

From Pop Icons to Political Icons

The Impact of Celebrity Politicians on Youth Political Participation

Thesis submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master in
Political Science (MSc)

International Relations

June 21, 2024

Abstract

This thesis builds on the concept of celebrity politicians, celebrity endorsement theory, and parasocial relationships theory to examine how popular culture and celebrities in particular are able to stimulate youth political participation. Whereas previous research solely focuses on popular culture products, the framework of this thesis incorporates celebrities, as well as their fans' perspective, to illustrate how youth political participation emerges. As celebrities have gained powerful positions in societies over the last decades, they have become prominent and influential figures that are able to affect their audiences' behavior and attitudes. With youth political participation declining, and the youth searching for other avenues to participate outside of formal, electoral politics, celebrities might be the key actors to engage them. Especially informal types of participation are stimulated by these celebrities, which include, amongst other examples, activism or fundraising. This thesis introduces the case study of the South Korean band BTS and their fans ARMY in order to illustrate the mechanisms through which the influence of popular culture and celebrities can affect youth political participation.

Keywords: Youth Political Participation, Popular Culture, Celebrity Politicians

Author: Laura Nordhausen (1099244)

Supervisor: Dr. G. Qiao-Franco

Nijmegen School of Management

Radboud University – Nijmegen – The Netherlands

Word Count: 19.251

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
List of Abbreviations and Acronyms	3
List of Figures	3
Chapter 1: Lights, Camera, Action!	4
Chapter 2: From Popular Entertainment to Political Engagement	8
2.1 Importance and Urgency of Youth Political Participation in Contemporary Politics	8
2.1.1 Debated Definitions of Youth Political Participation	8
2.1.2 Youth Political Participation Explained	9
2.1.3 Existing Literature	11
2.2 Can Popular Culture Drive Youth Political Participation?	12
2.2.1 (Popular) Culture in Global Politics and International Relations	12
2.2.2 Popular Culture in Politics Conceptualized	13
2.2.3 Popular Culture's Effects on Youth Political Participation	15
2.2.4 Critiques on Existing Literature	16
2.3 Introducing Celebrity Politicians	18
2.4 From Marketing to Politics: Celebrity Endorsement Theory	20
2.5 The Ultimate Toolbox: Parasocial Relationships Theory	21
Chapter 3: Methodology	24
3.1 Research Design	24
3.2 Data Collection	25
3.3 Data Analysis and Research Method	25
3.4 Limitations and Challenges	26
Chapter 4: The Political Clout of the BTS ARMY	28
4.1 Introduction to BTS	28
4.2 Introduction to ARMY	29
4.3 ARMY's Political Initiatives: Going Beyond Music	30
4.3.1 Healthcare	31
4.3.2 Environment	31
4.3.3 Social Justice, Equality, and Politics	32
Chapter 5: BTS Sparks Political Smarts	34
5.1 BTS' Musical Messages	34
5.1.1 Popular Culture Products, Familiarity, Likeability, Similarity, and Youth Political Participation	36
5.2 BTS' Credibility as Celebrity Politicians	38

5.2.1 BTS and the South Korean Government	38
5.2.2 BTS, the United Nations, and UNICEF	39
5.2.3 Other Activities	40
5.2.4 Credibility, Celebrity Politicians, and Youth Political Participation	42
5.3 BTS Behind the Scenes: the Establishment of Parasocial Relationships	44
Chapter 6: Concluding: Celebrity Politicians Stimulate Participation	48
Reference List	51
Appendices	61
Appendix A	61

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AANHPI	Asian American and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
ARMY	Adorable Representatives MC for Youth
BLM	Black Lives Matter
BTS	Bangtan Sonyeondan (방탄소년단)
CP1	Celebrity Politician type 1
CP2	Celebrity Politician type 2
IR	International Relations
OIAA	One In An Army
PSR	Parasocial Relationship
UN	United Nations
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNICEF	United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund
US	United States

List of Figures

Figure 1	The 4 Approaches to Popular Culture	15
Figure 2	BTS Birthday Message in Thailand	33
Figure 3	BTS with President Moon Jae In	38
Figure 4	BTS at the United Nations	38
Figure 5	BTS with US President Joe Biden	41

Chapter 1: Lights, Camera, Action!

In October 2020, a tweet from BTS' Twitter account (now X) supporting the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement went viral, amassing millions of likes and retweets. Within 24 hours, the fanbase of the South Korean band, known as ARMY, raised over a million dollars for the cause, matching the group's own donation (Rolli, 2020). This powerful moment highlighted the immense influence BTS wields over its global fanbase and raised an intriguing question; how can a K-pop band mobilize youth for political action across the world?

Popular culture has long been a conduit for social and political messages, but the digital age and creation of social media platforms has amplified the reach and impact of celebrities like never before. The study of popular culture has only recently entered the field of vision for scholars (Clerc, 2023), but is seen as crucial for explaining and stimulating political processes. Its products can reach large audiences while conveying both informative and emotional messages that have the ability to resonate (Press-Barnathan, 2017). Therefore, most popular culture products and messages shape audiences' understanding of both society and politics. For example, nuclear wars have not been fought, yet society as a collective has the ability to visualize what might happen during one due to portrayals in popular culture, such as through film (Daniel & Musgrave, 2017). As a result, popular culture provides the audience with tools to understand politics. It does not only influence politics through its (fictional) products and representations in film or television, celebrities can have an enormous impact as well.

Celebrities have become prominent figures in popular culture over the last couple of decades; about 60 years ago, celebrities were mere figures in popular culture that were known for their 'well-knownness', lacking any agency outside of being a celebrity and doing what they were famous for (Ribke, 2015). This definition notwithstanding nowadays, the role of celebrities in society has drastically changed: they have become people whose opinions have power and are able to affect audiences accordingly. Their involvement with sociopolitical issues is also part of the bigger movement towards active political engagement that we can identify in popular culture.

With their blend of music, activism, campaigns, and a global following, BTS stands at the forefront of this phenomenon. By investigating this intersection of popular culture and political activism, this study aims to shed light on the potential of celebrities to effect social change. The case study of BTS offers a unique lens through which one can understand the power of modern-day influences by celebrities and popular culture in shaping the political landscape for the younger generation. This thesis explores the ways in which BTS influences ARMY's youth political participation, examining the mechanisms behind their impact and the

broader implications for expanding democratic engagement amongst the younger generation. Therefore, the research question of this thesis goes as follows:

How do popular culture and celebrities in particular stimulate youth political participation?

The importance of studying youth political participation can be explained through focusing on both its societal and academic impact. Youth political participation has become an urgent topic of discussion due to the consistent decline of the youth's engagement with formal, electoral politics. Ever since the 1960s, the younger generation has advocated for their rights as student protests became a well-known and widespread phenomenon which established the youth's discontent with formal political institutions and processes (Pitti, 2018). Currently, this debate still remains and concerns grow, especially since the quality of democratic practice is under pressure (Pfanzelt & Spies, 2018; Zhang, 2022). In order to upkeep the current level of democracy, youth's voices are deemed necessary: not participating politically would otherwise evolve into the increased risk of democratic erosion (Farthing, 2010; Kitanova, 2020). In academics, the focus on studying youth political participation lies within this debate, as most research intends to find solutions to this decline in order to solve youth political participation in the form of voter turnout or attending political rallies. However, those studies leave out a whole other, perhaps more interesting and important, side of youth political participation, namely the unique ways of informal political participation that the youth identifies with more and actively participates in.

These new forms of youth political participation, also classified as informal ways of participation, are often labelled as illegitimate or less mature than more formal participation modes such as voting (Fyfe, 2009; Pitti, 2018). However, this claim could not be more far from the truth: the youth feels that the electoral system has failed them repeatedly and has therefore searched for alternative political avenues that express their lifestyle, identity, and opinions best. Examples of these types of participation can be activism, politically motivated consumerism, or other grassroots campaigns (Zhang, 2022). Youth political participation in this sense has been an underdeveloped study in academics as most research only amplifies the concerns around formal participation and does not recognize the youth's informal alternatives. In essence, this thesis will examine the informal political participation efforts of the younger generation and contribute to existing academic research by legitimizing them. Furthermore, youth political participation initiatives such as activism provide a unique context to not only study the development of social movements, but also offer valuable insights into how young people develop political identities (Earl et al., 2017). Through understanding the newer, less formal,

and more innovative methods of youth political participation, new understandings of political engagement and mobilization can emerge as young people have unique perspectives to offer (Philips, 2023). Besides contributions to academic research, it is also of societal importance to understand youth political participation as the activism of today's youth can have long-lasting and impactful consequences on the political landscape and societal norms surrounding matters such as climate or diversity.

Scholars have long debated what factors were necessary to drive political participation among youth. Traditional academic research, focusing on formal participation, emphasizes the importance of education, socioeconomic status, or familial influences (Dostie-Goulet, 2009; Kyranakis & Nurvala, 2013; Pontes et al., 2019). However, in the age of digital media, popular culture has emerged as a powerful new force. The majority of today's youth has turned to online networks and social media to gain political knowledge, spike their political interest, and therefore participate politically (Fyfe, 2009). Through these social media networks, the youth can connect to not only their favorite popular culture phenomena, but also to each other (Street et al., 2013). Subsequently, the strength of popular culture lies in its ability to create a sense of shared identity among those who are fans; communities around these phenomena often have a strong sense of togetherness. This feeling of belonging and shared identity is one of the most important preconditions for political participation, and is therefore especially helpful in stimulating political engagement (Street et al., 2013). Central to these popular culture phenomena are not only popular culture products, which academic research has mostly focused on; there is also a whole other side, namely celebrities. Celebrities who are actively involved with and speak about politics are called celebrity politicians. As the youth is invested in celebrity culture (Street et al., 2013), and as celebrities are often viewed to have a powerful opinion as endorsers (Brown, 2015), it is important to examine how the effect of celebrities on youth political participation can contribute to existing popular culture literature. Celebrities significantly impact societal behaviors and attitudes, especially those of the younger generation (Dekoninck & Schmuck, 2023). Understanding this influence can help explain the shifts in public opinion and participatory behavior as celebrities are often perceived as role models.

Throughout this thesis, the themes of youth political participation, popular culture, and celebrity politicians will be explored. Following this introduction is chapter 2 which will examine the literature published about these themes but will also add to the theoretical framework by introducing celebrity endorsement theory and parasocial relationships theory. This literature and these theories will lay the groundwork for identifying and explaining the mechanisms that stimulate youth political participation, which will be discussed later in the thesis. Chapter 3 illustrates this thesis' research design by delving into the case selection criteria and

methodologies chosen to conduct this research. The analysis starts in chapter 4, as it will provide an introduction to both BTS and their fanbase ARMY, and an overview of the political activities undertaken by them in order to illustrate how they are socio-politically responsible actors. Some of those main political participatory efforts include charity fundraisers and campaigns, which will be the main focus of this chapter. Chapter 5 continues the analysis section of this thesis by highlighting how BTS' political activities have stimulated ARMY's political participation. In order to illustrate the mechanisms that made BTS' political activism affect ARMY's political participation, the literature on popular culture will be used and substantiated by the concept of celebrity politicians, celebrity endorsement theory, as well as parasocial relationships theory. Lastly, chapter 6 concludes the findings of the case study, identifies the broader implications of this thesis' outcome, and discusses the limitations of the scope of this thesis, which might open up possible directions for future research.

Chapter 2: From Popular Entertainment to Political Engagement

This chapter will first introduce the core concepts of youth political participation and why research on it is now more important than ever. The answer to youth political participation may lie in popular culture, but this field has still been underexamined in academia. A section on the concept of popular culture in the field of International Relations by Neumann and Nexon (2006) will be followed by the critiques of current existing literature and a dive into the role of celebrities in politics as discussed in the works of Street (2002, 2004). After this research is embedded in existing literature, the theoretical framework and main concepts will be introduced at the end of this chapter.

2.1 Importance and Urgency of Youth Political Participation in Contemporary Politics

The concerns about the lack and continuous decrease of formal youth political participation have been extremely high. The youth tends to reject or feel increasingly more alienated from the traditional political system and processes which makes it difficult to find a solution for this decline (Farthing, 2010; Henn & Foard, 2014; Pontes et al., 2019; Rainsford, 2017; Rossi, 2009). The traditional forms of participation include voting, attending a political meeting or rally, or joining a party and receiving party membership (Fyfe, 2009). Furthermore, one of the core elements of political participation is argued to be political knowledge (Andersen et al., 2020), and the youth are viewed as politically unknowledgeable; therefore the sentiment is that they lack the sufficient information to properly participate (Ghazarian et al., 2019). Another core element for participation is political interest, and the youth is also less politically interested in comparison to older generations (Zhang, 2022). In current and past research, there is an urge to solve the lack and decrease of youth political participation as participation is viewed to be the single most important functioning cog in the machines that are our democracies (Pfanzelt & spies, 2019). Democracies are political systems enabled by and focused on the people, and if a big part of the group that is considered 'the people' does not participate, the mechanisms ensuring the proper functioning of a democracy will falter. As a result, youth disengagement might have detrimental effects for the future of democracy, politics, and the youth's own lives (Rainsford, 2017).

2.1.1 Debated Definitions of Youth Political Participation

There are two main discourses surrounding youth political participation; both illustrate their relationship with politics as very problematized. On the one hand, as discussed earlier, youths are described as apathetic, antipolitical, passive and lacking any sense of civic responsibility, political awareness, interest or knowledge (Farthing, 2010; Henn & Foard, 2014). Older citizens,

who have higher levels of traditional political participation, are viewed as wiser and more knowledgeable about politics, while the younger citizens' image is troubled (Farthing, 2010). Therefore, the decline in voter turnout has largely been attributed to the lack of youth political participation (Dostie-Goulet, 2009). On the other hand, however, it is argued that only youth participation in formal, traditional politics has declined, while the youth engages in more unorthodox and informal political processes (Henn & Foard, 2014). Viewed through this lens, political interest and knowledge would not directly translate into votes (Kitanova, 2020). Instead, the younger generation tends to gravitate towards less traditional and instead more non-institutional and unconventional political activities (Earl et al., 2017) such as boycotts (Pfanzelt & Spies, 2019), identity and lifestyle politics (Zhang, 2022), and online or non-partisan activism focused on specific civic issues (Fyfe, 2009).

Thus, it can be concluded that only youth formal political participation is in decline, while types of informal participation are actually expanding. Considering the fact that disengagement and engagement are happening at the same time, it is important to disclose the definition of political participation this thesis will build its arguments upon. Throughout this research, the effect on youth political participation through popular culture and celebrities in particular will be discussed. Youth political participation, in this sense, is its own concept which includes types of participation that are not associated with formal politics and go beyond party lines. I will therefore be focusing on informal types of political participation inherently unique to the youth's practices, which throughout this thesis will be referred to as youth political participation. Therefore, it distinguishes itself from regular electoral political participation, since it includes activities exclusive to the youth that cannot be found in traditional participation.

2.1.2 Youth Political Participation Explained

Youth political participation has since the global rise and establishing of democracies always been somewhat distinct from formal participation. Young people first started to go against the formal institutions in the 1960s with the upsurge of student demonstrations (Pitti, 2018). Over time, these expressions of discontent with the political system have evolved into a new form of political participation in which young people express their political interest through individual and fluid engagements with specific issues that they identify with, mostly due to the lack of identification and discontent with the traditional partisan ideological system (Pitti, 2018). Often, a distinction has been made between youth (or immature) and adult (therefore mature) participation, which has resulted in legitimacy issues concerning the informal political participation activities (Farthing, 2010; Fyfe, 2009). Formal, traditional institutions condone these types of participation since the youth criticizes their practices and therefore, this wave of

youth participation is rarely encouraged by traditional institutions (Zhang, 2022). Young citizens strongly feel that their concerns and criticisms are brushed aside by those same institutions, resulting in them rejecting and distrusting institutional traditional politics (Earl et al., 2017). Rather, other forms of political participation that seem more meaningful to the youth tend to be more suitable for them as they continue to feel excluded from the traditional system (Kitanova, 2020).

This rejection of the political system is grounded by the long process of deliberate decision-making by the traditional institutions which have made the interests of the youth less and less central (Pitti, 2018). If the younger citizens of a country feel like they are not being represented by politics and politicians do not invest in their futures, it would be quite logical that the youth in turn will also not invest their time and efforts in the existing political system (Rossi, 2009). Formal forms of political participation, such as elected officials, have not tended to young people's concerns, and they miss a genuine connection to their representatives and issues they are interested in. As a result, the youth has formed new forms of participation that suit their interests at best while simultaneously going against the narrow conception of politics (Zhang, 2022). Through being more curious and finding new ways to express themselves, media exposure is quite likely to influence the younger citizens as they have a bigger online presence and a more open and flexible attitude to what they consider to be political (Andersen et al., 2020). Media narratives are not only reflections of events or public life, they also have the ability to shape our public lives (Philips, 2023). While the older generations tend to be more closely tied to traditional news media, younger generations turn to mostly social media; the internet has been intrinsically integrated into their everyday lives and they have, as a result, started to use the online space as an arena that accommodates their political ends (Andersen et al., 2020; Dekoninck & Schmuck, 2023; Fyfe, 2009). Social media enables for a more personalized and direct way to deliver political contents. Due to the algorithm focusing on content it deems personal and relevant to the user, it can be an important trigger for political involvement (Andersen et al., 2020). As a result, in this new form of youth political participation, the younger citizens organize themselves online, make use of their online presence to raise awareness, or simply discuss political or societal issues on social media.

The characteristics of this new form of youth political participation should be discussed more in depth. First, besides the more obvious actions such as non-partisan protests, youth political participation involves actions that are politically grounded but are not directed to or take place in the traditional political sphere itself (Dekoninck & Schmuck, 2023). An example is politically motivated consumerism, where you intend to only buy items from shops or brands that find similar values or ideals to be of importance. Buying from black-owned small

businesses, or supporting small businesses in general, could be a manifestation of this politically motivated consumerism. Second, youth participation is very expressive in comparison to the traditional, formal, institutional political participation (Pfanzelt & Spies, 2019). Expressive participation is mostly organized on the internet and zooms in on citizens' political intentions. Third, social movements are now mainly organized online; they are the actors that appear to gather the qualities that politically motivate the youth most (Earl et al., 2017; Rossi, 2009). Online social movements provide the youth with the opportunity to participate socially or politically and focus on specific issues that they find important, while also providing results in either real time or the short term. Overall, youth participation is centered around specific issues, identity, and lifestyle (Zhang, 2022), while formal participation is more about ideology and partisanship.

2.1.3 Existing Literature

The concept of youth political participation has been established and highlights a new type of participation that arose due to discontent with the formal political institutions. Nevertheless, it is still of significance to not forget that formal political participation amongst the younger generation is declining (Andersen et al., 2020; Kitanova, 2020). The importance of this issue should not be underestimated since the lack of e.g. young voters could have significant effects on the future of politics and democracy (Pfanzelt & Spies, 2019; Pitti, 2018; Zhang, 2022). However, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to find a solution for this lack of engagement by the youth within formal politics. Instead, this thesis reinforces the idea that the new ways through which the youth participates politically are legitimate expressions of political interest, while simultaneously encouraging these types of participation to be recognized more in academics. Formal political institutions have continuously failed to cater towards youth's prospects and interests, and therefore the youth has started to find new ways to participate. In essence, this research does not present a solution to the discontent with the institutions, but will recognize that there are problems with these institutions that make the youth not want to be associated with or part of those structures.

Existing literature on youth political participation has focused on how the youth participates differently compared to older generations (Andersen et al., 2020; Fyfe, 2009; Pitti, 2018; Zhang, 2022), looked at solutions to increase youth participation for formal, institutional, and electoral politics (Farthing, 2010; Kyranakis & Nurvala, 2013; Pontes et al., 2019), or studied specific cases on either the country or regional level through for example voter turnout (Henn & Foard, 2014; Kitanova, 2020; Pfanzelt & Spies, 2019; Rainsford, 2017). Even though most of these articles do recognize this new type of youth political participation, they all try to find

solutions to how this new type of participation can fit in the existing system. Some research also links the phenomena of youth political participation and popular culture (Clerc, 2023; Philips, 2023; Street et al., 2013). This literature argues that youth political participation is not only shaped by traditional political institutions but is increasingly influenced by the realms of popular culture. They argue that popular culture plays a significant role in shaping the identities, values, and behaviors of young people: as young people navigate their political identities, they often draw upon elements of popular culture (Kangas, 2009). Thus, popular culture can serve both as a medium for political expression and a source of political inspiration. This interplay between popular culture and political engagement among youth is a crucial area of study, as it provides insights into how contemporary consumption of popular culture impacts political participation.

2.2 Can Popular Culture Drive Youth Political Participation?

Popular culture might be an important factor in encouraging youth political participation, but is also a dimension underexamined. Therefore, in this section, the relationship between (popular) culture and politics will be discussed. To fully understand the factors influencing youth political participation, it is essential to delve deeper into the connection between popular culture and political participation of the younger generation. Especially the influence celebrities, in the form of celebrity politicians, can have on political participation is central to this relationship.

2.2.1 (Popular) Culture in Global Politics and International Relations

Culture has been a growing research subject field in International Relations studies, in particular amongst specialists of diplomacy (Clerc, 2023). Concepts such as cultural diplomacy (Akhter, 2016; Marc, 2020; Schneider, 2010) and public diplomacy (Doncel-Martin et al., 2023; Hajdari, 2019) take central stage in this IR research. These forms of diplomacy use culture as a tool to foster mutual understanding between nations and their peoples, which therefore allows a free exchange of ideas and information (Schneider, 2010). In other words, culture is used as an instrument by government officials, representatives, or diplomats to enhance their states' image abroad through a soft power approach (Akhter, 2016; Braimah & Edo, 2020; Iwabuchi, 2015). Examples of cultural diplomacy are the US' diplomatic stance during the cold war by focusing on cultural artifacts such as jazz music and modern literature (Schneider, 2010), or improving relations between India and Pakistan through theatre, cinema, and sports (Akhter, 2016), while public diplomacy was an effective tool against hate-speech during the COVID-19 pandemic (Doncel-Martin et al., 2023). Hence, one of the biggest strengths of culture is its ability to create shared values and interests.

Besides being used to improve state and societal relations, how is culture itself related to politics? Culture and politics are intertwined but have different positions in society; culture is said to have humanizing effects, while politics demonizes (Schneider, 2010). Culture can create solidarity, belonging, and mutual understanding and is therefore able to, whether that is in diplomacy, politics or society in general, build bridges, create acceptance, and reduce hostility (Schneider, 2010). Representatives of culture can be found in mainly the entertainment industries such as music, film or television; the imaginaries those industries create can influence how the general public make sense of complex social phenomena (Clerc, 2023). As a result, the products from those entertainment industries are either used by cultural diplomats to improve relations or by scholars to study popular culture. Popular culture provides us with visual representational imaginaries where politics is constituted; the continuous growth in the circulation and production of popular culture makes world politics what it currently is (Grayson et al., 2009).

2.2.2 Popular Culture in Politics Conceptualized

Culture profoundly affects politics, therefore we should not neglect popular culture. It is within popular culture “that morality is shaped, identities are produced and transformed, and effective analogies and narratives are constructed and altered” (Neumann & Nexon, 2006, p. 6). Popular culture has several ways through which it not only represents political life, it also constitutes it. Neumann and Nexon (2006) distinguish between first-order and second-order representations: first-order representations are direct representations of political or social life, which can be found in e.g. journalism. Second-order representations, however, are narratives in popular entertainment that represent social or political life through layers of fictional representation (Neumann & Nexon, 2006). International Relations (IR) scholars often neglect the second-order representations (Daniel & Musgrave, 2017), since first-order representations are viewed to be factual expressions of international politics instead of fictional representations. From this point of view, popular culture, as it is a second-order representation, is frequently underestimated while it actually constitutes most people’s knowledge about and perception of politics and society (Neumann & Nexon, 2006). In order to gain a better and more in-dept understanding of world politics, studying a broad array of popular culture phenomena is required. Neumann and Nexon (2006) recognized four specific ways through which popular culture can be studied in International Relations research. It is essential to discuss these approaches as they provide us with contexts that explain the complex relationship between popular culture, politics, and therefore also youth political participation.

The first approach is popular culture as politics. In this type of second-order representation, popular culture and its products are recognized to be causes and effects of international political processes. Neumann and Nexon (2006) link this type of popular culture to international political economy and discuss how copyright infringement or cultural protectionism fall under this approach. Furthermore, products of popular culture have the potential to influence not only political discourse and policy debates, but also to galvanize social movements. This influence is not one-sided; popular culture in turn is also affected by events central to IR, such as political movements or war (Neumann & Nexon, 2006). Secondly, popular culture is identified as a mirror. This approach is mainly used while teaching in IR, but in theory it is broader than that: IR scholars can use popular culture as a tool to explore theoretical concepts, solve dilemmas and look into foreign policy (Neumann & Nexon, 2006). It also has the ability to inspire IR theorists after engaging with a popular culture product. Popular culture as data is the third approach identified by Neumann and Nexon (2006), which entails that popular culture can be handled as “evidence about dominant norms, ideas, identities or beliefs in a particular state, society or regions” (p. 13). It mostly refers to the useful reflections of cultural and political themes that popular culture provides in opposition to elite discourse; this approach also clearly distinguishes first- and second-order representations. Thus, popular culture in this third conception is treated as a very important second-order representation. Lastly, Neumann and Nexon (2006) discuss popular culture as constitutive. This approach relaxes the distinction between the first- and second-order representations and instead delves into how popular culture actively forms first-order representations. Hence, it is more important in this approach to understand how popular culture is an inherent part of actual international political conduct (Neumann & Nexon, 2006). Examples of this approach in practice include IR scholars that have researched how religion, a mix of belief and make-belief, has been at the core of society and therefore continuously impacted social and political life, while technically being labelled as a second-order representation.

In this thesis, the first approach of popular culture as politics will be utilized: the political process that is caused or influenced by popular culture is in this case youth political participation.

Figure 1

The 4 Approaches to Popular Culture

	Approaches			
	Popular Culture and Politics	Popular Culture as Mirror	Popular Culture as Data	Popular Culture as Constitutive
Status of Popular Culture	As a cause or outcome in world politics As an element of political processes in world politics	As a medium of inspiration for exploring themes/processes in international relations and international-relations theory	As evidence of the norms, beliefs, identities, etc.	As interactive with other representations of political life
Typical Mode of Analysis	Mainstream international-relations approaches	Pedagogical and analogical	Ethnographic, content analysis, etc.	Structural, post-structural, and other forms found in cultural studies
Key Questions	<i>Significance:</i> Are elements of popular culture a significant cause or outcome for international relations?	<i>Communicative:</i> Does the use of popular culture help to explain or elucidate issues in world politics?	<i>Quality:</i> Is the interpretation of the data correct; is it a good indicator of the existence of the norms, beliefs, identity, etc.?	<i>Relevance:</i> Are the interactions between popular culture and other representational system important to understanding international political process?

2.2.3 Popular Culture’s Effects on (Youth) Political Participation

Now that the relationship between popular culture and politics has been established, it is important to further draw upon the concept of popular culture as politics to demonstrate how popular culture could influence political participation. As shown before, culture produces shared meanings, interests and experiences (Jenkins, 2018; Kangas, 2009; Street et al., 2013). This process can also be translated towards popular culture and therefore allows entertainment to be viewed as a potential source of those shared values (Street et al., 2013). Through popular culture, lived experiences are discussed and agency is given to voices who are able to highlight these shared values and experiences. Since culture is such an important part of the lived experience, it is inherently a part of politics (Aistrophe, 2020; Daniel & Musgrave, 2017; Mulcahy, 2010; Street et al., 2013). As for (youth) political participation, popular culture might play a significant role. Individuals do not simply turn into sentient political beings once they turn 18 years old: they need to acquire political knowledge from different channels of communication, either formal or informal, and it is plausible that one such avenue to provide knowledge is popular culture (Grayson et al., 2009; Street et al., 2013).

Besides the potential to connect with others, popular culture also allows for locating oneself within wider communities of interest (Jenkins, 2018; Neumann & Nexon, 2006; Street et al., 2013). Connecting to communities and experiencing feelings of belonging are absolutely necessary preconditions for political engagement. Unlike traditional structures of electoral politics, popular culture accommodates emotional engagement with politics while being able to explore certain political issues (Press-Barnathan, 2017; Street et al., 2013). As mentioned earlier, young people feel a strong disconnect from electoral politics and perceive the political system as not capable to properly represent and solve issues the youth deem important. They would prefer to perform, and see politics being performed, in a more playful way that is less connected to hierarchies or institutions (Fyfe, 2009; Street et al., 2013). Popular culture offers

a large range of possible modes of representation and does address the causes these youths cares about. Therefore, it can definitely make a contribution to improving democratic culture where political participation is most necessary, precisely because it offers modes of presentation that might connect young people to issues of public concern (Clerc, 2023; Street et al., 2013). Popular culture is an accessible part of their everyday lives that provides possible connections between the youth's personal lives or interests and the wider, political world. A politically engaged individual surmounts geographical or social barriers through recognizing shared concerns. Due to popular culture being able to construct this shared sense of community, it allows individuals to develop political affinity, which is an important factor for active citizenship (Daniel & Musgrave, 2017; Jenkins, 2018; Street et al., 2013).

Yet, popular culture is not a tool that guarantees political participation for all (young) citizens that engage with it, nor is it a replacement for other resources (Street et al., 2013). What it does offer are opportunities to strengthen a collective identity and shared values, and it should be taken into serious consideration for that reason. Precisely because popular culture highlights these informal modes of communication and allows for wider opportunities of political engagement that formal, electoral politics marginalizes, it is well-suited to try and engage young people in politics (Farthing, 2010; Street et al., 2013).

2.2.4 Critiques on Existing Literature

The research on popular culture has seen an upsurge in the field, and its influence on politics has more or less been generally accepted by scholars of International Relations (Kangas, 2009). Despite the recognition that products of popular culture are considered to be at the 'low' level of political life, they still offer valuable insights (Kangas, 2009; Neumann & Nexon, 2006). Existing research on popular culture in International Relations so far has focused on entertainment products that have come out of popular culture in the last couple of decades, such as Harry Potter (Neumann & Nexon, 2006), Star Trek or Toy Story (Kangas, 2009), or My Little Pony (Clerc, 2023). As illustrated by these cases, IR research about popular culture products has often been limited to fictional narratives or characters from movies or series. The effect on politics through consuming these fictional popular culture products is often studied (Press-Barnathan, 2017), while leaving out a whole other side of popular culture, namely celebrities.

Furthermore, existing research concentrates on specific country cases such as how American popular culture shapes Chinese views of the USA (Gries et al., 2015), or how sports and music affect Kosovo's image and international relations (Hajdari, 2019). Broader research on popular culture links its effects to international conflicts, relating it to the positivist and critical

understandings (Press-Barnathan, 2017) or to the pragmatist side (Kangas, 2009) within the field of International Relations. However, still most of the existing research on popular culture in IR relates back to its usage for diplomatic purposes and soft power through focusing on how cultural products can improve one country's image (Akhter, 2016; Braimah & Edo, 2020; Gries et al., 2015; Hajdari, 2019; Iwabuchi, 2015; Li et al., 2021; Marc, 2020; Press-Barnathan, 2017; Schneider, 2010). Hence, there are two mechanisms that are not highlighted by prior research, namely the global effects of popular culture consumption, and the political effects of popular culture figures instead of products. Effects of popular culture products or figures are very much internationally popular and influential (Mulcahy, 2010), which is something that most previous studies do not regard.

Popular culture is also still somewhat of a contested topic within academia; a focus on established academic sources remains while overlooking the potential of popular culture on mass audiences (Daniel & Musgrave, 2017). Popular culture is known for its ability to shape audiences' ideas on world politics, and its products have found their way into political discourses (Aistropé, 2020). Despite this statement being widely recognized in International Relations (Kangas, 2009), popular culture has still been treated as a distraction from real academic research, and as a result, the research on popular culture phenomena affecting politics has had a marginal impact (Daniel & Musgrave, 2017). The power of popular culture resides not only in its ability to highlight shared experiences and create other forms of participation, but also in its ability to provide information about the world and politics in an accessible and easily understandable manner to audiences which know little or nothing (Daniel & Musgrave, 2017). There is a common implicit bias in academia, which still widely exists, that ideas are superior and circulate best if they come from respectable sources (Kangas, 2009). However, most people do not have access to or do not have the means to properly engage with academic practice. Popular culture could be a channel through which the general public is able to receive some extent of political education, therefore the strength of popular culture lies in its ability to reach a wide audience (Press-Barnathan, 2017). So, while there is still some objection to it in the field, popular culture might play a greater role in shaping international relations and world politics than International Relations studies so far has recognized due to this bias (Daniel & Musgrave, 2017).

In order to expand on the existing body of literature, this thesis will legitimize the importance of popular culture in relation to politics, as well as adding another perspective through the concept of celebrity politicians. While popular culture products, such as films and TV shows, play a significant role in shaping political attitudes and raising awareness, celebrities add a personal and interactive dimension that these products cannot.

2.3 Introducing Celebrity Politicians

The rise of celebrity politicians is a significant phenomenon that intersects popular culture and politics, expanding the political landscape and its accompanying possibilities (Grayson et al., 2009). This concept, articulated by Street (2004), defines a celebrity politician as “a person who, having become famous through some realm of popular culture, uses their fame in order to promote a cause or to win an election” (Street et al., 2013, p. 86). Celebrities, perceived as authentic and influential, can make political participation more relatable and visible, especially for young people. This section examines the theoretical underpinnings of celebrity politicians, operationalizes the concept, and discusses its limitations.

In Daniel Boorstin’s 1961 book ‘The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America’, the reputation of celebrities is described as having a lack of agency and power; celebrities are simply known for their ‘well-knownness’ (Ribke, 2015). This reputation still lingers in popular contemporary discourse, as celebrity politicians are often viewed as celebrities who dabble in politics without any proper knowledge about political processes or policy. As a result, they are often being mocked by academic critics as they are worried that the trivial (entertainment) will infect the serious (politics) (Street, 2004). Concerns amongst experts remain considering the quality of political knowledge that is being transferred to the celebrities’ audience. Democracies are able to function due to rational and well-informed citizens, and the turn to celebrities as political representatives and informants perhaps does not create such citizens (Street et al., 2013). As a result, critics argue that celebrity politics creates a superficial political understanding and thus invites a superficial type of political participation.

Nonetheless, popular culture figures starting political ventures has become a legitimate, albeit complex, part of modern political representation; celebrity politics is here to stay (Marsh et al., 2010). To operationalize the concept of celebrity politicians, we can distinguish between two types as described by Street (2004) and subsequently developed by Wheeler (2013). Celebrity politicians who actively seek and acquire elected office are the first type (CP1). The type 1 celebrity politician itself is engaged with formal politics, examples include Ronald Reagan or Donald Trump. The second type of celebrity politicians (CP2) expresses political views through public gestures or statements without running for office, and therefore engage through informal ways (Street, 2004). CP2s are known for their ability to support causes, advocate for social movements, bring attention to fund-raisers, and are able to generate overall political interest (Wheeler, 2013). In general, celebrity activism by CP2s is argued to frequently harness democratic politics, while also educating segments of society about politics who would otherwise remain unknowing (Marsh et al., 2010). This thesis also focuses on CP2s, as the research emphasizes informal political participation among youth, rather than formal electoral

politics. Throughout the analysis, the informal political endeavors of BTS will therefore be discussed in order to evaluate them as type 2 celebrity politicians.

The phenomenon of celebrity politics has become inherent to modern society since it is a result of social and political change. These changes have also resulted in a globalization of culture (Mulcahy, 2010). In contemporary society, actions of states or formal institutions could possibly be experienced to be oppressive towards or neglective of certain groups of citizens. As a result, these actions allow for, albeit sometimes unintentionally, communities and platforms of (political) representation to form around (figures of) popular culture (Street, 2004). So far, this argument has only been made for states with oppressive, authoritarian tendencies or structures, such as East German rock musicians who felt oppressed in communist East Germany. However, even though not as apparent or clear-cut examples of oppression are present, similar processes of disconnect and disempowerment occur to the youth whose interests are ignored (Farthing, 2010; Jenkins et al., 2009). This process is central to this thesis and the reason as to why the youth turns to other forms of representation instead of elected politicians. Therefore, it is of significance to introduce the concept of celebrity politicians and see how the youth seeks political involvement through celebrity politicians instead of formal politics.

There are several ways through which celebrity politicians contribute uniquely to the discourse on youth political participation. First, celebrities are authentic figures that the youth can easily relate to personally, as opposed to politicians. Thus, celebrities could be seen as an embodiment of the connection between politics and popular culture while they have the ability to connect with their young audiences in a way that politicians are not able to (Street et al., 2013). Often, the youth has been suspicious of politicians' motives due to politics being their profession; therefore the youth experiences politicians' statements or opinions not as authentic but rather fabricated to fit into the electoral system and their job description (Street et al., 2013; Wood et al., 2016). Instead, celebrities, who are figures that share parts of their personal lives and therefore tend to have a less serious and more authentic image, are viewed as more genuine, as are their opinions on politics or certain causes (Wheeler, 2013). Second, celebrities serve as role models and are often trusted more by young people (Ho et al., 2022). Therefore, they represent a trustworthy possible alternative to current, more traditional political structures (Street et al., 2013). Thus, celebrities' voices are often more impactful while they can use their influence to enhance youth political attitudes and behavior. Third, celebrities can bring media attention to significant political issues, thereby encouraging public discourse and engagement (Nownes, 2021). Due to their apparent position in the public eye, often issues highlighted by

celebrities become part of the mainstream political discourse, and therefore also get picked up more easily by the youth.

Despite their potential to engage youth in politics, the concept of celebrity politicians does not come without its limitations. The concept does describe the ways through which celebrities take on political responsibilities, become accepted by their audience as political representatives, and as a result influence their attitudes or behaviors. However, it does not specify what makes celebrities so influential in the first place, nor does it take into account an audience's perspective and how being a fan results in more political participation. In order to fill these gaps, two theories will be introduced, namely celebrity endorsement theory and parasocial relationships theory.

2.4 From Marketing to Politics: Celebrity Endorsement Theory

Extensive research in the field of marketing has been done on the effects on product purchases through celebrity endorsements (Jackson, 2008). Consequently, celebrity endorsement theory explores the influence of celebrities in endorsing products and how this endorsement in turn positively impacts consumer behavior (Schimmelfennig & Hunt, 2020). In the context of this thesis and politics in general, this theory can be extended to not only understand how celebrity endorsements of political causes can influence public attitudes and behaviors among the youth. It also enables us to look into how celebrities' products can have an impact on the audience (Jackson, 2008). It therefore does not only add onto the celebrity politician concept, but also contributes to this research since it allows us to better understand why popular culture products have an influence on their consumers.

Celebrity endorsement theory by McCracken (1989) is seen as the most appropriate advancement of this theory (Schimmelfennig & Hunt, 2020), and is called the 'meaning transfer' model. It describes the process of how celebrities give meanings to products and how this meaning is adopted by the consumer of that product (McCracken, 1989). In order to describe this process and how the meaning the celebrity attributed to the product affects the consumer, 4 aspects are identified that make a consumer, or the audience, more likely to invest in a product when a celebrity endorses it. The first aspect is credibility. It is of importance that the celebrity has a moderate to high level of credibility when endorsing a product (McCracken, 1989). Even though it is an important factor, this in itself does not make celebrity endorsements effective, as politicians or experts also possess credibility (Jackson, 2008). Therefore, the other three aspects, namely familiarity, likeability, and similarity are introduced. One is familiar with a celebrity when they are repeatedly exposed to them, likeability can be achieved when one has affection for the celebrity, and similarity happens when a supposed resemblance is identified

between the celebrity and the consumer or fan (McCracken, 1989). In other words, it is of great importance that the audience member resonates with and likes the celebrity. So, once these latter three aspects can be pinpointed, celebrity endorsements prove to be fruitful.

An example of successful celebrity endorsement is when Oprah Winfrey backed Barack Obama's candidacy during the 2008 US presidential elections (Marsh et al., 2010). Furthermore, celebrity endorsements are also effective in the case of promoting pro-environmental behavior (Ho et al., 2022). Therefore, there are examples of how celebrity endorsements in politics are successful. This theory is also proven to impact young people as findings suggest that they are significantly more likely to agree to a position or change their behavior when something is endorsed by a celebrity (Brown, 2015; Jackson, 2008). As for this thesis, in order to measure whether the celebrity politicians' endorsement is effective, these four aspects will be analyzed and applied to BTS. This theory will not only be applied to BTS' political cause endorsements, but also to their popular culture products, i.e. their songs.

Now that the theoretical framework surrounding popular culture, celebrity politicians, and their endorsements is established, there is still one main part missing. Celebrities' opinions are amplified by and have an impact on their fans' attitudes and behaviors. Therefore, it is also of importance to further delve into how this likeability, as celebrity endorsement theory describes it, comes into existence. In order to address this limitation, parasocial relationships theory will be introduced to complete this thesis' theoretical framework.

2.5 The Ultimate Toolbox: Parasocial Relationships Theory

Having fans is extremely important for celebrity politicians. Being a fan of something has been normalized and is a defining characteristic of popular culture and modern society (Lamerichs, 2018; Street, 2004). The relationship between performer and fan is a significant experience for both parties. It entails a certain amount of intimacy that is the basis, but also goes beyond, some form of (political) representation, even if there is an enormous amount of geographical distance between the two (Street, 2004). Celebrities are idolized by their fans, and through sharing their personal lives and opinions, intimate relationships between fans and celebrities can be created that surpass basic interactions. The fans create an emotional bond with their favorite celebrities, which enlarges the celebrities' influence on those fans. Thus, parasocial relationships could be established that enable the celebrity to not only voice their political opinions or give a political voice to their fans, but also to let their fans be influenced by their position.

The concept of a parasocial relationship (PSR) was first established in the 1960s while researching audiences' reactions to appearances of traditional mainstream celebrities in

television shows and movies (Xu et al., 2023). PSRs can be defined as connections between the audience and media figures that the audience experiences as intensely as face-to-face intimate relationships (Leith, 2012; Scherer et al., 2022; Xu et al., 2023). These relationships are considered parasocial since the audiences are extremely knowledgeable about the media figures' personalities and interests while not knowing them personally. Often, parasocial relationships are one-sided since only audiences develop them (Xu et al., 2023), but that does not instantly suggest that the media figure has no strong feelings of gratitude or affection towards its audience members. The audience only has interest in one or several celebrities, and it is impossible for celebrities to have the same amount of dedication for each individual follower. Therefore, the relationship remains parasocial in nature (Hoffner & Bond, 2022). For the audience members, having a parasocial relationship is comparable to having real life friends and relationships since it provides feelings of inclusion, belonging, and satisfaction (Lotun et al., 2022; Paraveti et al., 2022), which leads to emotional attachment to these media figures, similar as to how one would experience real life friendship (Lieu et al., 2023; Scherer et al., 2022). As a result of this deep connection, PSRs have the ability to mobilize the audience (Liu et al., 2024), influence their attitudes and behavior (Dekoninck & Schmuck, 2023), while also affecting future motivations (Hoewe et al., 2020).

Interest in parasocial relationships theory has reignited over the past couple of years, with lots of research in the field focusing on how PSRs are created and are expressed in communities of influencers, YouTubers or Twitch streamers (Dekoninck & Schmuck, 2023; Leith, 2021; Lotun et al., 2022; Xu et al., 2023). The cases in which parasocial relationships are used focus mostly on matters such as self-image, empathy, and other mental health focused examples (Paraveti et al., 2022; Scherer et al., 2022), or brand awareness, promoting products, and marketing (Liu et al., 2024).

PSRs have the ability to influence people's lives to a great extent as they can fulfil belonging needs (Scherer et al., 2022), and influence followers' behavior and attitudes (Dekoninck & Schmuck, 2023). Therefore, parasocial relationships theory could provide an explanation for people's mobilization (Liu et al., 2024). As a result, some research about PSRs has touched upon political participation. The article by Hoewe et al. (2020) discusses how female lead characters in shows or movies with a politically driven plotline can affect female viewers' political participation and behavior. Furthermore, the effects of environmental influencers' content on their audiences' perception of environment is studied by Dekoninck and Schmuck (2023). Their research ties the informal modes youth political participation, such as politically motivated consumerism, and parasocial relationships theory together by illustrating how celebrities' opinions, though not always filled with expertise, are perceived as

important. That is the reason why fans of these popular culture figures tend to form communities around them.

As described by the popular culture literature in a previous section of this chapter, one of the main strengths of popular culture is that it enables a person to form a sense of shared identity and locate themselves within wider communities of interest. Experiencing feelings of belonging is a necessary precondition for political participation (Street et al., 2013), and parasocial relationships theory strengthens these feelings. Often, the communities that are created through popular culture are focused on the same interest; this is how fandoms originate. However, these fandoms are not passive audiences, instead they actively engage with the content their favorite media figure(s) released (Jenol & Pazil, 2022).

Participation always involves collective experience, a shared activity, or a type of community (Jenkins, 2018). Therefore, as we understand belonging to a fandom as being part of an active community, every fanbase shares the same interest for the celebrity or product they are passionate about. In relation to celebrity culture and therefore also celebrity politicians, the youth is argued to possess the most emotional and psychological attachment to celebrity personalities (Brown, 2015; Street et al., 2013). As the influence of celebrities on audiences has substantially increased over the last decades, as have the effect of parasocial relationships, they have attained positions in society that can easily shape, influence, and deeply affect the audiences' beliefs, social practices and preferences, however diverse an audience is (Brown, 2015; Jackson, 2008; Paravati et al., 2022).

Throughout this thesis, the theoretical framework consisting of celebrity politicians, celebrity endorsement theory, and parasocial relationships theory will be used to explain three mechanisms through which celebrities can influence youth political participation. First, the effect of celebrities' popular culture products on their young audience will be analyzed by using the popular culture literature and celebrity endorsement theory. Second, the endorsement mechanism will be analyzed further by adding the celebrity politician concept and illustrating how important institutions in society can endorse a celebrity. Therefore, they make the celebrity politician's opinion more credible, which in turn has an effect on the audience's response. Last, through repeated exposure of celebrity politicians' personal lives, fans establish parasocial relationships that will intensify the effect celebrities have on them. Overall, these 3 aspects will create an encompassing theoretical framework to analyze the different avenues through which popular culture and celebrity politicians in particular can stimulate youth political participation.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In order to illustrate how the existing literature, theoretical framework and concepts will be analyzed, this section turns to the data sources and research methods. Case selection as well as data collection and data analysis methods will be justified and explained. This chapter will conclude by reflecting on the limitations and challenges accompanying this research.

3.1 Research Design

Throughout this thesis, there will be a qualitative research method approach. Qualitative research, in opposition to quantitative research, focuses not on numerical or statistical data, but instead delves into humans' meaning of and behavior or experience in the social world (Fossey et al., 2002). This approach suits this research since the new forms of political participation exercised by solely the youth are very complex and expressed through word and actions. Therefore, these types of participation, and the meaning or impact they have, cannot be measured easily through statistical data. Thus, qualitative data are suitable since they account for the nuances in these specific experiences and activities of political participation. In this thesis, the young people's behavior in, and meaning and experience of the social world will be analyzed in order to gain a better understanding of their political participation efforts and how those are influenced by celebrities and popular culture.

Qualitative research is an umbrella term that encompasses different types of methods and research designs, but this thesis will be conducted through a single case study design. The case of BTS is categorized as a representative case study design. The phenomenon of celebrity politicians influencing audiences' political participation is widespread and not limited to only a few celebrities. This phenomenon already started, and became more influential, with Ronald Reagan being elected as president of the United States in 1981 after being an actor (Street, 2012). Therefore, BTS is part of the movement of celebrities affecting (young) citizens' political participation. Perhaps, BTS' fanbase functions slightly different from those of Western artists, as extremely involved fandoms are well-known to be more common practices in K-pop in comparison to the Western music industry (Jenol & Pazil, 2022), but most K-pop groups, except for BTS, have not been able to enter worldwide recognition and become part of the globalized popular culture. Nonetheless, BTS, as a non-Western band who has become globally famous and recognized, will be able to properly illustrate how celebrities that belong to global popular culture can influence their young audiences' political participation. Thus, the case study will show how the theoretical framework of this thesis, consisting of celebrity politicians, celebrity endorsement theory, and parasocial relationships theory, explains the mechanisms for stimulating youth political participation. Important to note is that, throughout this thesis, I will

not use the label boyband to describe BTS. Often, the term boyband is connected to stereotypical images of teen pop, and in this case also K-pop; genres that stereotypically suggest political implausibility (Street, 2002). Therefore, I refrain from using this term to prevent reinforcing those negative stereotypes.

3.2 Data Collection

The analysis consists of both primary and secondary data. The primary data consists of two parts. Firstly, the celebrities' political initiatives, both offline and online, were collected as primary data. Secondly, their fans' political initiatives, also in both offline and online spaces, are also classified as primary data. All of these sources that provide information about both the celebrities' and fans' political participation efforts are retrieved from online platforms such as YouTube and X. In addition, some of these examples are discussed in academic articles or news articles. The collected primary data ranges from 2015 to 2024 as BTS started to get globally recognized in 2015. For secondary data, mostly academic research articles or books, and some news articles are used to substantiate and contextualize my arguments in the analysis. These sources do not all report directly to the full mechanism between celebrities and youth political participation, but they do give insights into parts of the mechanism.

In order to guarantee the credibility of the sources and authenticity of the research findings and outcomes, I turned to triangulation of data, which, through thoroughly rechecking the data, ensures consistency of data and findings across several types of sources (Creswell & Miller, 2000). For instance, I checked whether findings from social media or news articles were in accordance with academic literature in order to enhance the substantiation of my arguments.

3.3 Data Analysis and Research Method

To properly analyze the primary and secondary qualitative data that I acquired, discourse analysis will be applied. For this thesis, I will use Foucault's definition of discourse analysis as discussed by Hall (1997). According to Foucault, discourse was not simply consisting of linguistic elements. Rather, all social practices, to some extent, entail meaning: those meanings in turn shape our behavior, and therefore all practices and actions have a discursive aspect (Hall, 1997). Hence, discourse shall not be purely linguistic; practice has meaning that is embedded in shared meanings and culture (Hall, 1997). In other words, discourse analysis is a qualitative method that signifies not only knowledge production through language, such as semantics, but also through actions.

As this research focuses on the discourses surrounding youth political participation, popular culture, and celebrity politicians, I look for the ways in which my case study affects

those discourses. Regarding my analytical framework, I have in the previous chapter established the existing discourses surrounding these topics and introduced my theoretical framework. Throughout my analysis, I firstly discuss examples that illustrate how BTS and ARMY respectively are part of these discourses and, since they are part of these discourses, are able to influence them. Secondly, through the theories of celebrity politicians, celebrity endorsement, and parasocial relationships, it will be analyzed how BTS (as popular culture figures and celebrity politicians) entering the political discourse has affected young fans' interest in, or made them aware of, this discourse, and therefore stimulated youth political participation. Thus, this thesis uses discourse analysis to study the political actions and language of BTS and, more importantly, how that results in ARMY also actively participating within that political discourse.

To further substantiate this research, the method of netnography has been used (Kozinets, 2010). Given the digital nature of political participation among the youth, as well as the online presence of activism, celebrity statements, or fundraisers, conducting research through netnography allows for an in-depth analysis of the initiatives, behaviors, and interactions from both celebrity and fan in the digital space.

3.4 Limitations and Challenges

Throughout the analysis and data collecting process, certain challenges have become apparent. First, this research is a single case study which might question the external validity of this thesis' results (Yin, 2003). Perhaps more cases should be examined in order to illustrate the true effect of celebrity politicians and popular culture on youth political participation. However, representative single case study designs provide us with the ability to capture important everyday phenomena and can give us insights about the average behavior and experiences of individuals, collectives or institutions (Yin, 2003) Considering the theoretical framework and limited time available to conduct this research, the choice for a single case study about BTS was therefore most appropriate.

Second, the examples of political participation that are being discussed throughout this thesis are mostly left-wing or progressive views on politics, culture, and society. Even though youth political participation is important across all different political colors and opinions, BTS and their fans ARMY are known for their initiatives surrounding acceptance of people of all skin colors, genders, and sexuality, as illustrated by BTS' speech at the UNGA in 2018 (UNICEF, 2018), or highlighting issues like climate change (Lee & Kao, 2021). As a result, political views from a more conservative, right-wing, and perhaps more religious point of view are not part of

these youth political participation efforts that are being discussed due to their lack of presence in BTS' and ARMY's initiatives.

Lastly, it should be mentioned that this thesis is not written without research bias, and my personal values have influenced the writing and researching process. However, as a white, young woman educated as an International Relations researcher with a bachelor's background in gender, racial, and culture studies, I have tried to address this bias by choosing a non-white case study that encourages diversity. Throughout the case analysis, I also tried to mitigate my biases by including several non-Western political participation examples.

Chapter 4: The Political Clout of the BTS ARMY

In order to illustrate how figures of popular culture stimulate youth political participation, it is essential to mention that this is not a standalone phenomenon that is limited to BTS and their fans ARMY. Lots of celebrities that are very much a part of globalized popular culture have a dominantly younger fanbase as adolescents and young adults are more influenced by, positively perceive, and engage with celebrity culture (Šramová, 2019; Street et al., 2013). Taylor Swift started speaking up about politics during the 2018 midterm elections in the United States and has from that moment on always encouraged her followers to register to vote. As a result, she directed more than 35.000 registrations through one Instagram post she uploaded in September 2023 (Sullivan, 2023). At one of Olivia Rodrigo's concerts in St. Louis, contraceptives, condoms and information about abortion was spread amongst the fans attending: this activist action went viral as abortion is severely restricted in Missouri due to the overturning of Roe v. Wade (Shanfeld, 2024). Furthermore, Harry Styles was seen at a BLM protest in Los Angeles (Bailey, 2020), and his former One Direction bandmate Louis Tomlinson made a donation towards the victims of the floods in South Brazil in spring 2024, urging his fans to also donate by setting up donation sites at his concert venues in Brazil (Louis Nation, 2024). These are only a few examples, as celebrity politicians and fan activism are now more visible than ever before (Brough & Shresthova, 2012; Jenkins, 2018; Street, 2013)

This chapter will provide background information about BTS and ARMY respectively, and afterwards discusses ARMY's political participation. It will establish that ARMY's efforts are in fact examples of youth political participation through e.g. fundraisers or campaigns. Therefore, they contribute informally to political discourse in the name of BTS and ARMY.

4.1 Introduction to BTS

BTS is a South Korean band consisting of 7 members: RM (Kim Namjoon, 김 남준), Jin (Kim Seokjin, 김 석진), Suga (Min Yoongi, 민 윤기), J-Hope (Jeong Hoseok, 정 호석), Jimin (Park Jimin, 박 지민), V (Kim Taehyung, 김 태형) and Jungkook (Jeon Jungkook, 전 정국). RM, Suga and J-Hope are the rappers, while Jin, Jimin, V and Jungkook are singers. They debuted on June 13, 2013 under the entertainment company BigHit Entertainment (now part of HYBE LABELS), whose statement is 'Music and Artists for healing'. BTS gained international media attention after winning the 'Top Social Artist Award' at the Billboard Music Awards in 2017: that moment catapulted them and their careers into the Western music industry (Moon, 2020). As a result, they were able to top charts and break numerous records, even ones they set

themselves. They are the only K-pop group that has received nominations for the Grammy Awards (McIntyre, 2022), and they have topped the Billboard Hot100 chart with their songs 'Dynamite', 'Life Goes On', 'Butter', and 'Permission to Dance' (Pascual, 2023). Their music video for 'Butter' was the fastest music video ever to reach 100 million views on YouTube, which it reached 21 hours after release. The previous record was held by BTS' music video for their song 'Dynamite' (Hong, 2021). They also were the first K-pop group to sell out and perform at London's Wembley Stadium for two consecutive nights (Ahn, 2021). Even though they have promoted and popularized Korean popular culture worldwide, their achievements also indicate their importance and power in global popular culture.

When BTS debuted under BigHit Entertainment, a lack of financial resources limited their opportunities for promotion in the highly monopolized K-pop industry (xCeleste, 2020). They became the ultimate underdogs in the system and their success had to come from hard work as their company was not able to provide proper marketing. However, BigHit's hope for BTS was that they could influence the industry by going against the profoundly produced and manicured K-pop groups by writing their own music while create relatability and connection through their own individual identities and as a collective group (Lee, 2019). BTS stands for Bangtan Sonyeondan (방탄소년단), meaning Bulletproof Boy Scouts. Through this name, BTS are the bulletproof vests that protect the youth, i.e. their fans, from prejudice (xCeleste, 2020). Since their debut, great importance and weight has been placed on this name, and through their musical oeuvre, they have tried to uphold it. The themes of coming of age and its accompanying struggles, mental health, socioeconomic, political, and cultural issues therefore repeat themselves in their music (Herman, 2018).

4.2 Introduction to ARMY

ARMY is the name of BTS' devoted fandom. Besides their name which implies massiveness and power at first sight, it is currently the largest, most diverse, and inclusive fandom globally (Lee & Kao, 2021). One of ARMY's initiatives, namely the BTS ARMY Census, illustrates that the vast majority of the fanbase consists of fans under age 30, with 53.63% being 18-29 years old and 30.30% under 18¹ (BTS ARMY Census, 2022). ARMY is the name of the full fandom, but can also be utilized to refer to an individual (I am ARMY); the collective of all BTS ARMYs is ARMY, therefore singular and plural versions of the name will be used throughout this thesis.

¹ The BTS ARMY Census is an initiative set up by a couple of fans and it has so far conducted surveys considering ARMYs demographic specifics in 2020 and 2022. In the census of 2022, more than 500,000 respondents filled in the survey, making it currently the biggest source of data that is provided about the fandom by the fans itself (BTS ARMY Census, 2022).

The name for the BTS fandom was chosen in July 2013, and is an abbreviation of Adorable Representatives MC for Youth, relating back to the meaning of the name BTS. ARMY are the youth generation that is faced with prejudice and are urged to fight against it (xCeleste, 2020). Therefore, even through their names, BTS and ARMY are connected. Fanbases are generalized as obsessive to an unhealthy extent, however, this is far from the truth (Lamerichs, 2018). In particular, ARMY “are enabled by the semi-structured organization of the fanbase and the diversity within their ranks” (Bhandari, 2020), creating endless possibilities of meaningful collective action. ARMY represent today’s youth and can therefore be taken to be representations of youth political participation.

Because BTS debuted in a small, and at that time insignificant, company in the industry, being a dedicated fan who wholeheartedly supported every aspect of BTS required a lot of effort. Especially in the first couple of years, BTS and ARMY were belittled by other fandoms of other, bigger, more influential groups in the industry (Lee, 2019) Therefore, ARMY were somewhat forced to organize themselves efficiently to keep supporting BTS while also aspiring to help them book successful results for their music releases. However, after BTS grew in popularity, these structures continued to exist even though they were not necessary in order to raise BTS’ music to the top of the charts (Seo & Hollingsworth, 2019). Therefore, they started to use these structures to organize themselves in relation to each other and to outside causes or aspects of life, leading to an interconnected fandom that is equipped for and prepared to undertake collective action (Moon, 2020). Besides wanting to match BTS’ BLM donation, lots of fans want to create an inclusive space for everyone in the fandom, which can be illustrated through how Korean-speaking ARMYs often translate BTS’ livestreams or other released contents in real life on social media (Moon, 2020).

4.3 ARMYs Political Initiatives: Going Beyond Music

The response by ARMY to the Black Lives Matter donation that BTS made is not a onetime only event. Repeatedly over the years, the fans have contributed to their surroundings by participating politically through their communities and have done it in the name of BTS (Andini & Akhni, 2021; Kim & Hutt, 2021). ARMY is known for its unique, organized structure and is therefore able to undertake big political or social projects such as matching the BLM donation, making them a fandom that actively participates. However, as this donation is not the only way through which the fans have politically participated. this section will illustrate how ARMY has politically participated in the fields of healthcare, environment, and social justice, equality, and politics.

4.3.1 Healthcare

BTS fans in Thailand initiated a campaign to encourage blood donation as a part of BTS' 5th birthday celebration in 2018, again mentioning their motivation to spread love to others like BTS does through their songs (Andini & Akhni, 2021). In total, around 200 liters of blood were successfully donated as a result of this campaign, which can approximately save around 1500 people.

For Jungkook's birthday project in 2022, the organization One In An ARMY (OIAA) organized a Birthday Flash Campaign; in this case a fundraiser that supported the Cova Project. The Cova Project provides menstrual cups and health education throughout the African continent. 809 ARMYs donated and raised almost \$24.000, funding 1000 menstrual cups and shipment to Uganda, while also providing for menstrual health education for 1000 people who menstruate and their teachers (One In An Army 2022). As for Suga's birthday fundraiser in March 2024, OIAA organized a campaign for Palestine Trauma Centre, a medical clinic in Gaza that tries to provide free psychological and trauma support to the Palestinian victims of Israeli attacks (One In An Army Charity Project, 2024). The donations collected through this fundraiser amounted to \$22,955.

Besides fundraisers, the BTS ARMY Medical Union set up Jimin's Promise Campaign in October 2021 for his birthday to address COVID-19 misinformation and vaccine hesitancy (BTS ARMY Medical Union⁷, 2021).

4.3.2 Environment

In 2020, the BTS ARMY donated 8735 mangrove trees to be planted in Bedono Village, Demak, Central Java, Indonesia as a birthday project for Jimin, one of the BTS members (Andini & Akhni, 2021). ARMYs cooperated with a local organization called Lindungihutan², which has been fighting against the tree corrosion in the region, to choose a site for the planting of the trees. In a similar manner, ARMYs set up a fundraising campaign to help the victims from the Sulawesi earthquake and flood in 2021. One of the ARMYs who contributed to the fundraiser emphasized that fans do not only love BTS, but even more importantly, want to become a fandom that cares for people and their community, just like BTS tries to spread hope through their music (Andini & Akhni, 2021). Furthermore, Filipino ARMYs planted 1500 seedlings which led to the foundation of a whole tree park in dedicated to BTS (Lorzano & Barlam, 2021).

In July 2021, for ARMY's own birthday, OIAA organized a month-long campaign in collaboration with the Ocean Defenders Alliance, an organization that focuses on removal and

² The name of this organization translates into Protectingforest.

reduction of man-caused damage and threat to ocean wildlife through documentation, action and education (One In An Army, 2021a). Through this campaign, \$12,500 was raised, enabling Ocean Defenders Alliance to launch a massive clean-up in Kaneohe Harbor in Hawaii, while also funding them to free over 40 lobsters from illegal traps and fishing hundreds of pounds of trash out of the ocean (One In An Army, 2021a).

4.3.3 Social Justice, Equality, and Politics

In August 2021, OIAA organized another flash campaign, this time cooperating with Usikimye: an organization based in Kenya that works towards ending the prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence, mainly focusing on women and girls (One In An Army, 2021b). Through this campaign, \$26,481 was raised by more than 1100 ARMYs who contributed. This money enabled Usikimye to keep their 5 safe houses (of which 2 are LGBTQ focused) and rescue hotline opened, while also being able to provide a meal a day for thousands of children for the rest of 2021 (One In An Army, 2021b).

Furthermore, an X profile was created named Army for Palestine: this page shares information about the conflict, organizes collective action for ARMYs, and propagates for Palestinians' rights. ARMY for Palestine released an official statement that urges every ARMY to use their platforms and power as one of the biggest fandoms in the world to support full Palestinian liberation and call for an immediate ceasefire (ARMY for Palestine, 2023).

Other initiatives, in this case in Thailand, include activism-based birthday messages from 2020. ARMY and other K-pop fandoms are known for their extensive birthday message projects for their favorite artists, and in December 2020, Thai BTS fans decided to display these messages on the back of tuk-tuks instead of railway station billboards. During the pro-democracy rallies in Thailand, the railway operators decided to stop their train services, and changing the positioning of the birthday messages was a symbolic and strategic protest against the operators' decision (Andini & Akhni, 2021). Since early 2020, the young pro-democracy movement in Thailand was supported by the BTS ARMY. Most young protestors of these rallies urged the government to push through political reforms and stop the harassment of government critics (Andini & Akhni, 2021). After several protests and rallies, policing became violent and they even used water guns at one point to disperse the peaceful protest. Since this response was internationally condemned for its breaching of peaceful assembly, freedom of expression and human rights, BTS fans cooperated with some fandoms of other K-pop groups in order to gather money for protestors' protection gears (Andini & Akhni, 2021). This cooperative movement also donated to the organization named Thai Lawyers of Human Rights,

which provided “pro-bono legal aids to pro-democracy demonstrators arrested and given charges by the Thai government” (Andini & Akhni, 2021, p. 50).

Figure 2

BTS Birthday Message in Thailand



Note. The birthday messages for BTS member V were taken away in railway stations and instead placed on tuk-tuks in the light of pro-democracy protests.

These were only some examples of the extensive list of ARMY’s political initiatives. Throughout this chapter, BTS and ARMY were introduced, and the examples of ARMY’s political participation efforts show that ARMY, in fact, are very active politically and are so under the name of ARMY and BTS. Therefore, it has been established that BTS has stimulated the political participation efforts of ARMYs. However, the several mechanisms that caused this incentive to participate have not yet been analyzed.

Chapter 5: BTS Sparks Political Smarts

It has, since the debut of BTS, been very important in the fandom to be connected to one another and organize. However, this initiative was not pushed through on command of BigHit Entertainment or BTS, rather the fans themselves chose to act this way (Lee, 2019). ARMY feel appreciated by all of the members of BTS, as BTS themselves have repeatedly spoken out about their gratitude and appreciation towards ARMY (xCeleste, 2020). This makes the fans feel connected to the artists, wanting to do them proud and follow their example. Furthermore, BTS themselves have always been politically vocal, and therefore have paved their own way as artists with a sociopolitical awareness. Therefore, in this chapter, the three mechanisms through which BTS have stimulated ARMY's political participation will be discussed. First, BTS' music will be analyzed through the literature on popular culture products and celebrity endorsement theory in order to illustrate how their music might influence political participation. Second, BTS' collaborations with institutions like the United Nations and the South Korean government will be discussed through endorsement theory and celebrity politician literature in order to illustrate how these have influenced youth political participation. Last, parasocial relationship theory will be used to explain how ARMY's emotional attachment to BTS has increased their political affinity and activity. Together, these three mechanisms encapsulate the processes through which BTS stimulates ARMY's political participation.

5.1 BTS' Musical Messages

BTS debuted as a K-pop group, but their first released music albums had more similarities to the hip-hop genre than to the typical bubbly pop that is associated with K-pop. Coming from a company with financial difficulties, the hip-hop genre allowed and empowered them to discuss their struggles as they were the underdogs in the industry (Herman, 2018). Especially in the early 2010s, the K-pop industry operated around 3 main K-pop entertainment agencies, namely YG, SM and JYP, also known as the Big Three (Lee, 2019). These companies were in possession of most financial resources, allowing them to create beneficial media and marketing connections, resulting in a powerful media monopoly that worked in their favor to enhance their wealth, popularity and success (Jin, 2016). The Big Three thus highly influenced South Korea's musical media landscape, limiting smaller, less wealthy or well-known companies, such as BigHit, to succeed.

Being a group that debuted with hip-hop music and had hopes of breaking through the stylized mold of the Big Three while being as authentic and relatable to their audience as possible, BTS touched on emotional, social, economic, and political issues through their music. They have always continued to do so throughout their career as the hip-hop genre offers a

setting that allows for social change advocacy (Schneider, 2010). During the COVID-19 pandemic, BTS released several songs such as 'Blue and Grey' or '00:00 (Zero O'clock)' that comforted the listeners and reminded them that it was okay to feel defeated and depressed.

I just wanna be happier. Melt me, I'm cold. I've reached out my hand countless times. The echo is colorless. Oh, this ground feels so heavier. I am singing by myself. I just wanna be happier. Am I being too greedy?

(Blue and Grey lyrics, translated)

Other songs of BTS mention the youth specifically, and address issues that only they experience and can relate to. Their 2014 song 'N.O.' criticizes the straining, strict, and demanding Korean school system, the hierarchy rooted in it, and how students are negatively impacted by this system mentally (Lee, 2019).

Who is the one who made us into study machines? It's either number one or a failure. They trap us in borders, the adults. There's no choice but to consent.

(N.O. lyrics, translated)

Furthermore, their song 'Baepsae', also titled 'Silver Spoon', presents BTS' critique on the deeply-rooted hierarchy in South Korean society, and how often those who are in positions of power, i.e. adults or older people, demand respect from the younger citizens while simultaneously abusing their beneficial position in the hierarchy (Herman, 2018). A baepsae is the Korean naming of a species of small birds called crow-tits. The metaphor that is presented in the song uses the crow-tits to resemble the young, hard-working South Koreans that are unable to climb up the socioeconomic ladder while the storks, those of the older generations born with silver spoons in their mouths, ridicule young Koreans' difficulties (Herman, 2018; Lee, 2019).

Our generation has had it hard. Hurry, chase 'em. My teachers were born with it all. I have crow-tit legs, and you have stork's legs. They said, their legs are worth a million bucks. My legs are shorter, so how do you expect me to keep up? They say "It shouldn't matter since we're coming from the same place". Never never never.

(Baepsae lyrics, translated)

Young Koreans are not able to find jobs that pay living wage; this issue has extended itself beyond the job market and can be observed through the extremely low current birth rate, which lays at a record low of 0.72 in 2023 (Kwon, 2024). Due to the current system not attending to younger people trying to find a job or already working, young Korean citizens do not have the

means to start a family. Therefore, 'Baepsae', a song released in 2015, is still relevant almost 10 years later.

Not only through their lyrics do they focus on political matters, their music videos also contain symbolism that refers to politics. In their 2017 music video of 'Spring Day', they commemorate the victims of the Sewol Ferry Tragedy (Kranc, 2020). This disaster cost the lives of 304 people, including 250 high school students (Choi & Kim, 2024). The Sewol Ferry sunk in 2014 due to the boat being overloaded while the weight was not distributed equally: the structure of the ship was illegally modified in order to be able to carry more load on board (Choi & Kim, 2024). The Korean coast guard only responded after almost an hour while also discouraging fishing boats to rescue passengers. At the same time, the captain and some of the crew evacuated the ship while telling the children aboard to stay inside (Choi & Kim, 2024). This led to great distrust of Korean institutions including the people in power, and the sentiment that this accident left behind later led to the impeachment of then president Park Geun-Hye on the grounds of abusing power and failing to protect the citizens as a president (Yim, 2022), leaving scars on citizens' lives and their trust in politics.

5.1.1 Popular Culture Products, Familiarity, Likeability, Similarity, and Youth Political Participation

It became evident that through their songs and music videos, BTS has touched upon several socioeconomic and political issues. The literature on popular culture suggests that products of popular culture with political messages can induce political participation. Neumann and Nexon's (2006) first approach, namely popular culture as politics, suggests that popular culture can be an effect of political events or cause the emergence of political processes. The impact of popular culture as politics has also been confirmed by other scholars (Daniel & Musgrave, 2017; Kangas, 2009; Marc, 2020). In this case, BTS' popular culture products are indeed an effect of political events, as illustrated by their song 'Baepsae' or their 'Spring Day' music video. When we treat BTS' popular culture products as a cause of the political process of youth political participation, we can see that their products indeed encourage activism and political awareness (Herman, 2018; Lee, 2019). Two of the most important preconditions for political participation are political interest and political knowledge (Andersen et al., 2020; Dostie-Goulet, 2009; Ghazarian et al., 2019). However, the youth is argued to lack both (Farthing, 2010; Ghazarian et al., 2019; Henn & Foard, 2014). Hence, addressing sociopolitical issues and events through popular culture products could ignite the youth's political interest and provide political information (Clerc, 2023; Daniel & Musgrave, 2017), therefore inspiring them to politically participate.

As popular culture products have the ability to educate its audience, the opinions engraved in those products are also passed onto the audience. This is also the case for BTS, as their underlying message in their products focuses on social, economic, or political inequality or feelings of unfairness, expressed through their social commentary (Herman, 2018; Lee, 2019). These attitudes are also reflected in the political initiatives by ARMY. As illustrated in the previous chapter, ARMY tries to help those in need by e.g. donating money towards charities or organizations that take care of vulnerable communities. As illustrated by the OIAA campaign for Usikimye, which provides safehouses for the victims of sexual and gender based violence (One In An Army, 2021), or the X profile that educates its followers about the human rights breach in Palestine (ARMY For Palestine, 2023), ARMY's political efforts carry the same values as BTS' products: making sure that those who find themselves at an disadvantage in society are not forgotten.

This illustrated effect of BTS' products on ARMY's political participation can also be explained and strengthened through celebrity endorsement theory. One way as to how entertainment figures can influence their audience is through injecting political content into their products (Jackson, 2008), which is the mechanism that will be discussed in this section. The youth are more susceptible to celebrity endorsement than those in other walks of life, and can therefore also adapt the positions endorsed by the celebrities more easily (Jackson, 2008). For these same young people, authenticity and sincerity are important traits when judging celebrities (Jackson, 2008; Street et al., 2013; Wood et al., 2016). As BTS tries to steer away from the industrialized music and style of K-pop through making their own music and discussing their own struggles, while being and representing young people navigating through society, ARMY found this element of authenticity (Kanozia & Ganghariya, 2021). Three elements of McCracken's (1989) meaning transfer model can also be identified in the case of BTS and ARMY. First, familiarity was created as BTS presented themselves as their authentic selves as they expressed their thoughts and emotions through their music. Second, likeability was generated as fans invest a lot of time and effort into BTS due to their appearance and behavior, as can be illustrated by e.g. their birthday projects and streaming of songs. Third, and perhaps the most important, fans could resonate with BTS, their struggles, and their authentic lyrics. Therefore the three most important aspects of celebrity endorsement theory, namely familiarity, likeability, and similarity (McCracken, 1989), illustrate the effectiveness of, in this case, BTS' political endorsements through their products. However, the element of credibility cannot be found in this mechanism. In order to establish BTS' credibility, it is necessary to delve into the next mechanism.

5.2 BTS' Credibility as Celebrity Politicians

Even though BTS has never shied away from being upfront about their discontent concerning parts of Korean society or politics, they are still seen as country representatives and are used as examples to illustrate Korea's economic and cultural growth and prestige. Furthermore, BTS has been collaborating with other institutions and organizations to spread political awareness. In this section, these collaborations will be presented to illustrate how BTS' message has been recognized and credited, completing the 4 aspects of celebrity endorsement theory, while also strengthening their position as celebrity politicians.

5.2.1 BTS and the South Korean Government

In 2018, BTS got awarded by with the Order of Cultural Merit (문화훈장), the highest cultural award in South Korea (Kelley, 2018). It is only given by the president to those who performed "outstanding meritorious services in the fields of culture and art in the interest of promoting the national culture and national development" as disclosed in Article 17-3 from the Awards and Decorations Act (상훈법).

Figure 3

BTS with President Moon Jae In



Note. BTS with former South Korean President Moon Jae In as they were appointed as 'special presidential envoys for future generations and culture' and received their diplomatic passports.

Figure 4

BTS at the United Nations



Note. BTS at the United Nations in 2021, where they spoke in front of the UNGA and did a performance of their song 'Permission to Dance' as presidential envoys

Furthermore, in 2021, BTS were granted the title of special presidential envoys for future generations and culture and received diplomatic passports to accompany president Moon Jae In at the 76th United Nations General Assembly (Oh & Lee, 2021). Alongside the president, they were given the task to raise awareness concerning global issues amongst the youth, especially focusing on sustainability and environment. President Moon himself mentions how BTS is an advantageous asset in diplomatic settings and how he is thankful for raising Korea's national

prestige internationally (Choi, 2021). Thus, he invited them to the United Nations General Assembly to represent the global youth and give hope to future generations to take matters such as climate change into their own hands. Accordingly, they attended the meeting of the Sustainable Development Goals movement, which aims to resolve global challenges including poverty and climate (Oh & Lee, 2021).

5.2.2 BTS, the United Nations, and UNICEF

BTS' diplomatic duties alongside former president Moon Jaein was not their first glimpse into the United Nations. In 2020, during the global COVID-19 pandemic, they were asked to give a remote speech at the 75th UN General Assembly to encourage the youth to live through the difficulties of the pandemic. They reflected on their lives in and before the pandemic while mentioning their LOVE MYSELF campaign with UNICEF. BTS announced this campaign in 2017 to fight "against violence toward children and teens around the world, with the hope of making the world a better place through music" (LOVE MYSELF, n.d.). The name of this campaign coincides with their 2017-2018 album series, consisting of 3 albums that describe the process of falling in love with and fully accepting one's true self. As of April 2024, almost 9 trillion Korean Won, which is more than 6 million Euros, has been raised for this campaign (LOVE MYSELF, n.d.).

However, their 2020 speech at the UNGA was not their first time appearing at the UN either whilst discussing their LOVE MYSELF campaign with UNICEF. After announcing their cooperation with UNICEF, BTS were invited in 2018 to speak at the 73rd United Nations General Assembly. The leader of the band, RM, gave a speech at the UNGA and discussed his life and how he himself and BTS as a group relate to the campaign. He discussed inclusivity, acceptance, and the importance of mental health that this campaign has highlighted:

After releasing the "Love Yourself" albums and launching the "Love Myself" campaign, we started to hear remarkable stories from our fans all over the world, how our message helped them overcome their hardships in life and start loving themselves. These stories constantly remind us of our responsibility. So let's all take one more step. We have learned to love ourselves, so now I urge you to "speak yourself". I would like to ask all of you. What is your name? What excites you and makes your heart beat? Tell me your story. I want to hear your voice, and I want to hear your conviction. No matter who you are, where you're from, your skin colour, gender identity: speak yourself. Find your name, and find your voice by speaking yourself. I'm Kim Nam Joon, RM of BTS. I'm a hip-hop idol and an artist from a small town in Korea. I have many faults and I have many fears, but I am going to embrace myself as hard as I can, and I'm starting to love myself, little by little. What is your name? Speak Yourself! (UNICEF, 2018)

5.2.3 Other Activities

Their collaboration with Formula E at the end of 2019 is an example of the opportunities that were created for them after their first UNGA appearance. The ABB FIA Formula E Championship is an electric street racing series that, in opposition to Formula 1, uses electric race vehicles for their races. They joined forces with BTS in order to help promote the benefits of electric driving with the end goal of raising awareness to combat climate change and air pollution specifically (ABB Formula E, 2019).

BTS has also released statements disconnected from other institutions or actors. In March 2021, a white young man shot and killed eight people in the state of Georgia in the United States, six of whom were Asian women (King, 2021). Therefore, this crime was said to be an Asian hate crime, which was concerning considering the rise of AANHPI hate that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic. Compared to overall hate crimes in the United States against Asians in 2019, 2020 saw an increase of 76% (King, 2021). Following this incident, BTS released a lengthy statement on their Twitter account (now X) condemning violence and relating the hatred towards Asians to their own experiences as South Koreans:

We send our deepest condolences to those who have lost their loved ones. We feel grief and anger.

We recall moments when we faced discrimination as Asians. We have endured expletives without reason and were mocked for the way we look. We were even asked why Asians spoke in English.

We cannot put into words the pain of becoming the subject of hatred and violence for such a reason. Our own experiences are inconsequential compared to the events that have occurred over the past few weeks. But these experiences were enough to make us feel powerless and chip away our self-esteem.

What is happening right now cannot be dissociated from our identity as Asians. It required considerable time for us to discuss this carefully and we contemplated deeply on how we should voice our message.

But what our voice must convey is clear.

We stand against racial discrimination.

We condemn violence.

You, I and we all have the right to be respected. We will stand together.

(방탄소년단, 2021)

As a result of BTS' international success, Asian identity, and their political awareness, they were invited to join President Joe Biden at the White House in May 2022 for AANHPI (Asian American and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander) Heritage Month (Regan & Dailey, 2022). This visit included a press conference where each member discussed their stance on discrimination, hatred and violence on the grounds of racist, anti-Asian hate crimes, while also having a 35-minute meeting with the president in the Oval Office. Biden emphasized the importance of BTS using their platform in order to try and make a difference: "People care a lot about what you say, and what you're doing is good for all people. It's not just your great talent, it's the message you're communicating. It matters." (Regan & Dailey, 2022).

Figure 5

BTS with US President Joe Biden



Note. BTS with Joe Biden pictured in the Oval Office of the White House as they were invited to discuss anti-Asian hate with the President for AANHPI heritage month.

Besides public announcements, events, invitations, or collaborations with major institutions or companies, BTS is also known to donate individually to causes and charities they deem important. In April of 2023, the youngest member of the group, Jung Kook, donated 100 billion Korean won, which is roughly 70.000 Euros, to the Seoul National University Children's hospital (Ziwei, 2023). The leader of BTS, RM, is known for his love towards traditional Korean culture and literature and donated 100 million Korean Won towards the Overseas Korean Cultural Heritage Foundation that focuses on preservation and restoration of traditional Korean artefacts (Movius & Joo, 2022). Another member, Jimin, known for his annual donations to his arts high school in Busan to support students' development in art, music and dance, recently

donated scholarships to the Physical Therapy Department of Dong-Eui University in Busan (Rawat, 2024). These are only some instances of the BTS members donating individually to charities.

However, they also donate to certain causes as a group besides their LOVE MYSELF campaign with UNICEF. The most impactful donation they made as a group was in 2020 for the Black Lives Matter movement. On June 4th, they posted on Twitter (now X) a statement condemning racial discrimination and violence (방탄소년단, 2020). Later that week, it was reported that BTS, together with BigHit Entertainment, donated 1 million US dollars to the cause (Rolli, 2020). After this news became public, BTS' fans, ARMY, grouped together on Twitter under the hashtag #MatchAMillion, and they were able to match this 1 million dollar donation in a day (Bhandari, 2020), which gives us a sneak peek into the strong connection and interaction between BTS and ARMY.

5.2.4 Credibility, Celebrity Politicians, and Youth Political Participation

Though the aspect of credibility is not as important for celebrity endorsement theory as the other three aspects discussed earlier (Jackson, 2008), it is still of significance. In order to wholly understand BTS' impact on youth political participation. Thus, their credibility is an important aspect, especially to establish their influence on their audience as celebrity politicians.

In the previous section of this chapter, celebrity endorsement theory was used from the perspective of popular culture products. In this section, the focus will be on the other side of celebrity endorsements, namely the political statements or cooperations besides their products (Jackson, 2008). According to McCracken (1989), one's message is credible when it is trustworthy and well-informed. Especially for popular culture and celebrity politicians, the case has been made that their endorsements and statements are not always made out of expertise, resulting in misleading or incoherent political messages (Dekoninck & Schmuck, 2023; Street, 2004; Wheeler, 2013). However, delivering political knowledge through celebrities is more effective as they are perceived as more powerful and influential figures than experts (Jackson, 2008; Marsh et al., 2010). However, as the South Korean government and the United Nations, which are accredited political institutions, endorse BTS and their views, this lack of credibility is resolved. Besides their music presenting them as figures with familiarity, likeability, and similarity, the collaborative opportunities provided by important political actors makes possible BTS' credibility. Therefore, the case of BTS complies with all 4 aspects of celebrity endorsement theory; their political endorsements are therefore effective and can have an impact on youth political participation.

As celebrity politicians, BTS belongs to type 2. CP2s do not intend to run for office or seek any career in electoral politics, but they still remain politically active through speeches, statements, or campaigns (Street, 2004; Wheeler, 2013). The political activities undertaken by BTS discussed in this section illustrate this while also providing useful information to the ways in which BTS is able to politically influence their fans. Young people will most likely get attached to celebrities quicker (Brown, 2015), and as a result, celebrity politicians will have a stronger effect on their younger audiences. With the issue of celebrity politicians' lack of proficient political understanding solved, BTS can provide ARMY with sufficient political knowledge through which ARMY can develop well-informed political interests. As BTS is perceived as authentic figures (Kanozia & Ganghariya, 2021), not only their music, but also their political engagements outside of their performances have a big influence on ARMY's political participation. In the political discourse about re-engaging young people in politics, celebrity politicians might be the key (Street et al., 2013). Not only are young people more eager to be influenced by them, they solve every issue surrounding youth political participation that has been identified within the current younger generation.

First, the youth lacks political interest, something one needs in order to want to participate (Andersen et al., 2020; Fyfe, 2009; Zhang, 2022). Through being a fan of BTS, ARMY follows BTS' political endorsements closely as they find their favorite celebrities important. Consequently, they develop an interest in BTS' activities regardless of whether it is music, a campaign, or a post on social media and are also influenced by those activities (Jackson, 2008; Marsh et al., 2010; Wheeler, 2013). This leads to expressing political interest for issues related to BTS. Second, one also needs sufficient political knowledge in order to be able to properly participate, which is something that the youth also lacks (Andersen et al., 2020; Ghazarian et al., 2019; Henn & Foard, 2014). As BTS endorses certain political causes, and is asked by credible political institutions to collaborate, it can be argued that BTS provides well-informed and trustworthy political information for ARMY. Accordingly, the more political statements are released or initiatives are taken by BTS, the more political knowledge ARMY will attain, solving the second issue. Last, the youth does not participate politically as they are discontent with, disconnected from, and feel left out by formal politics (Fyfe; 2009; Jenkins et al., 2009; Pitti, 2018; Rainsford, 2017; Rossi, 2009; Street et al., 2013; Zhang, 2022). Celebrity politicians, as is the case for BTS, provide them with alternative avenues of, and therefore stimulate, political participation, albeit in an informal fashion that focuses on activism or charity fundraising.

The only other aspect through which BTS can influence ARMY's political participation is through parasocial relationships. In the upcoming section, this last mechanism that induces political participation will be discussed, by taking ARMY's perspective into account.

5.3 BTS Behind The Scenes: the Establishment of Parasocial Relationships

BTS have, since their debut, shared enormous amounts of content online through mainly their YouTube channel or other social media accounts such as on VLIVE or Weverse³. BTS, due to their company's financial shortcomings, was often not invited to appear as guests on variety television shows and therefore had to find other ways, such as social media platforms, to interact with their fans (xCeleste, 2020). On their YouTube channel BANGTANTV, behind the scenes videos from as far back as December 2012, half a year before their debut, can be watched. In these videos, BTS talks about their struggles or thoughts, are being filmed while preparing for a performance, or are just having a laugh amongst themselves and being 7 young men⁴. Every part of their day to day lives that could have been filmed has actually been uploaded. BTS even has their own variety show called 'Run BTS!' and their own travel shows such as Bon Voyage (2019) or BTS In The Soop (2020). These shows are uploaded on Weverse and can be watched after fans pay for access. However, Weverse is also a platform that enables artist to fan communication. Every artist or band has their own account to which the fans can subscribe. Artists can livestream and read the fans' comments, which allows for direct interactions, but the fans themselves can also post on the feeds of the artists they have subscribed to. Therefore, the artists can also directly respond to their fans' posts. These platforms, which are very popular in the K-pop industry, as a result facilitate more interaction and communication between artist and fan. Through all of this access to content and alternative avenues for communication, fans are given access to a huge part of BTS' lives, not only as artists and a band, but also as their own, individual personalities and them as a close group of friends. Over the past 11 years, the amount of behind the scenes or personal content has accumulated and become abundant.

As a result, fans got included into BTS' everyday lives and their journey not only as performers, but also as people. This close, personal exposure that has not only been built, but also upheld and continuously strengthened since their debut, could be the perfect formula to create parasocial relationships that can be sustained and are deeply rooted in the fandom and their interactions with other fans inside the BTS realm. Parasocial relationships are established when media figures have a high personalized media exposure towards their viewers, followers, or fans (Leith, 2021; Paravati et al., 2022). Through this high exposure, fans slowly get

³ VLIVE and Weverse are platforms especially popular for K-pop artists and their fans. VLIVE was a live streaming platform, while other pre-recorded content could be uploaded on Weverse. However, VLIVE's content and livestreaming transferred to Weverse in 2022. Now, all prerecorded content and livestreams are uploaded to or streamed via Weverse.

⁴ These videos can be found on their YouTube channel under the titles 'BANGTAN BOMB' or 'EPISODE'

emotionally attached and obtain a high level of empathy for this media figure, one of the strongest emotions that enables us to relate to and understand the person we are interested in (Scherer et al., 2022). Whereas fans know about almost every aspect of their favorite celebrity, celebrities do not possess knowledge about every individual fan; therefore the bond is considered to be parasocial (Xu et al., 2023).

Even though the relationship between BTS and ARMY is argued to exceed the model of parasocial relationships due to its intimacy (Cho, 2022), this is not the case. Though celebrities may engage through media in ways that suggest actual interaction, the personal, emotional bond that lasts is still one-sided, and therefore by definition, parasocial in nature (Hoffner & Bond, 2022). In other words, BTS showing gratitude towards and feeling a deep connection with ARMY is not the same as having an emotional attachment to every individual ARMY. However, ARMY does have a strong parasocial relationship with BTS. The socio-emotional bonds that are inherent to PSRs are intensified through frequent exposure (Hoffner & Bond, 2022; Paraveti et al., 2022), which is definitely the case for BTS and ARMY. As they have uploaded personal content for more than a decade, fans have been frequently exposed to what we perceive to be the authentic, real members. A direct example of BTS showing their emotions, thoughts and real selves was during the 2022 FESTA dinner (BANGTANTV, 2022); FESTA is the celebration they hold each year on their debut anniversary. This dinner was the last BTS FESTA with all 7 members present before they enlisted for obligatory military service, and was very emotional since they were only planning on taking a break and doing solo activities until every member has completed his service. After watching this YouTube video, fans commented on how they cried together with BTS, that they want the best for them, and that they will understand that they will not always be able to talk about every personal detail: BTS are respected by ARMY and ARMY will love BTS and wait for them until they come back⁵:

My heart hurts because you all must have been holding in all this pain for so long. You've helped so many of us navigate our lives thus far and now it's time we give you the same respect. We love you so much and you all know that. We'll support your individual work and we'll wait for you to return as one. Army and BTS forever! (BANGTANTV, 2022)

This video is only one instance through which it becomes clear that ARMY is very emotionally attached to BTS, and has therefore formed parasocial relationships. Particularly for young people, feelings of attachment to celebrities are common (Brown, 2015). The appeal that makes ARMY so into BTS is their perceived authenticity and realness, which is acquired

⁵ For more examples of the YouTube comments, see Appendix A

after BTS share personal stories, experiences or struggles (Kanozia & Ganghariya, 2021), as they did during the 2022 FESTA dinner. The relationship with BTS is experienced to be extremely intimate and trusting by ARMY. Due to this intimate feeling of closeness and its intense emotional attachment, ARMY can be said to have parasocial relationships with the members of BTS (Lee & Kao, 2021).

As ARMY has parasocial relationships with BTS, they form a community around their shared passion for the Korean band. As a result, people who all found themselves in parasocial relationships devoted a lot of their attention and effort towards BTS and their endeavors outside of music. As BTS started to become politically vocal, the fans followed suit: parasocial relationships allow for celebrities to exert influence on their audience's attitude and behavior (Dekoninck & Schmuck, 2023). Therefore, whenever BTS mentions a political cause or announced a new campaign, ARMY is influenced to find the same causes of significance. Especially because more than 80% of the fandom is younger than 30 (BTS ARMY Census, 2022), they are more susceptible to what BTS is saying. Young people, who usually feel disconnected from formal politics and instead use social media to learn about politics, are more easily affected by parasocial relationships (Dekoninck & Schmuck, 2023). Thus, ARMY is influenced quickly by BTS' political gestures because of their emotional attachment.

Considering ARMY's and BTS' online presence, the argument can also be made that the internet facilitated participation due to its non-existing barriers of entry: participating politically online decreases costs (e.g. time or money) (Dekoninck & Schmuck, 2023), while you also get results more quickly (Rossi, 2009). Therefore, the internet accommodates forms of fan activism that are primarily performed in the online space. Fan activism can be seen as one of the new modes of political participation especially prevalent among the youth due to its want to make social and political system changes through a horizontal structure (Andini & Akhni, 2021). Thus, being a fan is very important since it creates intimate relationships with distant others, creating feelings of belonging, community and a shared identity: all are important foundations for both parasocial relationships and political representation (Street, 2004). Besides the capability of parasocial relationships to influence current activities, they also contain lasting effects as they are able to also determine future motivations (Hoewe et al., 2020) and are, above all else, relationships that facilitate mobilization (Liu et al., 2024).

ARMYs mobilization and refined organizational skills might find its roots in motivations to make a BTS song top the charts or to organize a birthday project for one of the members, but they are currently also extensively used for projects that fall outside of BTS musical career and oeuvre (Seo & Hollingsworth, 2019). Accordingly, these skills enabled ARMY to create the MatchAMillion campaign for Black Lives Matter, alongside the thousands of other projects that

were undertaken by either One In An Army or other organizations or social media accounts founded by ARMY.

BTS has created an extremely close community with their fans ARMY. The strong sense of a shared identity is a result of this close community, creating a collective identity to speak up about certain topics. BTS is viewed by their fans to be authentic individuals with authentic opinions, therefore ARMY gravitates towards BTS for political matters (Kanozia & Ganghariya, 2021). Since young people experience an enormous lack of authenticity when performing in formal, electoral politics, being able to find figures in popular culture whose opinions do not seem manufactured to fit the formal political system is extremely important (Street et al., 2013). Having the possibility to wholeheartedly identify as a fan and become part of its accompanying culture can create an arena that is fruitful for igniting political interest, acquiring political knowledge, and therefore stimulating political participation. Hence, BTS has created a fandom that, in accordance with BTS' acts of charity and political statements, wants to follow their example; making their fans ARMY not a passive audience, but rather a collective consisting of youth citizens that actively participate politically.

Chapter 6: Conclusion: Celebrity Politicians Stimulate Participation

This thesis built on the concept of celebrity politicians, celebrity endorsement theory, and parasocial relationships theory to examine how youth political participation can be stimulated through popular culture. Popular culture has the ability to educate citizens about politics in an informal way. Furthermore, popular culture products have an undeniable impact on their consumers, as explained by celebrity endorsement theory. The concept of celebrity politicians then adds that not only these products of popular culture are significant, celebrities also have a major impact on their followers as they provide alternative political representation and allow for new avenues of political participation. Lastly, parasocial relationships theory highlights the perspective of the fans and how their emotional attachment to their favorite celebrity strengthens the political effects of the celebrity politicians and their popular culture products. As young people are more likely to be invested in popular culture and celebrity culture, while also being more susceptible to their influence and forming parasocial relationships, especially youth political participation can be stimulated through these three mechanisms.

In order to explain these mechanisms, the case study of BTS and ARMY was analyzed. The role of BTS' popular culture products illustrated that fans are influenced through the political messages within their music. Moreover, 3 aspects of celebrity endorsement theory were identified with BTS, namely familiarity, likeability, and similarity; showing that their political endorsements through music had an impact. As celebrity politicians, BTS illustrated that their political activities also had an effect on ARMY's political participation. Furthermore, their collaborations with the South Korean government and the UN showed that BTS' opinion is credible, completing the 4 aspects of celebrity endorsement theory. Lastly, it was demonstrated that ARMY, who has strong PSRs with BTS, felt inspired by BTS to follow their example to participate politically by organizing political initiatives such as fundraisers or campaigns.

There are 3 main identified problems as to why the youth does not participate politically. They lack an interest in politics, do not possess sufficient knowledge about politics to participate, and they find the electoral system has failed them. The case of BTS illustrates that popular culture, and especially celebrity politicians, can stimulate youth political participation by filling up these three gaps. If the youth is engaged with popular and celebrity culture, they might develop political interest if their favorite celebrity engages with politics. If that is the case, the same young audience will then also gain political knowledge as the political messages endorsed by the celebrity will influence their political attitudes. Lastly, because the fans feel a strong emotional attachment to the celebrity, and have a parasocial relationship with them, they would want to follow the celebrity's example and do them proud, and therefore will also start to participate politically.

This thesis has contributed to existing literature both theoretically and empirically. Regarding contributions to the former, this research has broadened the celebrity endorsement theory to be applied in a political science context by illustrating how celebrity endorsements influence political attitudes and behaviors among youth. Furthermore, by using the case of BTS, the parasocial relationships framework is also expanded by applying it to the political domain, showing how these one-sided relationships between celebrities and fans can translate into political engagement. Empirically, the case of BTS provides robust data that clearly illustrates the impact of celebrity politicians on youth political participation. If fans and celebrities are well connected and seem to care for each other, as is the case with BTS and ARMY, then the celebrities could have a major impact on not only the fans personally, but also their political and societal awareness. This case study shows that fans do not merely follow their favorite celebrity wholeheartedly, they are also individual actors that are capable to think critically, take action, and contribute to political change.

As BTS and ARMY have illustrated, celebrity politicians are very powerful figures to stimulate youth political participation. The fans' dedication to their favorite celebrity causes their political participation efforts to often be an extension of the political endeavors undertaken by that popular culture figure. However, the question remains as to whether this process has long-term effects. If that celebrity loses their fame, or does not endorse political messages anymore, what would happen to their young fans' political participation? Therefore, this thesis also faces some methodological limitations. Even though BTS is a band that has been active for the past 11 years, it is unsure as to how long they will remain active, and whether new, younger fans will join the fandom as the current fans do grow older as time passes. While BTS currently might be a representative case study, it might not be in 10 years. As this thesis focuses on political participation of the youth specifically, it is difficult to say whether its results are still generalizable a decade later. As a result, a longitudinal, multiple case study design is needed to further develop the mechanisms analyzed in this thesis. This research design would also allow for more methods to be used such as interviews.

Another challenge also remains; the most well-known popular culture enthusiasts or fandoms are made up out of mostly women, as is the case for the BTS fandom (BTS ARMY Census, 2022). Therefore, youth political participation for men remains underexamined in comparison to women. This gap could be a future research direction to further investigate the differences amongst the youth themselves, especially as there is some evidence that those who identify as a woman have stronger parasocial relationships and lower levels of political participation (Hoewe et al., 2020).

Seeing that the youth's formal political participation has been in decline for decades, they have found other ways to voice their political opinions and advocate for change. The electoral, democratic system has repeatedly failed the youth all over the world, otherwise these other informal avenues of participation would not be necessary for the youth to gain interest, inform themselves and participate politically. If elected governments would make more efforts to cater towards the younger generation and make systemic changes to their way of doing politics, perhaps these informal ways of political participation might cease to exist. However, when looking at the current situation in democratic societies, that development is not likely to happen suddenly. Therefore, celebrity politicians and the power of their political endorsements remain absolutely crucial in order to educate and stimulate the current youth to become well-informed, interested, and politically engaged citizens who can uphold democratic practices for at least the upcoming decade.

Reference List

- ABB Formula E. (2019, December 19). *BTS To Raise Awareness of Climate Change*.
<https://www.fiaformulae.com/fr/news/8937/bts-to-raise-awareness-of-climate-change>
- Ahn, S. (2019, June 2). *BTS performs at historic sold-out Wembley concert*. The Korea Herald.
<https://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20190602000198>
- Aistrophe, T. (2020). Popular culture, the body and world politics. *European Journal of International Relations*, 26(1), 163-186. DOI: 10.1177/1354066119851849
- Akhter, Z. (2016). India-Pakistan Relations: Efficacy of Culture. *Millennial Asia*, 7(2), 207-229.
DOI: 10.1177/0976399616655042
- Andersen, K., Ohme, J., Bjarnøe, C., Bordacconi, M. J., Albæk, E., & De Vreese, C. H. (2020). *Generational Gaps in Political Media Use and Civic Engagement: From Baby Boomers to Generation Z*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003111498>
- Andini, A. N., & Akhni, G. N. (2021). Exploring Youth Political Participation: K-pop Fan Activism in Indonesia and Thailand. *Global Focus*, 1(1), 38-55.
- ARMY for Palestine [@ARMY4Palestine]. (n.d.). *Tweets* [X Profile]. Retrieved June 7, 2024, from <https://twitter.com/ARMY4Palestine>
- Bailey, A. (2020, June 3). *Harry Styles Joined a Los Angeles Black Lives Matter Protest*. ELLE.
<https://www.elle.com/culture/celebrities/a32754617/harry-styles-los-angeles-black-lives-matter-protest-photo/>
- 방탄소년단 [@BTS-twt]. (2020, June 4). *우리는 인종차별에 반대합니다. 우리는 폭력에 반대합니다. 나, 당신, 우리 모두는 존중받을 권리가 있습니다. 함께 하겠습니다. We stand against racial discrimination* [Tweet]. X.
https://twitter.com/BTS_twt/status/1268422690336935943
- 방탄소년단 [@BTS-twt]. (2021, March 30). *#StopAsianHate #StopAAPIHate* [Tweet]. X.
https://twitter.com/BTS_twt/status/1376712834269159425
- BANGTANTV. (2022, June 14). *BTS (방탄소년단) '썸 방탄회식' #2022BTSFESTA* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1t0iJ7F_k9Q&t=1s
- Bhandari, A. (2020, July 14). *The mobilizing power of the BTS ARMY: How the South Korean band's fanbase – known as ARMY – raised over \$1 million for the Black Lives Matter movement, mostly in just one day*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/graphics/GLOBAL-RACE/BTS-FANS/nmopajgmxa/>

- Braimah, F., & Edo, Z. (2020). States Soft Power Utilisation in the Twenty-First Century: Pros and Cons from the Nigerian Perspective. *Journal of Public Administration and Development Alternatives*, 5(3), 1-17.
- Brough, M. M., & Shresthova, S. (2012). Fandom meets activism: Rethinking civic and political participation. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 10. <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2012.0303>
- Brown, W. J. (2015). Examining Four Processes of Audience Involvement With Media Personae: Transportation, Parasocial Interaction, Identification and Worship. *Communication Theory*, 25, 259-283. doi:10.1111/comt.12053
- BTS ARMY Census. (2022). *2022 Results*. <https://www.btsarmycensus.com/2022-results>
- BTS ARMY Medical Union⁷ [@armymedunion]. (2021, October 9). *To celebrate @BTS_twt Jimin's birthday Oct 13, #BAMU presents "Jimin's Promise Campaign" -a COVID-19 vaccination campaign to address vaccine hesitancy* [Tweet]. X. <https://twitter.com/armymedunion/status/1446828930741141505>
- Cho, M. (2022). BTS for BLM: K-pop, Race, and Transcultural Fandom. *Celebrity Studies*, 13(2), 270-279. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2022.2063974>
- Choi, S., & Kim, D. (2024, April 16). *South Koreans still seek answers 10 years after Sewol ferry disaster*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/south-koreans-still-seek-answers-10-years-after-sewol-ferry-disaster-2024-04-16/>
- Clerc, L. (2023). A Better Hegemon? *My Little Pony* as a Pop Representation of Diplomacy in the Context of American Hegemony. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 18, 534-557. doi:10.1163/1871191X-BJA10146
- Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining Validity in Qualitative Inquiry. *Theory Into Practice*, 39(3), 124-130.
- Daniel, J. F., & Musgrave, P. (2017). Synthetic Experiences: How Popular Culture Matters for Images of International Relations. *International Studies Quarterly*, 61, 503-516. doi:10.1093/isq/sqx053
- Dekoninck, H., & Schmuck, D. (2023). The "greenfluence": Following environmental influencers, parasocial relationships, and youth's participatory behavior. *New media & society*, 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448231156131>
- Doncel-Martin, I., Catalan-Matamoros, D., & Elias, C. (2023). Corporate social responsibility and public diplomacy as formulas to reduce hate speech on social media in the fake news era. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 28(2), 340-352. <https://doi.org/10.1108/CCIJ-04-2022-0040>.

- Dostie-Goulet, E. (2009). Social networks and the development of political interest. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 12(1), 405-421. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676260902866512>
- Earl, J., Maher, T. V., & Elliot, T. (2017). Youth, activism, and social movements. *Sociology Compass*, 11(4), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12465>
- Farthing, R. (2010). The politics of youthful antipolitics: representing the 'issue' of youth participation in politics. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 13(2), 181-195. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676260903233696>
- Fossey, E., Harvey, C., McDermott, F., & Davidson, L. (2002). Understanding and evaluating qualitative research. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 36, 717-732.
- Fyfe, I. (2009). Researching youth political participation in Australia: Arguments for an expanded focus. *Youth Studies Australia*, 28(1), 37-45.
- Galvan, D. (2010). Everyday Cultural Politics, Syncretism, and Cultural Policy. In J. P. Singh (Ed.), *International Cultural Policies and Power* (pp. 203-213). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ghazarian, Z., Laughland-Booij, J., & Skrbiš, Z. (2019). Young Australians, political engagement and the challenges ahead. *Ethos*, 27(2), 9-12.
- Grayson, K., Davies, M., & Philpott, S. (2009). Pop Goes IR? Researching the Popular Culture-World Politics Continuum. *Politics*, 29(3), 155-163.
- Gries, P., Sanders, M A., Stroup, D. R., & Cai, H. (2015). Hollywood in China: How American Popular Culture Shapes Chinese Views of “the Beautiful Imperialist” – An Experimental Analysis. *The China Quarterly*, 224, 1070-1082. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741015000831>
- Hajdari, L. (2019). The role of sports and music in public diplomacy: the case of Kosovo. *Przeglad Europejski*, 3, 189-203. doi: 10.5604/01.3001.0013.5849
- Hall, S. (1997). *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. SAGE Publications.
- Henn, M., & Foard, N. (2014). Social differentiation in young people's political participation: the impact of social and educational factors on youth political engagement in Britain. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 17(3), 360-380. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2013.830704>
- Herman, T. (2018, February 13). *BTS' Most Political Lyrics: A Guide to Their Social Commentary on South Korean Society*. Billboard. <https://www.billboard.com/music/music-news/bts-lyrics-social-commentary-political-8098832/>

- Ho, T. Q., Nie, Z., Alpizar, F., Carlsson, F., & Nam, P. K. (2022). Celebrity endorsement in promoting pro-environmental behavior. *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*, 198, 68-86. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jebo.2022.03.027>
- Hoewe, J., Wiemer, E. C., Adekunle, T., Barton, R., Jett, J., & Pijanowski, A. (2020). Linking Political TV Shows with Female Lead Characters to Political Engagement: The Roles of Parasocial Processes and Gender Identity. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 64(5), 672-692. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2020.1849703>
- Hoffner, C. A. & Bond, B. J. (2022). Parasocial relationships, social media, & well-being. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 45, 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2022.101306>
- Hong, C. (2021, May 22). *BTS Breaks All Their Own Records As "Butter" MV Hits 100 Million Views*. Soompi. <https://www.soompi.com/article/1470449wpp/bts-breaks-all-their-own-records-as-butter-mv-hits-100-million-views>
- Iwabuchi, K. (2015). Pop-culture diplomacy in Japan: soft power, nation branding and the question of 'international cultural exchange'. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 21(4), 419-432. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10286632.2015.1042469>
- Jackson, D. J. (2008). Selling Politics: The Impact of Celebrities' Political Beliefs on Young Americans. *Journal of Political Marketing*, 6(4), 67-83. DOI: 10.1300/J199v06n04_04
- Jenkins, H. (2018). Fandom, Negotiation, and Participatory Culture. In P. Booth (Ed.), *A Comparison to Media Fandom and Fan Studies* (pp. 13-26). John Wiley & Sons Inc.
- Jenkins, H., Purushotma, R., Weigel, M., Clinton, K., & Robison, A. J. (2009). *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century*. MIT Press.
- Jenol, N. A. M., & Pazil, N. H. A. (2022). "I found my talent after I become a K-pop fan": K-pop participatory culture unleashing talents among Malaysian youth. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 8(1), 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2022.2062914>
- Jin, D. Y. (2016). *New Korean Wave: Transnational Cultural Power in the Age of Social Media*. University of Illinois Press.
- Kangas, A. (2009). From Interfaces to Interpretants: A Pragmatist Exploration into Popular Culture as International Relations. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 38(2), 317-343. DOI: 10.1177/0305829809347510
- Kanozia, R., & Ganghariya, G. (2021). More than K-pop fans: BTS fandom and activism amid COVID-19 outbreak. *Media Asian*, 48(4), 338-345. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01296612.2021.1944542>
- Kelly, C. (2018, October 27). *As Torchbearers of Hallyu's Legacy, BTS Received the Order of Cultural Merit*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/caitlinkelley/2018/10/27/bts-order-of-cultural-merit/>

- Kim, P., & Hutt, E. (2021). K-pop as a Social Movement: Case Study of BTS and Their Fandom ARMY. *Journal of Student Research*, 10(3), 1-15.
- King, H. (2021, December 9). *BTS #StopAsianHate tweet was most retweeted in 2021*. Axios. <https://www.axios.com/2021/12/09/bts-stop-asian-hate-retweeted-2021-k-pop>
- Kitanova, M. (2020). Youth political participation in the EU: evidence from a cross-national analysis. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 23(7), 816-836. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2019.1636951>
- Kozinets, R. V. (2010). *Netnography: Doing Ethnographic Research Online*. Sage Publications.
- Kranc, L. (2020, November 23). *BTS Discuss the Meaning Behind Their Emotional 2017 Ballad 'Spring Day'*. Esquire. <https://www.esquire.com/entertainment/music/a34716082/bts-spring-day-song-lyrics-meaning-explained-sewol-ferry/>
- Kwon, J. (2024, March 29). *South Korea's birth rate is so low, one company offers staff a \$75,000 incentive to have children*. CBS News. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/south-korea-birth-rate-so-low-company-offers-75000-parenthood-incentive/>
- Kyranakis, K., & Nurvala, J. P. (2013). Bringing politics to the youth: how to generate interest in electoral politics. *European View*, 12, 263-269. DOI 10.1007/s12290-013-0283-1
- Lamerichs, N. (2018). *Productive Fandom. Intermediality and Affective Reception to Fan Cultures*. Amsterdam University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv65svxz>
- Lee, J. (2019). *BTS, Art Revolution: BTS Meets Deleuze* (Chae, M. J. & Kim, S. & Lee, S. W., & Won, J. Y., Trans.). Parrhesia.
- Lee, W., & Kao, G. (2021). "Make It Right": Why #BlackLivesMatter(s) to K-pop, BTS, and BTS ARMYs. *Journal of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music*, 11(1), 70-87. DOI 10.5429/2079-3871(2021)v11i1.7en
- Leith, A. P. (2021). Parasocial cues: The ubiquity of parasocial relationships on Twitch. *Communications Monographs*, 88(1), 111-129. DOI: 10.1080/03637751.2020.1868544
- Li, E. P. H., Min, H. J., & Lee, S. (2021). Soft power and nation rebranding: The transformation of Korean national identity through cosmetic surgery tourism. *International Marketing Review*, 38((1), 141-162. DOI 10.1108/IMR-01-2019-0053
- Liu, W., Wang, Z., Jian, L., & Sun, Z. (2023). How broadcasters' characteristics affect viewers' loyalty: the role of parasocial relationships. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, 36(1), 241-259. DOI 10.1108/APJML-10-2022-0856
- Lorzano, J., & Barlam, A. C. (2021, July 12). *MORE THAN A FANDOM: BTS ARMY Members Plant 1,500 Seedlings In Nueva Ecija*. One News. <https://www.onenews.ph/articles/more-than-a-fandom-bts-army-members-plant-1-500-seedlings-in-nueva-ecija>

- Lotun S., Lamarche, V. M., Samothrakia, S., Sandstrom, G. M., & Matran-Fernandez, A. (2022). Parasocial relationships on YouTube reduce prejudice towards mental health issues. *Scientific Reports*, *12*, 1-13.
- Louis Nation [@LouisWTNation]. (2024, May 8). *Louis Tomlinson via Instagram Story! Louis has made a donation for the people affected by the floods in Brazil and [Tweet]*. X. <https://twitter.com/LouisWTNation/status/1787998998747345131>
- LOVE MYSELF. (n.d.). *LOVE MYSELF*. <https://www.love-myself.org/eng/home>
- Luke, T. W. (2010). The Arts, Culture, and Civil Society: Power Stations in the Grids of Governance. In J. P. Singh (Ed.), *International Cultural Policies and Power* (pp. 29-35). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Marc, I. (2020). Around the world: France's new popular music diplomacy. *Modern & Contemporary France*, *28*(3), 253-270. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09639489.2019.1682533>
- Marsh, D., 't Hart, P., & Tindall, K. (2010). Celebrity Politics: The Politics of the Late Modernity?. *Political Studies Review*, *8*, 322-340. doi: 10.1111/j.1478-9302.2010.00215.x
- McCracken, G. (1989). Who Is the Celebrity Endorser? Cultural Foundations of the Endorsement Process. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *16*, 310-321.
- McIntyre, H. (2022, November 16). *BTS Brings K-Pop To The Top Grammy Categories For The First Time*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/hughmcintyre/2022/11/16/bts-brings-k-pop-to-the-top-grammy-categories-for-the-first-time/>
- Moon, K. (2020, November 18). *Inside the BTS ARMY, the Devoted Fandom With an Unrivaled Level of Organization*. TIME. <https://time.com/5912998/bts-army/>
- Movius, L., & Joo, H. (2022, September 15). *K-Pop star RM funds restoration of traditional Korean bridal gown in collection of Los Angeles County Museum of Art—and reveals further gifts*. The Art Newspaper. <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2022/09/15/btss-rm-funds-restoration-of-traditional-korean-silk-robe-in-collection-of-los-angeles-county-museumand-reveals-further-gifts>
- Mulcahy, K. V. (2010). Coloniality, Identity and Cultural Policy. In J. P. Singh (Ed.), *International Cultural Policies and Power* (pp. 155-165). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Neumann, I. B., & Nexon, D. H. (2006), Introduction: Harry Potter and the Study of World Politics. *Harry Potter and International Relations* (pp. 1-23). Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Nownes, A. J. (2021). Can Celebrities Set the Agenda?. *Political Research Quarterly*, *74*(1), 117-130. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912919869530>
- Oh, C. Y., & Lee, S. (2021, September 14). *South Korean President Appoints BTS as special envoys before their visit to the UN*. ABC News.

- <https://abcnews.go.com/International/south-korean-president-appoints-bts-special-envoys-visit/story?id=80006773#:~:text=SEOUL%20%2D%2D%20K%2Dpop%20group,diplomatic%20passports%20and%20fountain%20pens>.
- One In An Army. (2021a, July). *July 2021 Campaign Summary – Ocean Defender Alliance*. <https://www.oneinarmy.org/post/july-2021-campaign-summary-ocean-defenders-alliance>
- One In An Army. (2021b, August). *August 2021 Flash Campaign Summary – Usikimye*. <https://www.oneinarmy.org/post/august-2021-flash-campaign-summary-usikimye>
- One In An Army. (2022, September). *September 2022 Part 1 Campaign Summary – The Cova Project*. <https://www.oneinarmy.org/post/september-2022-part-1-campaign-summary-the-cova-project>
- One In An Army Charity Project [@OneInAnArmy]. (2024, March 16). *Suga's bday fundraiser #DeliverAidWithSuga is a wrap! 576 ARMY submitted to our form raising \$22,955 for Palestine Trauma Centre* [Tweet]. X. <https://twitter.com/OneInAnARMY/status/1768795975575806244>
- Paravati, E., Gabriel, S., Valenti, J., Valent, K., & Buffone, A. (2022). Social comparison, parasocial relationships, and attachment style: how and when do celebrities improve self-liking? *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224545.2022.2149385>
- Pascual, D. (2023, June 13). *BTS' 15 Top Songs on the Billboard Hot 100*. Billboard. <https://www.billboard.com/lists/bts-top-songs-billboard-hot-100/bts-stay/>
- Pfanzelt, H., & Spies, D. C. (2017). The Gender Gap in Youth Political Participation: Evidence from Germany. *Political Research Quarterly*, 72(1), 34-48. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912918775249>
- Philips, A. (2023). The PM's Daughter: Popular culture engaging young people in politics. *Practical Literacy*, 28(2), 11-13.
- Pitti, I. (2018). Young People and Unconventional Political Engagement. *Youth and Unconventional Political Engagement* (pp. 23-38). Springer International Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-75591-5>
- Pontes, A. I., Henn, M., & Griffiths, M. D. (2017). Youth political (dis)engagement and the need for citizenship education: Encouraging young people's civic and political participation through the curriculum. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, 14(1), 3-21. DOI: 10.1177/1746197917734542


- Press-Barnathan, G. (2017). Thinking About the Role of Popular Culture in International Conflicts. *International Studies Review*, 19, 166-184. doi: 10.1093/isr/viw030
- Rainsford, E. (2017). Exploring youth political activism in the United Kingdom: What makes young people politically active in different organization?. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 19(4), 790-806. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1369148117728666>
- Rawat, A. (2024, March 31). *BTS' Jimin Sponsors Scholarship To Help Students Pursue Physical Therapy At University In Busan*. Times Now News. <https://www.timesnownews.com/entertainment-news/korean/bts-jimin-sponsors-scholarship-to-help-students-pursue-physical-therapy-at-university-in-busan-article-108923014>
- Regan, J., & Dailey, H. (2022, June 1). *BTS Visit the White House & Meet With President Joe Biden: Photos*. Billboard. <https://www.billboard.com/photos/bts-at-white-house-joe-biden-meeting-1235079570/1-05-bts-white-house-billboard-1548/>
- Ribke, N. (2015). *A Genre Approach to Celebrity Politics*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rolli, B. (2020, June 6). *BTS ARMY Matched The Group's \$1 Million Black Lives Matter Donation, Proving The Positive Power Of Fandoms*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/bryanrolli/2020/06/08/bts-army-black-lives-matter-1-million-donation/#:~:text=Editors'%20Pick-,BTS%20ARMY%20Matched%20The%20Group's%20%241%20Million%20Black%20Lives%20Matter,The%20Positive%20Power%20Of%20Fandoms&text=Former%20Contributor,l%20cover%20the%20music%20industry>
- Rossi, F. M. (2009). Youth Political Participation: Is This the End of Generational Cleavage?. *International Sociology*, 24(4), 467-497. DOI: 10.1177/0268580909334498
- Scherer, H., Diaz, S., Iannone, N., McCarty, M., Branch, S., & Kelly, J. (2022). "Leave Britney alone!": parasocial relationships and empathy. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 162(1), 128-142. DOI: 10.1080/00224545.2021.1997889
- Schimmelpfennig, C., & Hunt, J. B. (2019). Fifty years of celebrity endorser research: Support for a comprehensive celebrity endorsement strategy framework. *Psychology Marketing*, 37, 488-505. DOI: 10.1002/mar.21315
- Schneider, C. P. (2010). Cultural Diplomacy: The Humanizing Factor. In J. P. Singh (Ed.), *International Cultural Policies and Power* (pp. 101-112). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Seo, Y., & Hollingsworth, J. (2019, October 20). *BTS' army of admirers: Inside one of the world's most powerful fandoms*. CNN. <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/10/12/asia/bts-fandom-army-intl-hnk/index.html>

- Shanfeld, E. (2024, March 13). *Olivia Rodrigo Makes Free Emergency Birth Control Pills Available at Missouri Concert After State Narrows Reproductive Rights*. Variety. <https://variety.com/2024/music/news/olivia-rodrigo-plan-b-condoms-contraceptives-concert-1235940694/>
- Šramová, B. (2019). Gender Differences In The Perception Of Celebrities By Adolescents. In Z. Bekirogullari, M. Y. Minas, & R. X. Thambusamy (Eds.), *ICEEPSY 2018: Education and Educational Psychology, vol 53. European Proceedings of Social and Behavioural Sciences* (pp. 182-187). Future Academy. <https://doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2019.01.18>
- Street, J. (2002). Bob, Bono and Tony B: the popular artist as politician. *Media, Culture & Society, 24*, 433-441.
- Street, J. (2004). Celebrity Politicians: Popular Culture and Political Representation. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations, 6*, 435-452.
- Street, J. (2012). Do Celebrity Politics and Celebrity Politicians Matter?. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations, 14*, 346-356. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-856X.2011.00480.x
- Street, J. (2013). The Sound of Geopolitics: Popular Music and Political Rights. *Popular Communication, 11*(1), 47-57. DOI: 10.1080/15405702.2013.748316
- Street, J., Inthorn, S., & Scott, M. (2013). *From entertainment to citizenship: Politics and Popular Culture*. Manchester University Press.
- Sullivan, B. (2023, September 22). *A Taylor Swift Instagram post helped drive a surge in voter registration*. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2023/09/22/1201183160/taylor-swift-instagram-voter-registration>
- UNICEF. (2018, September 24). *"We have learned to love ourselves, so now I urge you to 'speak yourself'"*. UNICEF. <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/we-have-learned-love-ourselves-so-now-i-urge-you-speak-yourself>
- Wheeler, M. (2013). *Celebrity Politics: Image and Identity in Contemporary Political Communications*. Polity Press.
- Wood, M., Corbett, J., & Flinders, M. (2016). Just like us: Everyday celebrity politicians and the pursuit of popularity in an age of anti-politics. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations, 18*(3), 581-598. DOI: 10.1177/1369148116632182
- xCeleste. (2020, August 19). *THIS IS BTS | Introduction to BTS* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3cESARetI9U&t=57s>
- Xu, Y., Vanden Abeele, M., Hou, M., & Antheunis, M. (2023). Do parasocial relationships with micro- and mainstream celebrities differ? An empirical study testing four attributes of

- the parasocial relationship. *Celebrity Studies*, 14(3), 366-386.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2021.2006730>
- Yim, H. (2022, November 3). *Political trauma of Sewol disaster haunts government response to Itaewon*. The Korea Herald.
<https://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20221103000585>
- Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. SAGE Publications.
- Zhang, W. (2022). Political Disengagement Among Youth: A Comparison Between 2011 and 2020. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 1-10. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.809432
- Ziwei, P. (2023, April 18). *BTS' Jungkook makes US\$750,000 donation to a Seoul children's hospital*. NME. <https://www.nme.com/news/music/bts-jungkook-donation-seoul-childrens-hospital-3431895>



Appendices


Appendix A

 **@guccisonyeon6746** 1 jaar geleden



I am sure everyone is crying and getting overwhelmed, they are the most honest and irreplaceable group that I have ever stand and I will tell you we are forever with in his journey and will never leave you ever. we love you so much and will always be. Thank you so much for coming into my life and making it the most beautiful, I will be honest that there is no one like BTS and ARMY will indeed be written in history for our love and sincerity.


Minder tonen

 2,7K  **Beantwoorden**



 **@Mrs_JK** 1 jaar geleden


The best moment is yet to come for both of us. You don't need our permission to step back and focus on yourselves because we'll meet back again. See you in the future my loves 💜

 18K  **Beantwoorden**



 **@BUNNYCOOKYARMY** 1 jaar geleden (bewerkt)


Taking a break is not negative ! It will make their bond with each other even more strong & the way they handled this & informed us. So proud of them. No matter what I'll support you as an ARMY forever. But the tears still not stop.

 12K  **Beantwoorden**

 **@user-bk7yg4gq2k** 1 jaar geleden



I still can't believe that BTS's debut was 9 years ago, look how much they've grown I'm so happy that they're all together


 48K  **Beantwoorden**

 **@btsoadore** 1 jaar geleden



"It's not like we're disbanding. We're just taking some time apart." - Yoongi

I do trust in bts ♡

 14K  **Beantwoorden**

 **@7purplebutterflies877** ✓ 1 jaar geleden

I feel so bad when Namjoon cried i literally wanted to go listen his everything and hug him tightly. He is the greatest leader ever. I love you Namjoon.

 10K  **Beantwoorden**



@borahae5129 1 jaar geleden

My heart hurts because you all must have been holding in all this pain for so long. You've helped so many of us navigate our lives thus far and now it's time we give you the same respect. We love you so much and you all know that. We'll support your individual work and we'll wait for you to return as one. Army and BTS forever!

314

Beantwoorden



@vmatebts ✓ 1 jaar geleden

Don't worry we will wait for you. Take your time. But remember all 7 of you are like a one Rainbow to us. When there was no happiness in our life only you are those 7 who make us happy. I know you can't share everything with us but remember we are always hugging you even when we don't know you are sad. We just want your happiness. For that we can survive some months with your old videos and memories. Saranghae 💜.

Minder tonen

1,5K

Beantwoorden



@sunnyskyes7883 1 jaar geleden

I'm speechless. They're just honestly so strong, yet so considerate and worried about their fan's opinion. I seriously can't express how much I love and respect them.

252

Beantwoorden