

DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT AND FAN LOYALTY: ASSOCIATIONS OF BTS COMEBACK COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA INTERACTION WITH ARMY LOYALTY

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ABSTRACT

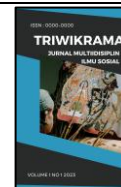
This study examines the associations of BTS comeback communication and social media interaction with ARMY loyalty. A quantitative explanatory design was employed using an online survey of 108 ARMY members who actively used X and followed the official account @BTS_official. Respondents were selected through purposive sampling, and the 28-item questionnaire measured BTS comeback communication, social media interaction, and ARMY loyalty on a five-point Likert scale. Data were analyzed in SPSS using item validity tests, Cronbach's alpha, regression assumption tests, multiple linear regression, t-tests, an F-test, and the coefficient of determination. All items were valid, and the three constructs demonstrated very high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.976 to 0.980. BTS comeback communication was positively and significantly associated with ARMY loyalty ($B = 0.579$; $t = 7.400$; $p < 0.001$), while social media interaction was also positively and significantly associated ($B = 0.447$; $t = 7.208$; $p < 0.001$). Together, the predictors significantly explained ARMY

loyalty, $F(2, 105) = 587.037$, $p < 0.001$, with $R^2 = 0.918$. The findings indicate that coordinated comeback messages and participatory interaction on X were jointly associated with sustained fan support within the study sample. The results should be interpreted cautiously because the residuals did not fully satisfy the normality assumption, and the predictors showed substantial empirical overlap

Keywords: ARMY, BTS comeback communication, digital engagement, fan loyalty, social media interaction.

INTRODUCTION

Digital media have transformed relationships between musicians and fans from predominantly one-way communication to continuous, participatory exchanges. Social media allows artists to distribute information, maintain visibility, and create a sense of presence through messages that fans can immediately respond to (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kim & Song, 2016). In the K-pop industry, this environment supports transnational circulation because music, promotional content, and fan activities move rapidly across digital networks (Jin & Yoon, 2016). Fans consequently participate in the production and circulation of value by interpreting messages, sharing content, organizing campaigns, and sustaining conversations around the artists they support.



BTS provides a prominent case of this digitally mediated relationship. The group's communication is embedded in an active fandom whose members use social media to circulate information, coordinate support, construct collective identity, and respond to public debates concerning BTS (Jin, 2021). Among Indonesian ARMY members, Twitter/X interactions have also been associated with cognitive, affective, and behavioral forms of perceived closeness to BTS (Wardani & Kusuma, 2021). These practices show that loyalty is maintained through both attachment to the artist and participation in the fandom community.

A comeback is a particularly intensive period of communication in the K-pop industry. It generally includes announcements, concept photos, teasers, promotional schedules, music videos, live content, and repeated official posts. These messages concentrate fans' attention and create anticipation before and after a new release. ARMY members may respond by liking, replying, reposting, quoting posts, using hashtags, producing derivative content, joining streaming activities, and discussing the release with other fans. Comeback communication, therefore, provides a structured set of messages, while social media interaction enables fans to interpret, circulate, and extend those messages.

These activities can be located within the broader concept of digital engagement. Engagement includes cognitive attention, emotional involvement, and behavioral participation in interactions with content, public figures, and online communities (Brodie et al., 2013; Dessart et al., 2015). In music fandoms, digital engagement is visible when fans follow updates, express enthusiasm, communicate with other members, recommend creative works, and maintain support over time. Social media interaction is consequently an observable form of engagement that may strengthen identification, belonging, and loyalty.

Previous research has examined parasocial relationships, celebrity-fan interaction, online fan communities, participatory fandom, and fan loyalty. Studies show that social media can strengthen perceived closeness to celebrities (Labrecque, 2014; Chung & Cho, 2017), that interaction contributes to fan happiness and attachment (Kim & Kim, 2020), and that community attributes influence loyalty and cooperation among members (Kim & Kim, 2017). Research on BTS and ARMY has also documented transnational identity, participatory culture, and collective communication on social media (Jin, 2021; Saraswati, 2020). Nevertheless, limited quantitative evidence has examined BTS comeback communication and social media interaction as simultaneous predictors of ARMY loyalty within a single regression model.

This study addresses that gap by testing the partial and simultaneous effects of BTS comeback communication and social media interaction on ARMY loyalty. BTS comeback communication is positioned as the first independent variable, social media interaction on the official X account @BTS_official as the second independent variable, and ARMY loyalty as the dependent variable. The study contributes to digital fandom research by showing how official promotional communication and participatory interaction jointly relate to sustained fan commitment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theory and Concepts

Digital Engagement and BTS Comeback Communication

Digital engagement refers to users' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral involvement with digital content, public figures, brands, or communities. Within virtual communities, engagement includes attention to information, emotional responses, message sharing, content production, and participation in collective activities (Brodie et al., 2013). Dessart et al. (2015)

further emphasize enthusiasm, attention, absorption, interaction, and identification as important components of engagement in social media communities. Digital engagement is therefore used in this study as an overarching concept rather than a separate statistical variable.

BTS comeback communication represents a coordinated set of official messages related to the release and promotion of new creative work. Announcements, visual concepts, teasers, schedules, music videos, and official posts provide information while generating anticipation and emotional involvement. Repeated exposure can renew fans' attention and reinforce the meanings they associate with BTS. Celebrity communication that appears open, credible, and relatable may also strengthen perceived closeness and favorable attitudes toward the celebrity's messages and creative output (Kim & Song, 2016; Chung & Cho, 2017). A positively evaluated comeback campaign is therefore expected to reinforce fans' willingness to continue supporting BTS.

Social Media Interaction in Online Fandom

Social media interaction is the process through which users produce, distribute, and respond to messages within digital networks (Septiani et al., 2026). It includes liking, replying, commenting, quoting, reposting, using hashtags, and producing related content. Social media enables multidirectional communication because fans can interact with official accounts, fellow fandom members, and wider audiences (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Frequent and meaningful interaction may improve perceptions of the supported figure and strengthen enduring relationships (Hudson et al., 2016).

Within K-pop fandoms, interaction also supports collective learning and coordinated action. Members translate information, explain promotional procedures, prepare streaming guides, and share practical knowledge. These activities allow online fandoms to operate as communities of practice built through repeated participation and knowledge exchange (Malik & Haidar, 2023). Fans also display identity through usernames, hashtags, profile images, symbols, and recognizable communication practices on Twitter/X (Maros & Basek, 2022). Interaction, therefore, functions both as message circulation and as a means of demonstrating membership in the fandom.

Social interaction within fan communities can also produce well-being and a sense of virtual community (Kim et al., 2023). When members receive information, recognition, and support from other fans, their connection to the artist becomes linked to their identification with the community. This social dimension is important for ARMY because support for BTS is often performed collectively through streaming, promotion, discussion, and defense of the group's reputation.

ARMY Loyalty

Fan loyalty refers to sustained commitment to follow, support, and maintain a relationship with an artist. It extends beyond purchasing albums or concert tickets and may include following updates, recommending creative works, defending the artist's reputation, joining fandom activities, and continuing support across different promotional periods. Zhang et al. (2015) conceptualize fan loyalty as a multidimensional relationship involving attitudes, attachment, and supportive behavior.

Engagement provides an important foundation for loyalty because interactive experiences connect communication with emotional and behavioral commitment (Pansari & Kumar, 2017). Parasocial closeness can further strengthen this relationship when fans perceive the artist as psychologically present and meaningful in their everyday lives (Labrecque, 2014). Parasocial interaction during exposure should be distinguished from a more enduring parasocial relationship, which persists beyond a single encounter with media content (Dibble et al., 2016). In this study, loyalty refers to ongoing support for BTS rather than a fleeting reaction to a single post or promotional message.

Online community experiences also contribute to loyalty. Information quality, trust, social interaction, and community identification influence members' willingness to remain involved and cooperate with other fans (Kim & Kim, 2017). Interaction between celebrities and fans can increase positive emotional experiences and attachment (Kim & Kim, 2020). Accordingly, ARMY members who positively evaluate BTS's comeback communication and engage more intensively with social media are expected to show stronger loyalty.

Research Gap

This study addresses that gap by testing the partial and simultaneous effects of BTS comeback communication and social media interaction on ARMY loyalty. BTS comeback communication is positioned as the first independent variable, social media interaction on the official X account @BTS_official as the second independent variable, and ARMY loyalty as the dependent variable. The study contributes to digital fandom research by showing how official promotional communication and participatory interaction jointly relate to sustained fan commitment.

Framework

BTS comeback communication and social media interaction represent distinct but related dimensions of digital fandom. Comeback communication provides official content, timing, and narrative momentum, whereas social media interaction provides participatory opportunities through which fans respond, exchange information, and display fandom identity. The present study does not treat social media interaction as a mediator. Instead, both constructs are specified as independent predictors of ARMY loyalty and are tested for both partial and simultaneous effects

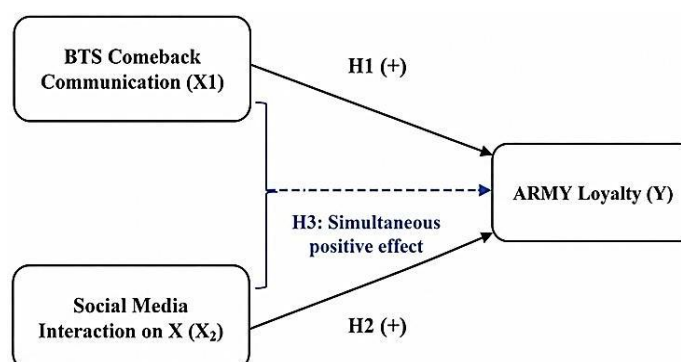


Figure 1. Relationship among research variables

Source: Processed by researchers based on theoretical concepts (2026)

Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual relationship between BTS comeback communication, social media interaction on X, and ARMY loyalty. BTS comeback communication (X1) and social media interaction on X (X2) are positioned as independent variables, while ARMY loyalty (Y) serves as the dependent variable. The model proposes that effective comeback communication, including official announcements, promotional content, teasers, and release-related information, positively influences fans' commitment and continued support for BTS. This relationship is represented by H1.

Social media interaction on X is also expected to positively affect ARMY loyalty, as stated in H2. Activities such as liking, replying, reposting, quoting posts, using hashtags, sharing information, and participating in fandom discussions allow ARMY members to express their identity, strengthen social connections, and maintain engagement with BTS. In addition to these partial relationships, H3 proposes that BTS's comeback communication and social media interaction on X simultaneously exert a positive and significant effect on ARMY loyalty. The framework, therefore, indicates that loyalty is shaped by the combined contributions of official communication from BTS and participatory interactions within the digital fandom environment.

Hypothesis (Quantitative)

Based on the theoretical foundation and the conceptual framework described above, the hypotheses proposed for this study are formulated as follows:

H1: BTS comeback communication is positively associated with ARMY loyalty.

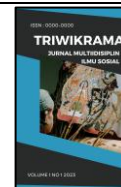
H2: Social media interaction on X is positively associated with ARMY loyalty.

H3: BTS comeback communication and social media interaction on X simultaneously have a positive and significant effect on ARMY loyalty.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative explanatory research design using a survey method. The explanatory design was selected to examine the statistical relationships between BTS comeback communication, social media interaction on X, and ARMY loyalty. The research model positioned BTS's comeback communication as the first independent variable (X1), social media interaction as the second independent variable (X2), and ARMY loyalty as the dependent variable (Y). Both independent variables were examined as distinct but related predictors of fan loyalty. The model was designed to test their partial effects on ARMY loyalty and their simultaneous contribution within a multiple linear regression framework. Social media interaction was therefore not treated as a mediating variable.

The study was conducted in a virtual research setting centered on BTS's official X account, @BTS_official. This setting was considered appropriate because comeback-related announcements, promotional content, information circulation, and interactions among ARMY members predominantly occur through digital platforms. These communication activities are not restricted to a particular geographic location, as fans can access official content, exchange information, and participate in fandom discussions from anywhere. The research was



conducted from April to June 2026. The research process included instrument development, questionnaire testing, online questionnaire distribution, response screening, data coding, statistical analysis, and interpretation of the findings.

The research population consisted of BTS fans, commonly known as ARMY, who actively used X and followed the official @BTS_official account. Respondents were required to meet three inclusion criteria: identify as ARMY members, have an active X account, and follow BTS's official account. A total of 108 respondents participated in the study. They were selected using nonprobability purposive sampling because the study required participants with characteristics directly relevant to the research objectives. Purposive sampling enables researchers to select individuals who meet predetermined criteria and possess experience or knowledge relevant to the phenomenon under investigation (Etikan et al., 2016).

Primary data were collected through an online questionnaire containing closed-ended statements. The online format enabled the instrument to reach respondents who participated in BTS fandom activities through digital platforms. Before completing the questionnaire, respondents were informed of the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the academic use of the collected data. Respondents were not required to provide personally identifying information. Their responses were treated confidentially and analyzed only in aggregate form.

The questionnaire employed a five-point Likert scale to measure respondents' levels of agreement with each statement. A score of 1 represented strongly disagree, 2 represented disagree, 3 represented neutral, 4 represented agree, and 5 represented strongly agree. The research instrument consisted of 28 statements divided among the three variables. Eight items measured BTS comeback communication, ten items measured social media interaction on X, and ten items measured ARMY loyalty.

The BTS comeback communication items assessed respondents' perceptions of official information, promotional messages, teasers, visual content, release schedules, and the capacity of comeback communication to generate attention and anticipation. Social media interaction items measured participatory activities such as liking, replying, reposting, quoting posts, using hashtags, sharing information, and joining fandom discussions. ARMY loyalty items assessed continued support for BTS, willingness to follow BTS-related updates, recommendation of BTS's creative works, participation in fandom activities, and commitment to supporting the group across different promotional periods.

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS. The initial stage involved checking questionnaire completeness, screening responses, coding answers, and entering the data into the software. Item validity was evaluated using Pearson's product-moment correlation, with each item score correlated with the total score of its respective construct. An item was considered valid when its correlation coefficient exceeded the predetermined critical value. Instrument reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha to determine the internal consistency of the items within each construct. The interpretation of Cronbach's alpha considered the number and similarity of the items because exceptionally high coefficients may indicate item redundancy or conceptual overlap (Cho & Kim, 2015).

Descriptive statistics were calculated to identify the minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation values for each variable. Before hypothesis testing, the regression model was evaluated using tests for normality of residuals, heteroscedasticity, and multicollinearity. Multiple linear regression was then used to estimate the effects of BTS comeback communication and social media interaction on ARMY loyalty. Partial effects were assessed using t-tests, while the simultaneous effect of both predictors was evaluated using an F-test. The coefficient of determination was calculated to determine the proportion of variation in ARMY loyalty jointly explained by BTS comeback communication and social media interaction on X.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of Research Results

This research examines 108 respondents who actively use X and follow the official @BTS_official account. The data collected through the 28-item questionnaire evaluate the empirical relationships among BTS comeback communication, social media interaction, and ARMY loyalty. A brief overview of the research findings, instrument quality, regression assumptions, and hypothesis testing results are presented in the following sub-sections.

Presentation of Research Results

Instrument Quality

All items met the validity criterion because their item-total correlations exceeded the critical r value of 0.2469. The coefficients ranged from 0.917 to 0.956 for BTS comeback communication, from 0.880 to 0.941 for social media interaction, and from 0.878 to 0.949 for ARMY loyalty. The constructs also demonstrated very high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.980, 0.980, and 0.976, respectively. These results indicate that the items consistently represented their assigned constructs. The exceptionally high alpha values should nevertheless be interpreted cautiously, as highly similar items may create redundancy and lead to conceptual overlap among the variables.

Table 1. Summary of Instrument Quality

Variable	Number of Items	Item-total Correlation Range	Cronbach's Alpha	Interpretation
BTS Comeback Communication (X1)	8	0.917-0.956	0.980	Valid; very high reliability
Social Media Interaction on X (X2)	10	0.880-0.941	0.980	Valid; very high reliability
ARMY Loyalty (Y)	10	0.878-0.949	0.976	Valid; very high reliability

Source: Research data analysis (2026)

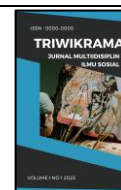


Table 1 presents the results of the validity and reliability tests for the three research variables. All questionnaire items were deemed valid because their item-total correlation coefficients exceeded the critical r value of 0.2469. The correlation coefficients ranged from 0.917 to 0.956 for BTS comeback communication, from 0.880 to 0.941 for social media interaction on X, and from 0.878 to 0.949 for ARMY loyalty. These results indicate that each item was strongly associated with the construct it was intended to measure. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients were 0.980 for BTS comeback communication, 0.980 for social media interaction, and 0.976 for ARMY loyalty, demonstrating very high internal consistency. The instrument was therefore considered appropriate for subsequent statistical analysis. Nevertheless, the exceptionally high reliability coefficients should be interpreted with caution, as they may indicate similarities or redundancy among questionnaire items.

Regression Assumption Tests

The residual normality test produced an Asymp. Sig. value of 0.025 and a Monte Carlo significance value of 0.026. Both values were below 0.05, indicating that the residuals did not fully satisfy the normality assumption. The Glejser test detected no heteroscedasticity, as the p -values were 0.108 for social media interaction and 0.343 for BTS comeback communication. The tolerance value was 0.173, and the VIF was 5.764. These values do not indicate perfect multicollinearity, but the VIF indicates substantial overlap among the predictors and warrants cautious interpretation of their separate contributions.

Table 2. Summary of Regression Assumption Tests

Assumption	Indicator	Result	Interpretation
Residual normality	Asymp. Sig.; Monte Carlo Sig.	0.025; 0.026	Not satisfied at the 5% level
Heteroscedasticity	Glejser Sig. for X2;	0.108; 0.343	Not detected
Multicollinearity	X1	0.173; 5.764	Substantial predictor overlap; interpret cautiously

Source: Research data analysis (2026)

Table 2 summarizes the results of the regression assumption tests. The residual normality test produced an Asymp. Sig. value of 0.025 and a Monte Carlo significance value of 0.026. Since both values were below the 0.05 significance threshold, the residuals did not fully meet the normality assumption. The Glejser test generated significance values of 0.108 for social media interaction and 0.343 for BTS comeback communication. Both values exceeded 0.05, indicating that heteroscedasticity was not detected in the regression model. The multicollinearity test produced a tolerance value of 0.173 and a variance inflation factor of 5.764. These values do not indicate perfect multicollinearity, although they suggest substantial empirical overlap between the two independent variables. Consequently, the separate contribution of each predictor should be interpreted cautiously, particularly because the residual distribution did not fully satisfy the normality assumption.

The non-normality of the residuals does not automatically render the regression estimates useless, but it reduces confidence in inference based solely on parametric assumptions. The results should therefore be understood as evidence within the present sample. Future analysis

using raw data should examine outliers and influential observations and may apply robust standard errors or bootstrapping to test the stability of the coefficients.

Multiple Regression and Hypothesis Testing

The multiple regression model produced $R = 0.958$, $R^2 = 0.918$, and adjusted $R^2 = 0.916$. BTS comeback communication and social media interaction jointly explained 91.8% of the variance in ARMY loyalty, while 8.2% was associated with factors outside the model. The ANOVA result, $F(2, 105) = 587.037$, $p < 0.001$, showed that the regression model was statistically significant. The estimated equation was $Y = 3.919 + 0.579X_1 + 0.447X_2$.

Table 3. Multiple Linear Regression Results

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	p
Constant	3.919	1.033	-	3.794	< 0.001
BTS Comeback Communication (X1)	0.579	0.078	0.497	7.400	< 0.001
Social Media Interaction on X (X2)	0.447	0.062	0.484	7.208	< 0.001

Source: Research data analysis (2026)

The coefficient for BTS comeback communication was positive and significant ($B = 0.579$; $t = 7.400$; $p < 0.001$). Holding social media interaction constant, a one-unit increase in the perceived quality of comeback communication was associated with a 0.579-unit increase in ARMY loyalty. H1 was therefore supported. Social media interaction also had a positive and significant coefficient ($B = 0.447$; $t = 7.208$; $p < 0.001$). Holding comeback communication constant, a one-unit increase in interaction was associated with a 0.447-unit increase in loyalty. H2 was supported. The significant F-test and R^2 of 0.918 supported H3, indicating a significant simultaneous effect of both predictors on ARMY loyalty.

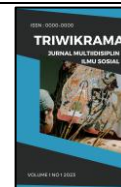
The standardized beta for BTS comeback communication (0.497) was slightly higher than that for social media interaction (0.484). This small difference suggests that official comeback communication made a marginally stronger relative contribution within the model, although the two predictors were nearly equivalent and empirically interrelated. The coefficients should not be interpreted as evidence that one predictor can replace the other.

Table 4. Research Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Statement	Decision Criterion	Status
H1	BTS's comeback communication has a positive, significant effect on ARMY loyalty.	$B = 0.579$; $t = 7.400$; $p < 0.001$	Supported
H2	Social media interaction on X positively and significantly affects ARMY loyalty.	$B = 0.447$; $t = 7.208$; $p < 0.001$	Supported
H3	BTS's simultaneous comeback communication and social media interaction on X have a positive, significant effect on ARMY loyalty.	$F(2, 105) = 587.037$; $p < 0.001$; $R^2 = 0.918$	Supported

Source: Research data analysis (2026)

Table 4 presents the results of the research hypothesis testing. The first hypothesis was supported because BTS comeback communication had a positive and significant effect on ARMY loyalty, as indicated by a regression coefficient of 0.579, a t-value of 7.400, and a significance



level below 0.001. This finding indicates that stronger, more positively perceived comeback communication was associated with higher loyalty among ARMY members. The second hypothesis was also supported. Social media interaction on X had a positive and significant effect on ARMY loyalty, with a regression coefficient of 0.447, a t-value of 7.208, and a significance level below 0.001. Fans who participated more actively in liking, reposting, replying, sharing information, and joining discussions tended to demonstrate stronger loyalty toward BTS. The third hypothesis was supported by the simultaneous test.

The regression model produced an F-value of 587.037, with a significance level below 0.001, indicating that BTS's comeback communication and social media interaction jointly had a statistically significant effect on ARMY loyalty. The coefficient of determination of 0.918 indicates that the two predictors collectively explained 91.8% of the variation in ARMY loyalty within the study sample. The remaining 8.2% was associated with other factors not included in the model. Overall, the findings confirm that official comeback communication and participatory interaction on X, individually and collectively, strengthen ARMY loyalty.

Analysis of Findings

The empirical findings provide within-sample evidence regarding fan loyalty in the digital music ecosystem, specifically among the surveyed ARMY members. The statistical results demonstrate that both BTS comeback communication and social media interaction on X exert a positive and significant effect on ARMY loyalty, accounting for a substantial portion of the variance in loyalty (R-squared of 0.918).

First, the analysis confirms the hypothesis that BTS comeback communication significantly influences fan loyalty. Strategic official communications—such as promotional rollouts, concept photos, teasers, and comeback schedules—function as vital informational anchors that sustain fan excitement and brand commitment. These findings align with media and communication theories suggesting that structured organizational messaging maintains audience retention and fosters long-term attachment in mediated environments.

Second, social media interaction on X plays a crucial role in predicting ARMY loyalty. The interactive features of the platform, including reposting, quoting, hashtag campaigns, and peer-to-peer discussions, enable fans to transition from passive consumers to active participants. This active digital engagement strengthens communal bonds, reinforces shared identity, and deepens emotional alignment with the group.

Finally, the joint regression model indicates that both official comeback communication and social media interaction contribute to the prediction of fan loyalty; the model does not test an interaction or synergistic effect between the predictors. This indicates that modern fan loyalty is not solely driven by top-down announcements from artists, but is fundamentally co-created through the active, participatory culture of the digital fandom landscape.

Discussion

The positive effect of BTS's comeback communication suggests that a comeback is an important period of relational communication rather than merely a product release. Announcements, teasers, concept materials, schedules, and music videos create repeated points of contact that renew attention and reinforce the meanings fans associate with BTS. This interpretation is consistent with research showing that celebrity communication and social presence can

strengthen perceived closeness and favorable audience responses (Kim & Song, 2016; Chung & Cho, 2017). When ARMY members evaluate official comeback messages as informative, attractive, and emotionally meaningful, they are more likely to continue following updates, recommending BTS's work, and supporting promotional activities.

The slightly larger standardized coefficient for comeback communication shows that the quality and coherence of official messages remain central to loyalty. A structured comeback campaign establishes the content and narrative around which fandom activity develops. It also extends engagement across several stages, from initial announcements to post-release discussions. The result suggests that fan commitment is renewed through an ongoing communication process rather than produced by a single promotional post.

Social media interaction also contributed significantly to ARMY loyalty. Liking, replying, quoting, reposting, using hashtags, and joining discussions allow fans to move from receiving information to participating in its circulation. These practices correspond with the view that engagement involves behavioral participation as well as cognitive and emotional involvement (Brodie et al., 2013; Dessart et al., 2015). Interaction gives fans opportunities to demonstrate support, receive recognition, and maintain visibility within the fandom.

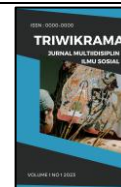
The social dimension of interaction is particularly important. ARMY members exchange information, produce guides, translate content, and coordinate collective activities. Similar practices have been described as forms of community learning and identity construction in K-pop fandoms (Malik & Haidar, 2023; Maros & Basek, 2022). Repeated interaction can create a sense of virtual community and connect loyalty to BTS with identification as an ARMY member (Kim et al., 2023). Fan loyalty is therefore sustained through both the artist-fan relationship and relationships among fans.

The simultaneous effect of comeback communication and social media interaction shows that official communication and participatory activity work together within digital fandom. Comeback messages provide content, timing, and emotional momentum. Social media interaction expands the circulation of those messages and allows fans to attach collective meanings to them. This combination helps explain why engagement with a music group can persist beyond consumption and become a continuing form of community participation, recommendation, and reputational support.

The R^2 value of 0.918 is exceptionally high and should not be treated as a complete explanation of ARMY loyalty. It may partly reflect conceptual proximity among the indicators, the homogeneity of a sample composed of active followers, and common-method bias, as all constructs were measured through the same questionnaire at a single point in time. The VIF of 5.764 also indicates substantial empirical overlap between comeback communication and social media interaction. The study therefore provides strong evidence of relationships within this sample, but broader generalization requires more diverse samples, longitudinal designs, stronger construct validation, and alternative analytical procedures.

CONCLUSION

This study indicates that perceived BTS comeback communication and social media interaction on X are significant predictors of ARMY loyalty within the study sample. BTS comeback



communication had a positive and significant association ($B = 0.579$; $t = 7.400$; $p < 0.001$), while social media interaction also had a positive and significant partial effect ($B = 0.447$; $t = 7.208$; $p < 0.001$). The simultaneous model was significant, $F(2, 105) = 587.037$, $p < 0.001$, and explained 91.8% of the variance in loyalty. The findings show that loyalty is associated with two complementary communication processes. Official comeback communication provides information, anticipation, and emotional meaning, while interaction on X enables fans to respond, circulate content, express fandom identity, and participate in collective support.

For artists and entertainment managers, the results underline the importance of coordinating high-quality official messages with accessible opportunities for fan participation. Communication strategies should sustain engagement throughout the entire comeback period rather than focus solely on the release date. The conclusions are limited to the 108 respondents in this study. Residual normality was not fully satisfied, the predictors displayed substantial overlap, and the very high reliability coefficients may indicate item redundancy. Future studies should use more heterogeneous samples, validate the distinctiveness of the constructs, examine common-method bias, and apply robust or longitudinal analyses. These steps would provide stronger evidence about how digital communication and fandom participation shape loyalty across artists, platforms, and cultural contexts.

ETHICAL DECLARATION

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Conflict of interest: Authors must disclose any financial, professional, personal, or institutional interests that could influence the research, interpretation, or publication of the manuscript. If none exist, this should be clearly stated.

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