and similar fields, perform "exciting dances" alongside their songs, a challenging display that is beyond the capabilities of ordinary individuals.

BTS members, in addition to their thrilling and magnificent performances, present songs that address the issues and challenges of youth, portraying themselves as "defenders of young people." And also, by providing guidance on rebellion against the values of the older generation, they establish themselves as an "intellectual group" and, by offering advice on how to continue and live in a challenging world, they position themselves as "saviors of youth," fully supporting young people.

On the other hand, BTS members, while striving to produce content to "fill the leisure time of their fans and entertain them," have also established "deep relationships with their fans," proclaiming, "If you have no refuge, we are thinking of you in Seoul, and you can always see us as your supporters and allies."

The "altruistic and seemingly altruistic actions" of BTS, along with their "social-political activities," are additional attractions that Big Hit Entertainment possesses. Ultimately, by avoiding marriage or even dating the opposite sex, they indirectly present themselves as "lover" and "potential partners" for their female audience.

All of the above positions the stars of BTS as multidimensional models (beautiful, full of excitement, with beautiful voices; altruistic; socially and politically aware, intellectual, saviors of youth, etc.) that may not have a parallel in the processing of human models throughout history.

Field evidence among BTS fans indicates the unexpectedly profound impact this group has on its audience, especially on female fans.

² Big Hit Entertainment formed the BTS group in 2010, and since the group's debut in 2013, BTS has achieved significant success on a global scale.

The preliminary investigations conducted by the researcher and his students regarding the effects of the BTS group on its fans indicate that powerful fan organizations have sometimes formed among BTS supporters. For instance, when the annual travel video of BTS (Bon Voyage) is released online, a group of 30 translators from a fan organization works throughout the night to translate the videos. Once the translation is complete, translators take a rest and the content is handed over to the group's editors. They finalize the text and send it to a third team for uploading. This is time that they can take a rest and the uploading team then promptly shares the content online, making it accessible to the vast number of BTS fans.

In various instances, it has been observed that some fans, upon the release of new BTS songs, engage in activities such as "listening to the song continuously for 24 hours" or "voting" to ensure that their favorite song achieves a high ranking on prominent music sites or wins popular choice awards. This is done to increase the streaming counts and votes for the song, thereby elevating its position on platforms like Billboard, Spotify, and others and to achieve people's choice awards.

One of the author's students noted in her report that when she visited a girls' high school to gather data, she observed that nearly half of the students were crying. When the student inquired in surprise whether someone from the teaching staff had passed away, the students replied, "No, Jin—one of the BTS members—has went to the military service!"

Many girls expressed during their interviews that they would "give their lives for the boys of the group," that they experienced "panic attacks" when faced with haters from rival groups, that they would "sell their kidneys to spend a night with Jimin," and that they had engaged in fights and hair-pulling at school over the claim that a certain idol was their husband. They also mentioned commissioning fanfiction and smutfiction stories centered around themselves and one of the BTS members, threatening their families to send them to South Korea or else they would commit suicide, organizing large gatherings with BTS channel admins, collectors, fanfiction writers, and simple fans to celebrate the boys in Iran, practicing dance for 5-6 hours a day to be accepted as backup dancers for BTS, contemplating suicide upon hearing rumors of their favorite star's relationship with a girl, and speaking as if they were married to their idol or even claiming to be pregnant by them.

Preliminary field research indicated that a significant number of students (even at the elementary level) had begun self-teaching the Korean language, with

some becoming so proficient that they could easily translate Korean texts or manage their Instagram pages in Korean.

The high sales of Korean language learning books (after English language books in Iran) serve as another clear example of the success of K-pop groups, particularly BTS, among the youth and teenagers in society. This is notable considering that when high school students display images of the seven members of BTS on their school computers, the educational staff either do not recognize them or simply overlook the reason for this.

All of the above prompted the author to take action to clarify the transformations occurring in model processing in the contemporary world. Consequently, along with their students, the author engaged in research in this direction³.

³ The research method employed in this study was qualitative in nature. In the realm of humanities, researchers often encounter issues and inquiries that cannot be adequately addressed through common research methods. These questions may involve complex or abstract concepts that defy easy definition, they may lack precedence in existing literature, making it difficult to formulate an easy to test hypothesis. Qualitative research is particularly well-suited for addressing such novel and unexplored topics.

Qualitative research is characterized by a non-linear process where various components intersect rather than progress in a linear fashion. In other word, in qualitative research, data collection and analysis take place simultaneously, with the researcher continuing this iterative process until reaching a point of saturation .Saturation represents the stage at which the researcher is confident in the quality and adequacy of the collected data for generating a comprehensive and accurate analysis.

The qualitative research methodology adopted in this study was grounded theory. This approach is particularly well-suited for investigating topics with limited existing knowledge.

The theorists utilizing grounded theory strive to cultivate an understanding of the processes linked to issues. In qualitative research, it is essential for researchers to effectively report their interpretive findings without relying on statistical methods.

Qualitative research method books typically recommend conducting in-depth qualitative interviews with sample sizes ranging from 8-12 or 20 participants. However, I believe these suggested numbers may be unreliable in the Iranian context due to several factors.

The difference in the socialization processes between the West and Iran can be consider as the first key factor. In Iran, socialization is often perceived as a challenging and occasionally conflicting process, contrasting with the smoother experience in Western societies. For instance, the values instilled by the primary socializing institutions such as the home, school, and society in Iran exhibit a diversity of perspectives. In other words, parents emphasize survival skills and resilience, educational institutions highlight sacrifice, jihad, martyrdom, while, individuals in Iranian society observe that economic corruption has become pervasive, with many officials and their relatives engaging in rent-seeking activities. These scenarios contribute to challenges and hurdles in the socialization process in Iran, representing a complex landscape of integration and socialization compared to Western societies where socializing agents typically align their messages and actions.

Another factor that presents a significant challenge when decide about increasing the sample size in qualitative research is the limited financial support available for many researchers in Iran. Unlike in the Western context that researchers typically compensate participants for their time and cooperation, such practices may not be feasible in the Iranian research environment. And this limitation can lead to interview endings as participants may be unwilling to spend sufficient time due to the lack of compensation and end the interview before providing enough information. Additionally, political apprehensions among respondents in Iran, although relatively minor this study, along with issues such as respondent fatigue, lack of focus, conflicting responses, particularly commonplace among younger participants, further highlight the challenges faced in qualitative research settings in Iran.

The challenges faced by Iranian researchers have led to an increase in the number of in-depth interviews conducted to gain a comprehensive understanding of the qualitative phenomenon under study. And in the

The process of compiling the present work was as follows: after providing preliminary training on qualitative data-driven methods to students at the undergraduate, master's, and PhD levels, and after presenting some initial information about the importance of models and how BTS's models are processed by Big Hit Entertainment, the author asked the students to conduct in-depth interviews with fans of the group to gather their perspectives on the ups and downs of Big Hit Entertainment, BTS, and the group's supporters.

In this research, the interviews were conducted with accessible samples across various cities in Iran. The condition for conducting the interviews was that the participants were fans with sufficient knowledge of BTS.

After gathering the necessary field data, the collected information was organized under three titles: "Exploring the Visible and Hidden Aspects of Big Hit Entertainment" (the company that owns BTS), "Exploring the Visible and Hidden Aspects of BTS," and "Exploring the Ups and Downs of BTS Fandom."

This book focuses on "Exploring the Ups and Downs of BTS from the Perspective of Iranian Fans." It consists of an introduction and five chapters.

In the introduction, the research methodology is discussed, along with an overview of the topics covered in the book.

The subsequent chapters, which summarize 47 in-depth interviews conducted with BTS fans regarding various aspects and the ups and downs of Big Hit Entertainment and BTS from the perspective of Iranian fans, aim to provide an overview of the company's actions related to the establishment of BTS and its explicit and implicit goals.

In the first chapter, after emphasizing the immense importance of models for guiding children, adolescents, youth, and other social groups, the discussion shifts to the transformation that has directed one-dimensional and two-dimensional models towards the processing of multidimensional models in the present world.

The second chapter, titled "Big Hit Entertainment and Its Goals," attempts to provide an overview of the company's objectives.

Since studying a phenomenon requires viewing it within its broader context, understanding the goals of Big Hit Entertainment necessitates attention to the

requirements of South Korean capitalism and the global capitalist society (of which Korea is a part). Therefore, considering the macro context in which Big Hit Entertainment and BTS operate, some of the requirements of this context are examined under the headings of Big Hit Entertainment's economic-political goals, cultural-social goals, and ethical-ideological goals, based on the statements of the research population.

In the third chapter, titled "Efforts in the Path of Processing an Unmatched Group," the processing of BTS by the examined population is questioned. Among the discussed topics, one of the highlights of Big Hit Entertainment and BTS is their precise understanding of the audience and their efforts to provide content that aligns with the audience's needs. This means that due to the insufficient and inadequate understanding of parents, educators, and society regarding the cognitive, emotional, psychological, social, cultural, political, ethical, and aesthetic transformations of youth, a relative conflict arises between them and the young person, creating a gap. BTS has entered the scene by recognizing the concerns of youth, providing hope and motivation, instilling confidence, and inviting them to rebel and protest against the older generation, thereby positioning themselves as the saviors of youth.

Chapter Overview

In the first chapter (or fourth chapter of this collection), titled "The Excruciating Psychological Pressures on Stars," the obstacles to processing an ideal group are examined. The population studied in this context highlights the various pressures exerted on the stars by Big Hit Entertainment.

The next chapter, titled "Efforts to Address and Mitigate Conflicts," explores Big Hit's responses to the obstacles in the path of processing an unparalleled group. The findings of this investigation are presented under the overarching title of robotic identity or modern slavery.

The issues mentioned lead to the cultivation of individuals who, by setting aside their emotions and thoughts, are trained like robots, deserving of the label "robotic identity." These individuals, who have adopted a robotic identity, become mere executors of the goals that have been dictated to them. These directives can range from promoting various products to adopting specific political stances (such as condemning North Korean policies) and requiring stars to use feminine makeup and display homosexual behaviors.

In the final chapter of the book, the achievement of the company's goals is discussed and confirmed. This means that Big Hit, through the cultivation of its

robotic stars, has surpassed rival K-pop groups within Korea and has also outperformed Western pop and non-pop groups. In terms of album sales, rankings on major global music sites like Billboard, Spotify, SoundCloud, and similar platforms, as well as winning awards at popular festivals, they have achieved top ranks or significant positions. However, the outcome of these efforts (which has led to the concept of robotic identity) has primarily resulted in the psychological degradation of the group's stars and, secondarily, a relative harm to the group's fans. In other words, while conventional models in human societies once had a single notable characteristic, such as physical strength, beautiful voices, or attractive appearances, in recent decades, humanity has developed models with two notable characteristics. For instance, bodybuilders or martial artists have merged artistic and athletic realms by acting in films. However, the study of Big Hit and BTS indicates that humanity has moved beyond one-dimensional or two-dimensional models to the processing of multidimensional models, which can be concretely observed in BTS and its company.

BTS stars, while initially selected for their physical attractiveness, have enhanced their beauty through cosmetic surgery and have combined their singing with dynamic dancing. Additionally, by accurately understanding the psychology of adolescents and young adults, they address their concerns in their songs and strive to provide guidance, presenting themselves as saviors of youth. The various activities of the group members (such as engaging in artistic endeavors like painting or creating handmade crafts) portray them as multifaceted individuals. Their altruistic, social, and political activities—such as serving as UNESCO ambassadors, speaking at the United Nations, meeting with the Presidents of South Korea and the United States, and similar engagements—distinguish BTS members from ordinary singers who primarily focus on their singing careers.

Deepening the relationship between the stars and their fans, designing a multitude of entertainment programs, and infusing emotional intensity into the fan-star relationship (by prohibiting the stars from marrying or dating the opposite sex, so that every female fan can at least envision BTS stars as potential partners) are other actions that the company has mandated the boys to undertake. This has resulted in BTS stars being processed as models that possess not just one or two superior traits but a multitude of significant characteristics. This phenomenon reflects society's encounter with multidimensional models, and since these recent models aim to achieve their economic-political, cultural-social, and ethical-ideological objectives within their own context and the global capitalist system (of which South Korea is a

part), the effects of these multidimensional models on their fans exhibit unique characteristics, which are discussed in other volumes of this collection.

2- Big Hit Entertainment and Its Goals

Big Hit Entertainment officially launched BTS in South Korea in 2013.

Understanding a phenomenon better requires viewing it within the broader context in which it exists. To better comprehend the ups and downs of BTS, it is essential to examine Big Hit Entertainment in relation to its social, economic, and political relationships with capitalist South Korea and, on a larger scale, within the global capitalist system. This will facilitate a more realistic analysis of the BTS group.

Therefore, before delving into the analysis of BTS's ups and downs, we will first conduct a general review of some of the national and international conditions affecting Big Hit Entertainment, followed by an examination of BTS as a subset of this company.

While Big Hit Entertainment, as a South Korean company, seeks to generate profit and economic benefits, it is important to remember that reducing cultural, social, political, ideological, and even aesthetic and environmental issues to mere economic concerns is not accurate. The capitalist system should be viewed as a comprehensive package containing economic, political, cultural, social, ethical, ideological, and similar dimensions.

Thus, as previously mentioned, before analyzing the ups and downs of BTS, we will first view this group and its company within the broader context of South Korea and subsequently within the global capitalist system. Then, relying on macro-level findings, we will examine the micro-level aspects of BTS.

Following this, the titles of the economic-political, cultural-social, and ethical-ideological dimensions of Big Hit Entertainment will be briefly reviewed.

1-2- Economic-Political Goals of Big Hit Entertainment

In examining the economic-political goals of Big Hit Entertainment (Hybe), three main areas can be identified based on field findings: "the company's efforts to maximize revenue," "actions to support the capitalist system of South Korea," and "actions to support the global capitalist system."

Under the title "Efforts to Generate Revenue for the Company," we can mention aspects such as: elevating the music industry to an entertainment industry within

Big Hit company, transforming BTS stars into bloggers, utilizing stars for modeling and commercial advertising, organizing international tours, producing merchandise related to the group (BTS Merch), striving to cover various demographics (via avoiding definitive stances), and rotating group members (to prevent fans from becoming oversaturated with the group).

In the section "Actions to Support the Capitalist System of South Korea," we can refer to aspects such as: generating significant revenue for the company, supporting the decisions of the South Korean government, promoting the immigration of elites to South Korea, encouraging consumerism among audiences, and diverting public opinion in times of necessity.

In the section "Actions to Support the Global Capitalist System," aspects such as promoting extreme individualism, playing a sedative role to entertain the public, fostering consumerism, advertising capitalist brands, supporting the capitalist system, and the instrumental use of celebrities have been identified through research and can be presented.



Following the mentioned titles, they will be discussed briefly.

1-2-1- Efforts to Generate Revenue for the Company

Big Hit Entertainment, in one of its first actions to increase profits, sought to elevate the K-pop music industry to an entertainment industry. This means that there is an average gap of months or even years between the releases of two new songs, and as a result, many artists gradually fade from the minds of the audience due to the delay between their performances, until the next performance when the community and fans notice the recent artists again.

However, if during the interval between two songs, artists can maintain and continue their presence in the eyes and hearts of their audience, they will naturally be in a better position. The BTS group has effectively elevated the Korean music industry to an entertainment industry by producing a plethora of

entertaining programs such as "Run BTS," "BTS In The Soop," "Bon Voyage," "Festa," and similar shows.

15-year-old Diba in her interview, mentions learning pottery, yoga, and similar activities by the group members during the comedic program "Run BTS."

In another aspect of its efforts to generate more revenue, the company has tried to deepen the relationship between BTS stars and their fans, thereby increasing the number of fans to gain more profit. Unlike Western artists who only interact with their audience at performance venues and have no way for the audience to learn more about their personal lives, the company has directed its stars towards blogging (lifestyle blogging) and has provided opportunities for their audience to access even videos of the stars in their bedrooms or bathrooms, relying on the stars' confined lives in the camps (which lasted about a decade).

16-year-old Saba notes in her interview that the company, beyond their singing and dancing duties, has practically turned its stars into bloggers to gain more profit from them.

The company's use of stars as models or individuals responsible for various commercial advertisements is another aspect that increases the company's revenue from the stars.

Hosting international tours and performances by BTS in stadiums that can accommodate 80,000 to 90,000 people generates significant income for Big Hit Company.

The boys of BTS, alongside their usual occupations, are encouraged by the company to showcase their versatility by creating handmade and artistic products. These products, known as Merch, are offered for sale to fans and create another source of income for Big Hit Entertainment to maximize profits.

To cover more fans, Big Hit has asked its stars not only to refrain from speaking positively or negatively about their beliefs but also not to inform their audience about other matters such as their sexual orientation, so that both religious and non-religious individuals, as well as heterosexual and homosexual individuals, have no reason to distance themselves from the group stars (for example, thinking that one is not religious like me or that another has a tendency towards homosexuality).

21-year-old Mohammad Reza emphasizes the auctioning of individuals' beliefs for greater profit, effectively recalling the alignment and support of the boys' group with global capitalism, which recognizes nothing but profit:

- "How can beliefs affect people's beliefs?"

Well, usually they shouldn't say much about their beliefs because there are many supporters and opponents, and it creates the possibility of being hated and all that. For example, let's say one of the group members says, 'I really believe in God,' then suddenly those who don't care much about God and religion will stop following the group, which will ultimately be a loss for them.”

17-year-old Ehsan, in his interview, similarly believes that Big Hit instructs its stars to display behaviors that suggest homosexuality to achieve its goals, in order to cover all social classes.

The relocation of group members is another important issue that ensures that if, over time, the group's stars are no longer appealing to the teenage and young audience due to aging or if fans lose interest due to saturation, the company can guarantee and continue its profitability by changing the group and replacing old members with new ones.

17-year-old Reyhaneh states that for the company, the only thing that matters is profit and maximizing it, so with the aging of the stars and the relative saturation of the audience towards them, it immediately replaces its stars to maintain its income.

14-year-old Hadith also identifies the company's main goal as profit, noting that the company takes advantage of every opportunity to increase its revenue and pays no attention to anything else, even the existence or absence of its stars.

1-2-2- Actions to Practically Support the Capitalist System of South Korea

The ultimate goal of the capitalist system is to generate more and more profit; therefore, societies that are immersed in consumerism and are preoccupied with their whims so as not to challenge the capitalist system are considered ideal for this system. Thus, the capitalist system is striving to obtain raw materials on one hand and markets for selling the produced goods on the other hand.

Countries that serve the global capitalist system's goals are considered satellites of this system, while countries that do not fully comply with the policies of the capitalist system are regarded as relatively hostile or adversarial.

Big Hit Entertainment, as an entity in the capitalist system of South Korea, and South Korea as one of the satellite countries of the global capitalist system, sees itself obligated to create markets for this system while denying and negating countries that oppose it. Furthermore, since individualism and competition can exist at their peak in the capitalist system, some individuals and entities in the

scene strive to achieve their goals by circumventing others, which leads to some political conflicts. Big Hit Entertainment, considering the potential to attract audience attention, can also enter the scene to provide necessary services to the political capitalist system.

15-year-old Sahar and 20-year-old Masoud have described Big Hit Entertainment and, fundamentally, South Korea as being under the control and dominance of the United States in separate interviews.

17-year-old Samaneh and 19-year-old Shabnam have noted in their interviews that HYBE feels obligated to defend the overarching capitalist system of South Korea.

14-year-old Hadith and 19-year-old Shaghayegh, in their interviews, view Big Hit Entertainment as being against countries that oppose the U.S. capitalist system:

- “You said North Korea hates K-pop. What is the reason for this hatred?

Well, South and North Korea are generally not on good terms, and K-pop, since it is for South Korea and has greatly contributed to its progress, is very disliked by North Korea. North Korea has created a group that is its only music group, and their songs are only about their leader, and they only praise him in their songs. The members of that group are part of the army, and if anyone from North Korea listens to anything other than that, they are arrested or even executed.”

- “So, do they also use these for political issues?

Yes, definitely. They are actually aligned with the government. If something happens politically or economically in the world, they have to support that side. For example, regarding North Korea and its bomb-making, they have heavily criticized it, saying that these people are not human, that they don't understand human rights, that they are criminals, and that they are making bombs to kill everyone, creating a hostile atmosphere. Or in the case of Israel and Palestine, they have always subtly sided with Israel, claiming that it is the land of the Jews and that it is their right; they are always aligned with the capitalist system.”

13-year-old Sarina, 15-year-old Diba, and 19-year-old Nasrin, in their interviews, identified one of Big Hit's main responsibilities as covering up political scandals within South Korea.

21-year-old Erfan has approached the issue of Big Hit from another angle, criticizing the portrayal of soft or effeminate men, which reduces the productive

man to a consumer man and seeks to present a borderline or marginal identity of a man that should advance society by solving problems and building.

It seems that the set of cultural and social goals mentioned regarding Big Hit effectively leads society towards accepting a capitalist system based on liberal thought.

Wikipedia reports that for every 13 tourists who travel to South Korea, one is inclined to visit due to the positive influence of BTS. Similarly, it is reported in Wikipedia that the BTS boys generate nearly \$5 billion annually for the company and their country, indicating the mutual interests of Big Hit and the South Korean government.

Preliminary studies suggest that people's interest in stars leads them to embrace anything that has even a hint of stardom, based on the classical conditioning theory. For example, 15-year-old Reyhaneh notes in her interview that she and those around her become interested in consuming a product simply because they see the stars' image on it. This recent issue causes Big Hit to resort to billion-dollar advertising to advance its goals.

19-year-old Mahlaqa describes the K-pop industry as a dirty industry. She mentions one of the reasons for K-pop's dirtiness is the company's desire to profit more and more, even at the expense of the group members' well-being.

Mahlaqa continues her argument about the dirtiness of the K-pop industry by stating that, in her view, the company is essentially a plaything of the capitalist system:

- “When you say they are very beautiful, didn't you want to undergo surgery or do what they do to become like them?

No, it has never been like that because I have never liked surgery at all and I have never accepted it, especially now more than ever because why should we make ourselves toys of the standards that the capitalist system has created to benefit itself? It is not supposed to bring us any profit for us to make ourselves look like them or to bring ourselves closer to their beauty standards. I have only tried to admire their beauty, and it has never been that way... Of course, sometimes I might feel a bit jealous, but it has never been that I wanted to undergo surgery and do something to look like them.

- What do you think the goal of the capitalist system is?

The name says it all. It's for money and capital. They brainwash us and, with their specific tricks, make us feel that we need the products that this system has prepared for us without us even realizing it. It infiltrates so subtly that

we don't understand at all, and we can't even imagine a world without money. It's like North Korea's homogenization system, which has made its people unable to imagine that life can be lived differently and has no proper definition of freedom. Capitalism wants the world to revolve around money and creates a sense of need for people, and the higher the demand, the higher the profit of this system.

Supporting the decisions of the South Korean government is another duty that Big Hit feels committed to. For example, 18-year-old Taranom also notes in her interview that the members of BTS support the government's major decision to commercialize the "Busan area" and strive for its success:

“They held a group concert in Busan. They are also ambassadors for Busan to attract tourists and held a concert there.”

Big Hit sees it as its duty to support the political system of South Korea by portraying favorable conditions for elites who are considering immigration through appropriate advertising.

15-year-old Shadi and 16-year-old Saba have noted the BTS group's promotion of immigration for elite individuals to Korea and choosing Korea as their tourism destination as follows:

- “Do they share their personal lives with their audience?

Yes, they have a lifestyle blogger vibe and film their lives, like cooking or their daily activities or shopping, but what they show is a bit fake.

- What do you mean?

I mean, for example, no one goes shopping at 6 AM and then comes to make breakfast with them; it's a bit idealized what they show. Or they might go take a shower and then have breakfast. In real life, we are just rushing to get to work (laughs), or there are no queues wherever they go; is that possible? There are not that few people there; it's actually highly idealized.

- So, are they promoting their country?

Yes, I think it's a bit like that, showing that everywhere is empty, there are no lines, things get done quickly, and everything is chic and beautiful, and their lives are luxurious. Maybe the company wants to present them in this idealized way because they do whatever the company says.”

- “What is the lifestyle that BTS shares like?

It's more consumerist, with lots of different clothes and constantly changing hair colors. Every time, the hair color changes, and the clothes change, and there are new accessories...

And they keep saying to love yourself, but in reality, they contradict this because they keep changing, and this statement contradicts their actions. They say to go out, explore, live, and enjoy, and in the meantime, they are promoting their country, which is a kind of clever trick to attract immigrants. They go out and explore and keep saying, 'Wow, how beautiful it is here, how great the weather is, and how good we feel,' which makes you feel more miserable (laughs) because you see that your life is not like that and how unfortunate you are compared to them."

In capitalist systems where profit is the ultimate goal, advertising to encourage individuals in society to consume more and more is a natural matter. 24-year-old Zahra and 22-year-old Mohsen, in their interviews, have noted the advertisements conducted by BTS and the ultimate goal of these advertisements as follows:

- "Could you please provide examples of the group's activities outside the music industry?

They have a lot of activities; perhaps the most significant ones are related to advertising."

- "So, do you think they promote consumerism?

I don't understand what you mean by consumerism.

- I mean, do they encourage their audience to consume even if they don't need to?

Yes, I think that's how it is."

Many of the individuals interviewed noted that one of BTS's collaborations with Big Hit Entertainment and the ruling political system in Korea is to divert public attention during critical times (such as diverting attention from a political scandal). 19-year-old Nasrin mentioned the following about this recent topic in her interview:

- "Well, I saw something about the Dispatch website that has access to the stars' chats and exposes them.

Yes.

- Can't they file a complaint against them?

It's a complete violation of privacy. Exactly (laughs), that's what I'm saying. Recently, Dispatch⁴ has started this new trend of exposing chats, and I really don't understand how they have access to people's phones and chats and how they expose them. But I feel like, since there's no way to access people's phones... I think, for example, the very actor or singer involved in that scandal gives these chats to Dispatch. Dispatch comes to clarify the issue for the public because chats are very private. I don't think anyone can access it in terms of phone security.

Of course, since many of these scandals and commotions are to cover up a political event in their country, it wouldn't be surprising if it were the work of their own security forces. Because as far as I've heard, privacy is very important to them in their society, or they have so many security cameras that if someone leaves an item somewhere, ummm, I don't know, for example, in a café, no one picks it up because the footage is recorded. I mean, I want to say this is important to them. And since I haven't seen anyone come and protest after their chat is leaked, I think maybe this whole apparatus is something their government does."



1-2-3- Actions to Practically Support the Global Capitalist System

In preliminary investigations of Big Hit's practical actions in support of the global capitalist system, the following points emerged from field research: promoting extreme individualism, playing a numbing role (to prevent

⁴ It is one of the most famous tabloid media outlets in South Korea, which has gained prominence by exploiting controversies and playing on people's curiosity.

revolutionary actions by the people against the capitalist system), fueling consumerism, modeling and promoting brands of the capitalist world, supporting the capitalist system, and the instrumental use of celebrities.

The title "**Encouraging Extreme Individualism**" refers to another characteristic that BTS, under the management of Big Hit officials, seeks to instill.

Individualism is one of the essential pillars of the capitalist system, and Big Hit sees it as its duty, despite the occasionally protest-oriented nature of the boys' songs, to ultimately refer issues and problems to the overarching political system of the capitalist society rather than to the individuals themselves, attributing all matters from success and pleasure to failure and the resulting sorrow to the individual.

Extreme individualism can be considered the cornerstone of capitalist society.

Unlike collectivist societies, in an individualistic society, the collective does not hold authenticity; rather, the individual is considered authentic, and each person must achieve their desires by sidelining their competitors.

15-year-old Reyhaneh and 14-year-old Golnoush, in their interviews, mentioned the influence of individualism from BTS (in their collectivist society) as follows:

- "Reyhaneh, overall, what do you think are the positive and negative points that BTS has had for you?

BTS has taught me not to care about others' opinions and to make decisions for myself. Since I started doing this, I feel much better and more satisfied."

- "Which song do you really like?

The song 'So What'⁵ is really great.

- Can you tell me what it's about?

At the beginning, it says: "Somebody call me right one, Somebody call me wrong, I'm not gonna care about it, What about you, So what, Let them go, we are Young & wild & free, Your worries, ... ultimately remain unanswered. So what?" And things like this. It mostly wants to say be free and don't care about anyone's words because it doesn't help if you don't enjoy life and youth.

⁵ A popular song of BTS sung in English



- So you believe that you shouldn't care about anyone's words?

Yes. I believe in all of it. I believe in every single word in their songs because it's all true.

- So you really don't care about anyone's words, and you're not worried about anything?

No, really. I'm serious. I'm never worried, nor do I care about anyone's words. Why would I lie? That's really how I feel.

- Even regarding your parents' words?

When I feel something is wrong or I don't want something, even their words, I don't have to listen to them. Everyone knows what's best for them, and they are responsible for what they do. Everyone is free to do what they want and enjoy it; otherwise, life becomes meaningless.

- Do you mean that the meaning of life is summarized in freedom and enjoying life?

Yes, when you don't enjoy life and don't achieve any of your dreams, what meaning can life have for you?

- Is this just your opinion, or do all ARMYs think this way?

Yes, when you don't enjoy life and don't achieve any of your dreams, what meaning can life have for you? When BTS's belief is this, ARMYs should have the same belief, but maybe someone thinks differently. The ARMYs who are my friends all agree with me; when you interview me, it's like you're interviewing them.”

The next role identified from the interviews is the "**Numbing Role.**"

Capitalist societies, due to the intense competition among individuals for resources and positions, always have two dominant and victorious classes and a defeated and unsuccessful class. Naturally, individuals whom the capitalist system has deprived of even the necessities of life may be angry with this system, and their rebellion against it could lead to its downfall. Therefore, in capitalist societies, there is a significant effort to keep people, especially the youth, so entertained and numbed that they never think of rising against the capitalist system.

Mahlaqa and 19-year-old Nasrin provided evidence of this recent topic in their interviews:

- "So, are you no longer a K-pop fan?

No, I haven't followed it for about a year now.

- Can you tell me why?

Both my concerns and my life have changed, and I've come out of that fantasy world of youth and realized that the very concept of "being a fan" means creating idols, whether you want to or not, it plants the seeds of fanaticism within you. I realized I shouldn't make myself a toy of market music and capitalism. K-pop is not the colorful and cute world they show in their music videos. The dirtiness of Hollywood is obvious to everyone, but K-pop comes with a facade and makes it so that even when you realize what's going on, you can't pull yourself out of it."

- What do you mean when you say the company does things that make it hard for you to leave?

Can you clarify this sentence for me? Well, one thing that is very clear is that the more of a K-pop fan you are, the more profit it is for Korea and its music industry. Now, what plans do they have and what do they do... Capitalism and market music put various awards in different ceremonies, create various and diverse programs with their idols, and all these different festivals have voting and awards. There is voting for someone to win an award, and I don't know how many types of voting there are on streaming platforms like Spotify, YouTube, and others. If you want to get involved and support someone you are a fan of, you get caught up in a cycle where you are constantly voting. This voting ends, the next voting starts, and you are always engaged in these matters.

K-pop groups, because most of them operate this way, release music in much shorter intervals than Western artists. A Korean group might release a full album and at least two mini-albums in a year, you know what I mean?

Because of this, you are constantly engaged; you are always involved in their comebacks, you are always involved in their various ceremonies, and you don't even have time to think about other things. Plus, there are the cover-ups they do. In Hollywood, it's completely normal for someone to talk about their girlfriend or boyfriend or to be in a relationship, but in K-pop, it's not like that at all. They try to hide these things. You don't see someone talking about their partner at an event or in a program; there's absolutely none of that, and a lot of things in between are censored. Even their behaviors and personalities are often censored, and all the behind-the-scenes events are covered up because of this. They keep you in that cycle, in that circle, so you are always engaged with K-pop.

- So, what about the scandals that are referred to as star scandals and the issue of covering them up? Do you know anything about that?

Yes, there are many, and it has increased a lot recently.

- Can you give an example?

Sure. We who are aware know that Korea has a lot of corruption, and the officials are very corrupt. Because of this, every once in a while, there's a scandal. For example, recently, I don't know if it was the president or the president's son who did something. They released news about a singer dating someone to shift the public's focus onto that news and away from the other news.



Fostering "**consumerism**" or turning productive men into soft, consumer-oriented men is another service that the members of BTS provide to the global capitalist system.

Youna Kim, a global communications professor at the University of Pennsylvania, notes in her book about BTS that despite the sharp criticisms from the members of BTS regarding social conditions, these criticisms do not target the overarching capitalist system. Ultimately, by promoting the necessity of hard work, they effectively endorse individualism and the economic ideology of capitalism.

In another part of her book, Youna Kim recalls that Big Hit Entertainment has directed its stars from hard masculinity towards soft and gentle masculinity, drowning them in consumerism. She refers to the transformation from productive hard masculinity to soft consumer-oriented masculinity in BTS's ideology.

Modeling and "**advertising brands of the capitalist world**" are among the other activities of BTS.

Fereshteh, 18-year-old, in describing the advertising power of the BTS boys in her interview, provided the following evidence: "Jungkook was drinking juice during a live stream and praised it a bit, and in the next live stream, when he wanted to order juice, it was sold out, and the ARMYs had done that; there are even photos of it." The advertising power that Fereshteh refers to is a clear factor that has motivated many economic companies to take advantage of recent conditions.

Twenty-one-year-old Mohammad Reza and 24-year-old Zahra, in their separate interviews, confirmed that BTS has become a promoter of brands in the capitalist world, advertising expensive products that even affluent members of society may not be able to afford (in other words, contrary to BTS's humanitarian slogans, in practice, audiences are humiliated when they see the boys advertising extremely expensive brands):

- "Have you bought the album or any of the items that the stars use or advertise?

No, honestly, I don't have the patience for that, and spending money on these things is really a lot. But I have friends who do that.

You know, the things they advertise are really beyond the purchasing power of many people; they advertise things that are all brands, for example, each of the clothes they advertise costs over two or three thousand dollars."

“...In the field of clothing, their advertisements are for foreign companies, for example, Fila is an Italian brand that was already well-known, but when they used BTS for their advertising, I think it became much more famous.

- How did you notice that the brand's popularity increased?

There are a lot of posts related to this company on Instagram, meaning they are very active in the virtual space. The posts they share about their stores around the world, since they also have chain stores, show an increase in their sales, indicating that this brand is growing much better and more, especially the clothes and shoes that have BTS designs, which are very popular. For example, when Messi went to Paris Saint-Germain, the sales of that team's jersey skyrocketed; BTS also significantly increased Fila's sales when they advertised for them.”

"Taking action to support the global capitalist system" is another aspect of the joint efforts of Big Hit Entertainment and BTS.

While Big Hit utilizes its stars in modeling, it also asks them to promote some of the powerful brands of the capitalist system, indirectly endorsing the class society of capitalism by advertising extremely expensive brands. However, all the sharp criticisms from BTS regarding the individual and social conditions of people in their capitalist society ultimately lead to the conclusion that to overcome problems, merely more individual effort is prescribed for people, so that the overarching capitalist system does not suffer damage or loss.

24-year-old Zahra mentioned in her interview the boys' actions in modeling and their advertisements for certain products as follows:

“ ... Fila is an Italian brand that was already well-known, but when they used BTS for their advertising, I think it became much more famous.

- How did you notice that the brand's popularity increased?

There are a lot of posts related to this company on Instagram, meaning they are very active in the virtual space. The posts they share about their stores around the world, since they also have chain stores, show an increase in their sales, indicating that this brand is growing much better and more, especially the clothes and shoes that have BTS designs, which are very popular."

After mentioning the exorbitant prices of some of the brands advertised by BTS 21-year-old Mohammad Reza, in his interview refers to the exploited workers

around the world who are involved in producing these brands, but receive little attention from the BTS stars.

"Support for the capitalist system" is another title that some interviewees have pointed out.

21-year-old Erfan, in an interview, noted that the BTS boys, by pouring their fame at the feet of Biden, supported him during their meeting with the U.S. President:

- "Erfan, what cultural and social impact has BTS's presence in the White House and their meeting with Biden had on the world?

It has had a significant cultural impact. A group of beautiful and attractive Korean boys, by meeting with the then-President of the United States, Joe Biden, became the headline news in magazines and newspapers across America and the world, and this itself is the biggest advertisement for BTS.

With this action, BTS has been introduced as young peace ambassadors worldwide, and their popularity and fame have increased.

- What benefit does this meeting have for Biden's presidency?

In all the past years and during Joe Biden's presidency, the American people have repeatedly shown their anger and hatred towards Asian Americans. They have expressed their disgust through racial discrimination, the killing of Asian Americans, and humiliating them. This action by Joe Biden shows a message of peace and equality for all people living in America. This move has had very positive political repercussions.

- What political repercussions has it had for Biden?

With this action, President Joe Biden has managed to attract many of his opponents and present himself as a peace-loving figure fighting against racial discrimination and advocating for equality among people regardless of color and race. This is very impactful for Biden if he wants to run for president again after his term ends."

Nineteen-year-old Shaghayegh, in her interview, mentioned similar themes regarding BTS's political alignment with the capitalist system:

- "So, do they also get used for political issues?

Yes, definitely. They are actually aligned with the government. If something happens politically or economically in the world, they have to support it from that side. For example, in the case of North Korea and its bomb-making, they received a lot of hate, saying that these people are not human, that they don't know human rights, that they are criminals, and that they are making bombs to kill everyone, creating a hostile atmosphere. Or regarding the issue of Israel and Palestine, they have always taken the side of Israel subtly, saying that it is the land of the Jews and that it is their right. They are always aligned with the capitalist system.”

“The instrumental use of BTS celebrities” is another topic of interest for the research group. Fourteen-year-old Hadith and eighteen-year-old Shokufeh mentioned the following in their reports regarding this:

- “The Illuminati you mentioned, which exists in both Hollywood and K-pop, what is it?

The Illuminati is a satanic cult and the most powerful and wealthiest cult in the world, whose leaders are unknown, and they aim to significantly reduce the world's population to control people more easily and have the entire world under their influence. They say that if we can control teenagers and young people, it will be more beneficial for us, and this way, we get closer to our goal. Now, what do teenagers and young people like and spend their time on? Famous and influential singers and actors. When a new singer enters the music industry, they make their first song a huge hit and make them famous, giving them a lot of money. Then they tell them that since we did this for you, you have to work for us; we will give you everything you want, a world of money, a nice house, a fancy car, and we will make you very famous. Well, who would say no to this offer? Singers, actors, and celebrities accept it and sign a contract that they have to sign in their own blood. After that contract, they have to perform several ceremonies, and this is referred to as selling their soul to the devil. Once they sell their soul, they lose control over everything, even their blinking, and everything is completely controlled by the Illuminati.”

- “Does the company operate independently, or does it work under another organization?

It seems to operate independently, but there are rumors about a contract between the company and the Illuminati, which, if true, means that the

Illuminati is the higher organization overseeing the company. But no one is sure about this.

- What do you know about the Illuminati?

The Illuminati is a Freemasonic company that signs contracts with content production companies and celebrities around the world. In exchange for fame, they ask them to subtly incorporate their symbols, signs, and ideologies into their content and performances. It is interpreted that celebrities sell their souls to the devil. This company has a lot of power, and just as it can astonishingly cause celebrities to gain fame, it can equally erase them from their field of activity, to the point where their works are no longer seen globally, which is very frightening.”

2-2- Cultural and Social Goals of Big Hit Entertainment

An examination of the opinions presented by the interviewees regarding the cultural goals of Big Hit Entertainment reveals four main categories: "showcasing Korea's cultural power," "creating a foundation for the expansion of liberal culture," "efforts to create cultural and social attractions for the capitalist system," and "efforts to divert criticism from the capitalist system."

Korean leaders, and consequently institutions like Big Hit, focusing on showcasing Korean cultural power are seeking to utilize the implications of this issue, which is synonymous with attracting immigrants, elite individuals, and students (and subsequently strengthening Korea's economic foundation). The political leaders of Korea and, under them, Big Hit Entertainment, in the context of "creating a foundation for the expansion of liberal culture," aim to articulate liberal cultural policies alongside South Korea's liberal economy. This means that liberal thought does not only manifest in the economy of a society but also influences various social, cultural, ethical, ideological, and even aesthetic dimensions, imparting its liberal flavor to them.

Liberalism as a culture advocates for cultural free-thinking, which can have both positive and negative dimensions. If liberal culture pays attention to the needs of individuals and society, it can lead to cultural dialogues and even the discourse of civilizations. However, if liberal culture, under the guise of freedom, allows people to do anything, and on the other hand, the media of society instills the naturalness of various deviations in children from an early age (meaning during their formative years when they are still years away from developing abstract thinking and selective thinking), it acts against free-thinking in the name of liberal culture. This is because it imposes extensive influences on