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Master's Thesis of International Studies

**THE BTS IMPACT:  
A COMPARATIVE THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF BTS  
FANS AND NON-FANS' CHANGES IN  
PERCEPTION**

BTS 영향:  
BTS 팬들과 일반 방문객들의 인식 변화에 대한  
주제별 비교 분석

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Graduate School of International Studies

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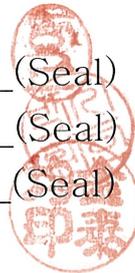
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## ABSTRACT

*Connect, BTS* is a contemporary art project that involves five cities around the world. Located in London, Buenos Aires, Berlin, Seoul and New York, this project was created by BTS and 22 contemporary artists and curators who related to BTS' philosophy, according to its official website. One interesting aspect of BTS' involvement in this project is that BTS does not appear visually in the selected artworks. Yet, both groups of BTS fans and non-fans' interest in BTS increased after their London exhibition experience. For BTS fans, this project reaffirmed their positive understanding of BTS, thus enhancing their interest in BTS. Meanwhile, non-fans saw it as a pleasant surprise that challenged their existing bias towards BTS, resulting in new curiosity and therefore increased interest in the group. A small group of non-fans' interpretation of the project turned into resistance and neutrality. Interestingly, most of the participants including both BTS fans and non-fans' interests in Korean art and culture also increased. This study conducts a comparative thematic analysis to effectively understand the findings of both the surveys and interviews. Using Lee (2009)'s theoretical framework of soft power, this study aims to find effective soft power

resources for enhancing the promotion of Korean art and culture in overseas  
museum and gallery exhibitions.

**Keywords:** BTS, Soft Power, Korea, Art, Exhibition, Korean Wave, Hallyu,  
Culture, Museum, Curator

**Student Number:** 2017- 26755, Min Jung Kim

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION</b> .....	1
<b>CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW</b> .....	4
2.1 Museum Exhibitions and Soft Power .....	4
2.2 Historical Understanding of the Representation of Korean Art and Culture in Overseas Museums and the Challenges .....	7
2.3 BTS, Korean Wave and Soft Power Resources .....	10
2.4 <i>Connect, BTS</i> .....	15
<b>CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH DESIGN</b> .....	17
3.1 Research Setting.....	17
3.2 Research Question, Methods, and Sample.....	18
3.3 Analytical Framework .....	20
<b>CHAPTER 4. ANALYSIS</b> .....	24
4.1 Keywords .....	24
4.2 Analysis of Non-fans' Understanding .....	26
4.2.1 The <i>Connect</i> , BTS London Exhibition Challenges Non-fans' Understanding of BTS as a Korean Pop Band.....	27
4.2.1 Associating Their Experiences with Their Pre-existing Understanding of Contemporary Korea.....	30
4.2.2 Non-fans' Understanding of Art Presented at <i>Connect, BTS</i> and its Link with Korea: Technology .....	32

4.3	Analysis of Fans’ Understanding.....	35
4.3.1	BTS: Main Interpretation Framework to <i>Connect, BTS</i> .....	36
4.3.1.1	The <i>Connect, BTS</i> London Exhibition Connects BTS and Fans .....	38
4.3.1.2	The <i>Connect, BTS</i> London Exhibition Reaffirms Fans’ Understanding of BTS Being Different .....	40
4.3.1.3	The <i>Connect, BTS</i> London Exhibition Reaffirms Fans’ Understanding of BTS as Global Goodwill Ambassadors Promoting Love .....	43
4.3.2	The <i>Connect, BTS</i> London Exhibition Reaffirms Fans’ Association Between BTS and Korea .....	47
<b>CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION</b> .....		<b>49</b>
5.1	Both Groups’ Increased Interest in BTS and Korean Art and Culture: Cooptive Power.....	50
5.2	Non-fans’ Resistance Towards <i>Connect, BTS</i> : Coercive Power .....	51
5.3	Not Cooptive nor Coercive, Neutral .....	52
5.4	BTS as the Main Catalyst to Korea.....	53
<b>CHAPTER 6. IMPLICATIONS</b> .....		<b>54</b>
6.1	Korean Wave Offers a Wider Audience .....	54
6.2	Utilize Korea’s Rising Image to Establish Itself as the Rule Maker in Contemporary Art World.....	56
6.3	Use Korea’s Strength in Contemporary Culture When Presenting Korea’s Culture in Exhibitions .....	57

6.4 Increase Interest Indirectly But Creatively .....	58
<b>CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION</b> .....	60
<b>REFERENCE</b> .....	63
<b>APPENDIX</b> .....	68
<b>ABSTRACT IN KOREAN</b> .....	73

## LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure 1. Conversion Process of Soft Power .....	23
Figure 2. Non-fans' Thought Process .....	26
Figure 3. What Attracted Non-fans to the Exhibition.....	30
Figure 4. Fans' Thought Process .....	35
Figure 5. What Attracted Fans to the Exhibition .....	37
Figure 6. Conversion Process of Soft Power .....	49
Figure 7. Comparative Understanding of Fans and Non-fans' Thought Process .....	50
Table 1. Keywords for each group based on MAXQDA's algorithm .....	25

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

*“One of the most unusual collaborations so far this century: Korean pop music and contemporary art. K-pop meets C-art, for short.” – Sanderson 2020, Times*

In an interview with *Ocula*, one of Korea's most influential art curators, Lee Daehyung, recounted an emotional experience while he was studying in Columbia University's curatorial studies program. His classmates, who were interested in Asia, came to him to ask about Chinese and Japanese art, but ignored Korean art. This motivated him to focus on Korean art: “I got a bit angry. So I said, ‘Really? I’m not doing Asian art anymore. I’m only doing Korean.’” (Min 2014). Many scholars in the museology and art fields have noted the challenges that Korean art curators face in promoting Korean art at museums overseas in comparison to art from China or Japan. These range from low numbers of collections and levels of cultural understanding in other countries to the limited range of cultural objects. However, in 2020, Lee’s groundbreaking project *Connect, BTS* sparked a debate among Korean art curators as well as in the global contemporary art world. *Connect, BTS* involves Korea’s boy band BTS (an acronym for *Bangtan Sonyeondan* and the English abbreviation: *Beyond the Scene*) and 22 world-renowned artists and curators in five major cultural cities across the globe. The project’s official website describes the initiative as “a

collective curatorial practice by curators around the world who resonated with BTS' philosophy". Sanderson (2020) from *The Times* described the project as "one of the most unusual collaborations so far this century: Korean pop music and contemporary art. K-pop meets C-art, for short" while *The Financial Times* referred to BTS as "art patrons". The nature of *Connect, BTS* generates important questions about the influence of "Hallyu", the Korean Wave, on museum and gallery exhibitions. What is noteworthy is that BTS did not visually appear in the artwork. Instead their role was to be the patrons in the project, supporting the curators, artists, and artworks. This unique exhibition offers a valuable scholarly opportunity as it enables a direct test on perception of BTS and understanding of BTS as soft power resources for Korea. This study conducted a survey and interviews to explore the experience of those that attended the exhibition, with the aim of determining whether specific elements of their experience influenced their interest towards BTS and Korea. It uses a close thematic analysis on their responses to better understand their thought processes. The research findings are then examined in the context of soft power. This study uses Lee's (2009) soft power conversion process to answer the research question of the study: Can the *Connect, BTS* London exhibition offer insights for promoting Korean art and culture in overseas museum exhibitions? By examining an often overlooked aspect of the Korean Wave and its connection with exhibitions, this study

contributes to literature on the Korean Wave, soft power studies, as well as finding solutions to some of the existing challenges in representing Korean art and culture in overseas museums.

## CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Museum Exhibitions and Soft Power

*“Whether browsing the physical galleries, viewing exhibitions online, attending a lecture, watching films, or seeing the world go by with friends, museums are setting agendas and persuading people to think about many ideas and issues.”*

*– Lord, 2017*

Soft power, as termed by Harvard professor Joseph Nye (1990), refers to the power of attraction: the ability to get what one wants by attraction and persuasion rather than coercion or payment. This concept has become extremely relevant in today’s connected global society wherein many institutions and organizations are continuously attempting to measure countries’ soft power abilities. Museum and gallery art exhibitions are considered important criteria of soft power. The annual Soft Power 30 rank index report by Portland, Facebook, and the USC Center on Public Diplomacy for example, includes annual museum attendance for the top 100 museums worldwide in their metrics, and Monocle counts the attendance of major art galleries in theirs. Lord and Blankenberg (2015, p. 9) explain that this is because these cultural indicators reveal a country’s persuasion capability. They (2015, p.10) argue that the rise of cities and civil society have brought museums from the margins to the center of soft power. Nye

(2014, quoted in Lord and Blankenberg 2015, p.10) also highlights that soft power is more effective when produced by civil society than by the government and large corporations, the traditional “hard power” backers. As Min and Jin (2017, p.155) also note, countries have been promoting their culture and image through museums. Considering that museums are still a popular tourism spot and a place to experience a new culture, it is understandable why countries attempt to strategically use their cultural objects in museums to support their global image (Min and Jin 2017, p.155). For example, Tate Modern became the top tourist attraction of the UK in 2019, welcoming almost 5.9 million visitors in 2018 (Association of Leading Visitor Attractions 2019). In fact, the soft power of museum and art exhibitions has also become a popular scholarly topic in recent years. Hoogwaerts (2016), for example, examined how art and cultural object exchanges including the loan of Picasso’s *Buste de Femme* (1943) from the Dutch Van Abbemuseum to the International Academy of Art Palestine demonstrated that museums and art institutions can make a positive impact on international relations by fostering mutual respect and understanding. Varutti (2014), Zhang and Courty (2020) examined how China utilizes museums as a soft power instrument for a new politics of identity and cultural nationalism. Cai (2013) tested the relationship between soft power and

museums in the international relations context by assessing both effectiveness and the limits of the concept of cross-cultural museum exchanges as an instrument of soft power and cultural diplomacy in Singaporean and French relations. Kang (2019) examined how Japan's Ukiyoe art has been used for its soft power.

Although Nye's concept of soft power has been widely used in various fields, its popularity has been scrutinized by many scholars who highlight its ambiguity and lack of systemic framework. As Blanchard and Lu (2012) put it, "The very success of the term soft power among the wider public seems to suggest that there is a need for it. Yet, since Nye did not clearly define soft power, there is also the need for a more systemic scholarly discussion". Parmar and Cox (2010, p.2) highlight the ambiguous understanding of the theory partly stems from Nye himself, who gave a wide scope for interpretations and came up with a variety of understandings of his own term throughout time. Ifantis (2011, p.445) even wrote that there seems to be a tendency to refer to anything attractive as soft power. Lee (2009, p.207) also points out that although Nye's concept of soft power sheds light on non-violent and non-coercive ways of influencing others, solid theoretical frameworks that demonstrate the power conversion mechanisms are missing.

Lee (2009) challenges Nye's distinction of "hard power" and "soft power" and redefines the concept of soft power by making a distinction between hard resources and soft resources instead of distinguishing between coercive power and cooptive power. Lee (2009, p.205) writes that when non-material, symbolic "soft resources" are implemented to influence others, the result is considered as soft power, but when material "hard resources" are implemented, the result is considered as hard power. This study utilizes Lee's (2009) "resource-based theory of soft power" to understand the success of the *Connect, BTS* London exhibition, as it offers a soft power conversion process that can measure the effectiveness of soft resources.

## **2.2 Historical Understanding of the representation of Korean Art and Culture in Overseas Museums and the challenges**

Yoo et al. (2011) write that galleries presenting Korean culture within overseas museums significantly helped Koreans to promote their culture. The overseas museums' Korean galleries are important educational and promotional windows that introduce Korean culture to visitors (Yoo et al. 2011, p.34-35). Yoo et al. (2011, p.34-35) add that they encourage museums to understand and research Korean art and encourage the museum's

exchanges with Korean national institutions for Korean artifacts. However, collections of Korean art in overseas museums, including those in the United States and the United Kingdom, have often been limited compared to those from Japan and China. According to Wilkinson (2003), acquisition of Asian art was reliant on the individual preferences of curators working in museums in the 1800s. There was a strong preference for Chinese and Japanese items as so few Korean artifacts were available in the West and Korean items were often misattributed due to the lack of understanding of Korea and its culture (Wilkinson 2003, p.242). Korea, historically limited in its interaction with Europe, particularly compared with Europe's ties to China and Japan, exhibited mainly craft or folk wares. These included textiles, agricultural artifacts and fans (Kim 2002, quoted in Kim 2015, p.88). Korean culture, through Europe's imperialist lens, was primarily understood to be an uncivilized culture. It was not broadly recognized for its aesthetics (Kim 2015, p.88).

It was in the 1960s that Korean galleries were established for the Korean collections in overseas museums, with the Honolulu Art museum known as the first (Korea National Museum 2009, p.892, quoted in Yoo et al. 2011, p.33). However, according to Hong (2014), it was not until the 1990s that a

proper framework for Korean collections was put in place with the development of the culture diplomacy policies on implementation of Korean galleries in overseas museums. The establishment of separate Korean galleries was the start of the exclusive categorization and exhibition of Korean collections (Kim 2015, p.88). However, past studies have highlighted challenges with Korean galleries in overseas museums. Choi (2007, quoted in Yoo et al. 2011, p.34) outlined several of these, including: unbalanced range of collection insufficient to represent the 5000 years of history of Korea, difficulties in purchasing and receiving donations to expand their collections and rarely having curators with expertise in Korean art and culture but curated by staff of East Asian collections in general. Korean galleries tend to be smaller than Japanese and Chinese galleries and are located in places with limited access (Choi 2007, quoted in Yoo et al. 2011, p.34). Most times, Korean galleries lack the exhibition activities and the breadth of content and become stagnant (Yoo et al. 2011, p.34). Yoo et al. (2011) offered guidelines for possible structural reforms to open up the Korean gallery at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the United States to a wider audience. Min and Jin (2017), conversely, focused on documenting the curators' challenges in promoting Korean culture in overseas museum exhibitions. They noted four main challenges: small range of Korean collection, insufficient

documentation of Korean objects, limited funding for the curatorial process and the difficulty to effectively communicate the subtle aesthetics of Korean art. They suggested the following solutions: government institution's continuous and extensive support, conveying a cultural context via storytelling, presenting diverse cultural objects in exhibitions and implementing creative marketing tactics to promote Korean culture.

### **2.3 BTS, Korean Wave and Soft Power Resources**

*“BTS! We haven't seen boy band fandom like this since the Beatles.”*

*– Willingham 2020, CNN*

Lee (2018) notes that we are now in an era where a Korean person's conventional introductory question to foreigners is no longer “Do you know kimchi?” but “Do you know BTS?” BTS is an acronym for the Korean phrase, *Bangtan Sonyeondan*, which translates to “Bulletproof Boy Scouts”. Bangtan's literal meaning, ‘resistant to bullets’, also refers to BTS' protection of those in their teens to 20s and their values from the prejudice and social pressure of society (Cho et. al 2018, p.20). In 2017, BTS added a fresh identity to a new English acronym, “Beyond The Scene”. BTS' agency, Big Hit Entertainment, said in an interview with *Soompi* that the updated branding “symbolizes youth who don't settle for their

current reality and instead open the door and go forward to achieve growth”. There are seven members in BTS: Jin, Suga, J-Hope, RM, Jimin, V, and Jungkook.

The rise in popularity of Korean culture, often referred to as *Hallyu*, meaning “Korean Wave”, is not a new phenomenon, but BTS’ success is seen as an inflection point in its history. BTS has expanded the reach of the Korean Wave to the United States, the center of pop culture, with experts calling it the evolved *Hallyu*, “*Global Hallyu*” (Ko & Heo 2018, quoted in, Yoon 2019, p.15). *Hallyu* refers to the phenomenon of people liking and admiring Korean mass culture (Moon 2014, p.143). According to the Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange (2009, quoted in Moon 2014, p.15), the term itself is known to have been first used by China’s *Beijing Youth Daily* when the Korean drama, *What Is Love All About*, became popular. What is noteworthy about BTS is that they have been constantly making the headlines not only with their historic music achievements including its third No. 1 on the Billboard Main Album Chart, but with their speech at the United Nations General Assembly in 2018 and projects in other areas including the contemporary art with “*Connected, BTS*” and their online Korean language lessons.

BTS' influence and success have turned into a massive economic contribution to the Korean economy. According to the Hyundai Research Institute's "Economic Effects of BTS" (2018) report, the septets' annual contribution to Korea's economy is about 4.1 trillion won - equivalent to that of 26 mid-sized companies. *MK News* referred to BTS as a "walking conglomerate" (Kim 2018). BTS' positive contribution to Korea's branding has also been impactful, with the group becoming one of the most influential soft power agents of Korea. Approximately 800,000 tourists have visited Korea annually for BTS concerts since their debut in 2013. This means BTS attracted 7.6% of Korea's annual visitors (Hyundai Research Institute 2018, p.7-8). The report also notes that if their popularity continues through 2023, BTS is estimated to contribute 56 trillion won to the Korean economy since 2014, which is worth more than the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympics. BTS' contribution to Korean soft power certainly demonstrates why the government has been capitalizing on the Korean Wave since its early days. The term *Hallyu* first appeared in an official presidential statement in 2001 when then-President Kim Dae-jung referred to it as a "chimney-less industry" and a driver of economic development that brings about high-added value with less expenditure compared to industrial development (Suntikul 2019, *The Diplomat*). The key question for policy makers at the time

was how to transform the Korean Wave into a sustainable source of income (Cho 2005, p. 160). Kim and Jin (2016)'s analysis of presidential speeches on the Korean Wave phenomenon and cultural diplomacy from 1998 to 2014 also shows that the Korean government has actively tried to capitalize on *Hallyu* economically and culturally by combining it with cultural policies and cultural diplomacy. According to Otmazgin (2008), the goal of cultural diplomacy is to promote new images of the nation via cultural products and thereby enhance its global influence. Popular culture has become an important asset for soft power diplomacy, transcultural collaborations, dialogues, and for winning the hearts and minds of people (Nye & Kim, 2013, p. 35). For Korea, in spite of its astonishing economic development and success, establishing a positive country brand has been a challenge (Elfving-Hwang, 2013; R. Kim, 2011, quoted in Kim and Jin 2016, p. 5517).

The rise of BTS not only offers valuable scholarly insights regarding the K-pop industry but also to the broader culture industry (Jung 2019, p. 64). Yet, despite the septet's tremendous multifaceted influence, research on BTS remains limited. Jung (2019) writes that there is a lack of scholarly research on BTS and asserts that most research has been confined to genres like music, choreography, and

performance. Kim (2019) examined the success of K-pop as a music genre by studying BTS as a case study while Cho et al. (2018) focused on analyzing BTS' star attributes and its effects on success. Byun and Ryu (2019) focused on how BTS' usage of social media contributed to their success and suggested ways social media can enhance the Korean Wave while Li (2019) on the other hand, studied the ecosystem of BTS' global fandom and Yoon (2019) looked at the role global fandom plays in BTS' success. Choi and Lim (2019) conducted a comparative analysis of BTS, EXO, and Twice (two other K-pop bands) as an attempt to outline unique traits to BTS and examine their success. As BTS continues to challenge the boundaries of what a traditional idol group can do, interdisciplinary discussions about the group have also started to emerge. Jung and Lee (2018) explained why and how BTS could positively contribute to promoting the Korean alphabet, Hangeul, by coming up with Hangeul fashion designs that fit BTS' branding while Cho (2019) wrote why and how K-pop effectively promotes Korean traditional art. He specifically looked at how BTS successfully reinterpreted and promoted elements of traditional culture via their music videos and performances. The Korean Wave has been an important soft power resource for Korea and BTS has certainly been one of Korea's valuable soft power resources. This link between Korea's soft power and BTS is demonstrated by Lee's (2009) understanding of soft power resources. Lee (2009,

p.134) writes, “The Korean Wave is not soft power, but is one of Korea’s many soft resources and when one successfully mobilizes these resources to achieve certain political and economic goals and national interests, one can say that soft resources have turned into soft power.”

## **2.4 Connect, BTS**

*“Curator and Art Director Daehyung Lee was sitting at a cafe in Venice during the biennale with Hans-Ulrich Obrist and a few other globally famous art curators bemoaning the fact that every couple of years all this great art was produced to basically talk to the same audience without hardly any breakthrough into the wider community. What could be done to get these artist’s messages across to the bigger community that existed outside of the contemporary art world - Why not use the platform of the biggest global boy band (BTS) to promote a select group of artists (22) across five cities and four continents - thus was born, CONNECT, BTS.”*

*– Westall 2020, FAD Magazine*

Like how many media organizations have paid attention, “Connect, BTS” is special in many ways, especially because it was not a project in which BTS themselves created works of art or directly appeared in the works of art. Instead their role was to be the patrons in the project, supporting the curators, artists, and works of art. This is noteworthy as art patrons often have influence over direction of exhibitions. As the curator and art director who developed the exhibit, Lee Daehyung said in *The JoongAng Daily*, “this project is a series of exhibitions

created by artists and curators who share BTS' philosophy in the form of support for diversity and love and care for the periphery". This unique aspect of the project and the relationship with BTS can also be seen in the description written on the official website of the project: "Connect, BTS' is a global project to connect five cities and 22 artists, each of whom contributes their unique philosophy and imagination to it. This project aims to redefine the relationships between art and music, the material and immaterial, artists and their audiences, artist and artists, theory and practice." The project involved five exhibitions in London, Berlin, Buenos Aires, Seoul, and New York. Not only the nationalities, but also the specialties of artists and the works of art involved in the project were diverse ranging, from performance art and audio-video work to installations. In other words, the project gave the freedom for viewers including both BTS fans, non-fans as well as organizers like the involved curators and artists to relate, interpret, and express BTS' philosophy. This unique communication process offers a valuable research opportunity to explore people's understanding of BTS, its philosophy in global society, and test its effectiveness as a soft power resource for Korea.

## CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH DESIGN

### 3.1 Research Setting

The *Connect BTS* London exhibition at Serpentine Galleries presented the artwork *Catharsis* by Danish artist, Jakob Kudsk Steensen. The *Connect, BTS* website introduces the artwork as the following: “‘Catharsis’ is an artwork by Jakob Kudsk Steensen immersing audiences within a digital simulation of a re-imagined old-growth forest, a forest that has developed undisturbed over hundreds of years. Based on field work undertaken by Steensen and his primary collaborator Matt McCorkle, the work’s virtual ecosystem and synchronised audio comprise 3D textures and sounds gathered from several North American forests. Set up as a single continuous shot that moves from the watery underground roots to the surveying viewpoint of the canopy, ‘Catharsis’ draws on Steensen’s conception of ‘slow media’ whereby digital technologies can foster attention to the natural world and create new narratives about our ecological futures. ‘Catharsis’ becomes a digital portal, a simulated journey that offers audiences access to past and present natural environments, slowed down and up close. ‘Catharsis’ was originally open to the public from January 14<sup>th</sup> to March 15<sup>th</sup>.” However, the end part of the exhibition overlapped with the sudden outbreak of the COVID-19 in the UK. Many museums and galleries including

Serpentine Galleries closed down as part of protective measures. However, the nature of Steensen's work enabled it to be open to the public online. In fact, Serpentine Galleries made Instagram posts of clips of Steensen's work on their account to inform the public that online viewing of the work had been extended to May 31<sup>st</sup>, allowing a wider audience range to experience the artwork and for me to include a global audience sample in my study.

### **3.2 Research Question, Methods, and Sample**

This study aims to answer the following question: *Can the Connect, BTS London exhibition offer new insights for promoting Korean art and culture in overseas museum exhibitions?* It explores the question by combining a survey to spot notable trends in two groups of fans and non-fans and follow-up interviews with those who showed interest in conducting interviews to further understand the contexts of the trends. The survey included multiple choice questions as well as short answer questions to enable respondents to elaborate on their exhibition experiences and offer contextual meanings to their answers. One-on-one interviews were conducted via digital communication platforms like Skype and Facebook Messenger, in order to follow up on certain parts of their responses to

better understand their thought processes. Each survey question and follow up interview question was carefully crafted to address the research aims with flexibility to adapt to participants' desire to elaborate on specific parts of their answers or their thought process. This type of interview, where interviewers adapt to interviewees' responses with the intention of continuously improving the research, is known as "responsive interviewing" according to Rubin and Rubin (2012, p.70). There were four main categories of questions: Background, BTS, Exhibition and Korea. As this study aims to understand participants' exhibition experiences, the focus of the survey evolved around the 'Exhibition' category. Questions in the categories of BTS and Korea helped me better understand and test participants' background, existing beliefs and thought process. The link to the survey included the link to the online exhibition. The survey was distributed online on social media networks to adapt to the COVID-19 global pandemic situation where most people around the world were in lockdown and could only be reached online. Both groups of participants were gathered via the snowball effect on social media networks. For fans, I put up a post about the study on social media groups such as BTS fan pages on Facebook. A number of BTS fans who participated in the study spread the word about my study on their own social media networks. A total of 56 respondents including 30 fans and 26 non-fans participated in the survey. Follow-up interviews were

conducted with 17 participants. Participants consisted of 25 males and 31 females. The ages of participants ranged from 17 to 51. The most popular age group was 20s. One participant, by selecting N/A, declined to name their country. The most common country represented was the United Kingdom.

### **3.3 Analytical Framework**

Thematic analysis has been a popular analytical tool for organizing qualitative data sets, especially for exploratory researchers attempting to understand a phenomenon or specific groups' experiences. Thematic analysis is more than counting phrases or words, it detects patterns, themes, across datasets, to explain the phenomenon under investigation (Guest, 2012, quoted in El Said 2017, p.733). As Braun and Clark (2006, p.79) wrote, it is a tool that identifies, analyzes and outlines patterns within data. In order to cross-check and to detect patterns of thought process within and between the two groups, I scrutinized the whole data set by conducting multiple close readings and by using qualitative and mixed methods research software MAXQDA. By using its word frequency function, I derived the top 100 keywords from participants' answers from the exhibition category in their surveys and cross-checked why and how the keywords were used. The top 100 keywords list also included a rank and frequency level next to each word. Some rank may have multiple keywords, as they were used with the

same frequency. This explains why the list includes several instances of rank 97, for example. To understand the algorithm and to ensure that the list was accurate for the purpose of this study, I went through each word of the list and filtered separately.

My filtering of the list included: 1) Excluding words that were used frequently for grammatical reasons such as articles like 'a' and 'the' along with pronouns like 'I' and 'you', as well as prepositions such as 'in'. 2) As the algorithm focused on frequency, sometimes it even included words that did not necessarily share the same meaning but contained the specific phrase it was looking for. For example, for the word 'all', it even included times where 'call' was used as it shared the three letters, 'all'. I checked the usage of each word that was included in the top 100, to ensure that the frequency was measured in the right context for this study and excluded those that did not meet the criteria. 3) I paid particular attention to words with double meanings and grammatical functions and excluded them if the algorithm did not measure it in the correct context. Examples include 'like', as it can be used to describe something that one likes or used before someone is giving an example.

Using Excel's search function, I filtered each word in the lists to ensure that I understood the contextual meanings of the keywords and checked that they represented what the respondents were referring to. The keywords were then sorted out to relevant themes according to contextual understanding of survey responses as well as follow-up interviews with participants from both fan and non-fan groups. A thorough cross-check and analysis of participants' responses were conducted to assure that I understood and coded themes of participants' thought process accurately. The research findings were then analyzed through Lee (2009)'s soft power conversion mechanism. The *Connect, BTS* London exhibition was explored as an application of soft resources and audiences' meaning making processes were sorted out according to the three different categories outlined in the model. These included two types of "cooptive power" and the "coercive power (or Resistance)". This was to further understand how the *Connect, BTS* London exhibition influenced BTS fans and non-fans' perceptions towards BTS and Korean art and culture and to answer the research question of the study: whether the *Connect, BTS* London exhibition offers insights to enhancing Korean art and culture in overseas museum exhibitions.

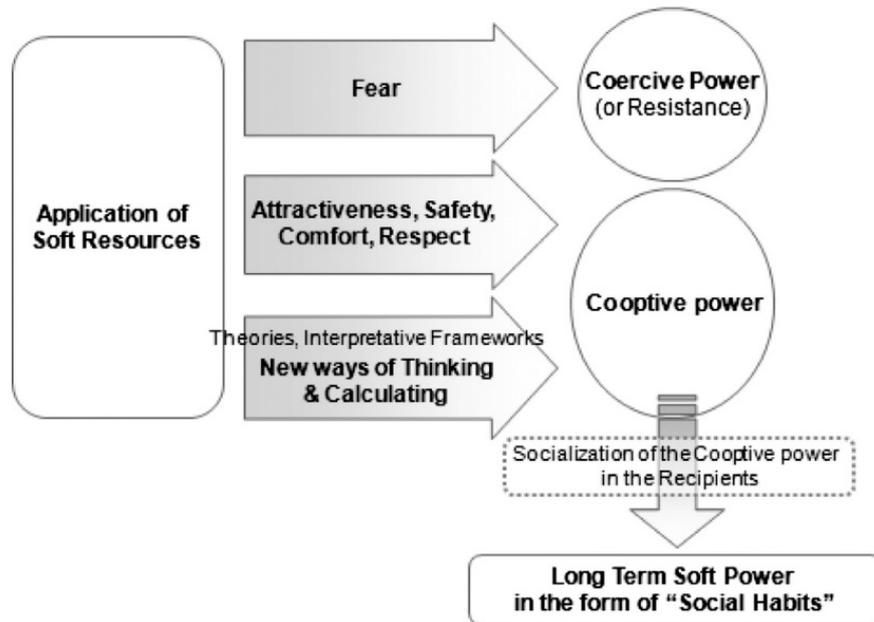


Figure 1. Conversion Process of Soft Power (Lee 2009, p. 211)

## CHAPTER 4. ANALYSIS

### 4.1 Keywords

As the table shows, the most frequent word used by fans when describing their experience was ‘BTS’, while it was ‘Art’ for non-fans. This difference in interpretation framework is further demonstrated in the keywords that follow. For fans, keywords related to the identity of BTS or the BTS message such as ‘world’ and ‘connect’ came after, while for non-fans, words that describe the art itself followed, such as ‘nature’ and ‘digital’. After a thorough contextual analysis of each word based on the survey responses as well as the follow-up interviews with participants from each group, I have visually outlined fans’ and non-fans’ interpretation frameworks of their exhibition experiences. Certain keywords belonged in more than one category, showing the linkages of different categories. There were three main categories in participants’ thought processes: BTS, Art and Korea. I used Venn diagrams to illustrate these linkages and to more effectively demonstrate the interactive relations’ context of the concepts that exist within participants, which were stimulated and influenced by the exhibition. As I explain how keywords and concepts were used, I bold them to assist readers’ understanding of the analysis and context.

Fans		Non-fans	
Top words	Frequency %	Top words	Frequency %
BTS	1.95	Art	1.17
Art	1.21	BTS	0.91
Exhibition	0.64	Exhibition	0.67
World	0.41	Nature	0.65
Connect	0.34	Digital	0.52
Nature	0.34	Korea	0.39
Artists	0.32	Online	0.39
Experience	0.30	Curious	0.31
Different	0.29	Immersive	0.31
Fans	0.27	Interesting	0.31
People	0.27	Pop	0.29
Artist	0.25	Peaceful	0.26
Life	0.25	Forest	0.23
Love	0.25	Music	0.23
New	0.23	Technology	0.23
Interested	0.20	Contemporary	0.21
Korea	0.20	Modern	0.21
Interesting	0.18	New	0.21
Beautiful	0.16	Different	0.18
Media	0.16	Video	0.18

Table 1. Keywords for Each Group Based on MAXQDA's Algorithm,  
Author 2020

4.2 Analysis of Non-fans' Understanding

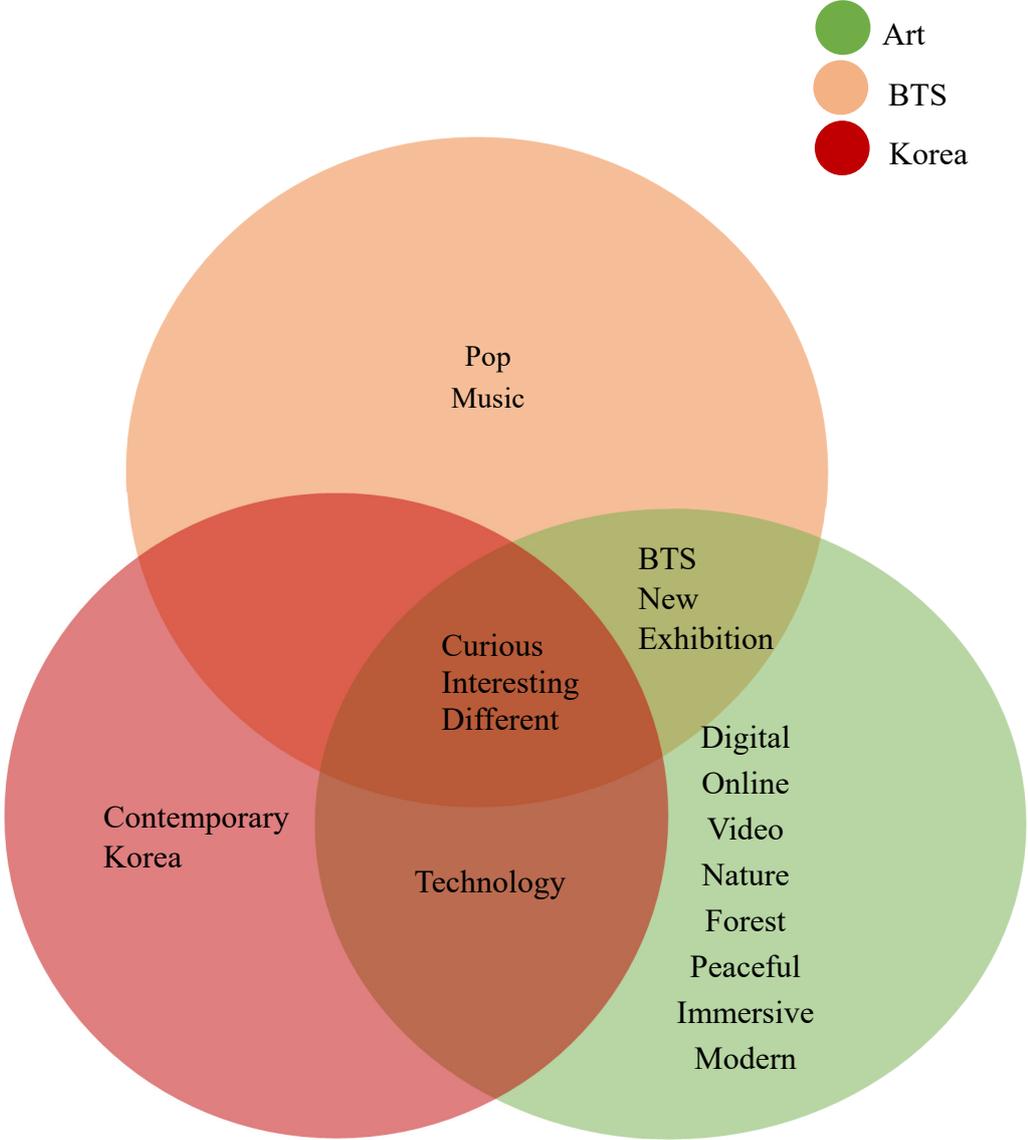


Figure 2. Non-fans' Thought Process, Author 2020

#### **4.2.1 The *Connect, BTS* London Exhibition Challenges Non-fans' Understanding of BTS as a Korean Pop Band**

As the keyword chart suggests and as the diagram further illustrates, for non-fans, their main interpretation framework did not revolve around BTS. In fact, this resonates with their answers through their attraction to the exhibition. Only 8.33% of participants included BTS for what attracted them to the exhibition. In fact, only 11 participants knew what BTS was prior to the exhibition. BTS was mainly understood to be a Korean pop music band as illustrated in the description in the Venn diagram with 'pop' and 'music'. However, this limited understanding of BTS as a typical Korean pop band is also what turned into a pleasant surprise when their understanding of BTS was challenged through the *Connect, BTS* project. What is important to note is that the *Connect, BTS* London exhibition did not feature BTS in the artwork. This made it difficult for non-fans to instantly understand the link between the two compared to fans. However, this characteristic of the exhibition rather encouraged them to think that the exhibition was a different and refreshing positive experience. In other words, the combination of the two seemingly different worlds provoked participants' curiosity and interest towards the exhibition and BTS. This thought process was clear when Participant 1 said: "I was surprised because I thought, this is not my

idea of a typical **Korean boy band** to me. My stereotype is that they have a very glamorous and glitzy look, wearing makeup and being onstage with lots of flashing lights and being very energetic. ‘Catharsis’ didn't seem like that at all. It was not decadent or glitzy, it was just quite peaceful...It made me think maybe I should be less dismissive of a boy band like a **Korean pop boy band**. It made me realize that I compartmentalized Korean boy bands as rubbish and not my thing, whereas this made me think, actually, I was being quite close-minded. Maybe these guys could be quite **interesting**, actually.” This quote demonstrates that the participant’s understanding of BTS and the artwork did not align at first and challenged the participant’s existing perception towards BTS as a Korean pop boy band but that turned into curiosity and interest towards the group. Other participants’ challenged thoughts also demonstrate their pre-existing understanding of BTS and how the exhibition influenced their thought processes, specifically how it increased their interest in BTS. For example, Participant 2’s account shows the participant’s contrasting pre-existing belief towards K-pop and contemporary art and how that was challenged, “I didn’t know anything about **BTS** but I always associated **Korean pop** as **low culture**, which young teenage girls like. So I was a little **surprised** and rather confused to see that a **Korean boy band** was involved in contemporary art, let alone, sponsor it, because that is high culture. I thought that was a great way to open up people's

minds and to **connect** two **different** worlds. In the end, art is something that connects everyone not owned by a specific group of generation or people. This experience was **different** and I am definitely more **interested** in BTS now.” For Participant 3, the *Connect BTS* was a ‘**new**’ type of collaboration that challenged their pre-existing understanding of not only BTS as artists but the status quo of the art world, “In the art world, I think Asian artists like **Koreans** are seen as inferior to some extent by Westerners. But, I could really see that the Western artists really love **BTS**, they praised them and they really wanted to work with BTS. This exhibition was a ‘**new**’ type of collaboration and I also learned a ‘**new**’ side of BTS.” What is noteworthy is that in all participants’ accounts above, their association between BTS and Korea was referenced, shedding light on their pre-existing understanding of BTS as a boy band from Korea. For many non-fans, the *Connect BTS* London exhibition was a new experience that challenged their way of thinking towards BTS and provoked their curiosity and interest in them. This is supported by the survey result which says 80.8% of non-fans’ interest in BTS increased.

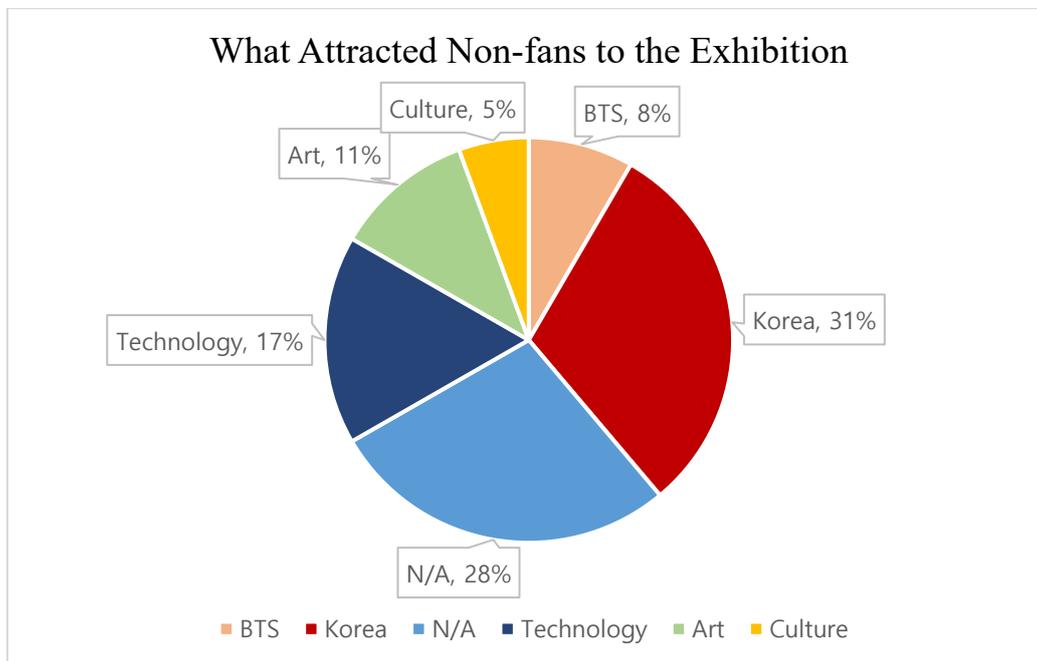


Figure 3. What Attracted Non-fans to the Exhibition

#### 4.2.2 Associating Their Experiences with Their Pre-existing Understanding of Contemporary Korea

In non-fans' explanations of their experiences, there was an interesting tendency for them to relate their experiences to their pre-existing thoughts on Korean culture, specifically by understanding BTS as a part of Korea's contemporary culture. This thought process is clear in the following quote by Participant 2, "I see **BTS** as part of **Korea's contemporary** culture. This project made me think

that **BTS** are **changemakers** bringing together **different** worlds and it actually reminded me of **Korea's rising image as the changemaker** in global society with its handling of the COVID-19 outbreak and *Parasite* winning the Oscar and so on. These came to my mind and made me more **interested** about **contemporary Korean culture**. I also got more **curious** about **Korean art and culture** because the fact that a 'boy band' is supporting an **art** project, made me wonder if **Koreans** are generally interested in **art**, which attracts me as an **art** enthusiast." Participant 7 also noted how the *Connect, BTS* exhibition encouraged the participant to think about Korea's advantage in contemporary culture and art. "Contemporary is **Korea's** advantage. Japan and China rely a lot on traditional culture and **art** like old paintings and historical sculptures and the likes. But if you think about it, in some ways, **Korea** shares more similar societal values to other parts of the world than Japan and China like with democracy and entertainment for example. I feel that **Korea** can differentiate itself by being completely new and **contemporary** and it has the right resources to do it." The fact that these participants extended their exhibition experience to their thoughts, curiosity, and interest towards Korea, and that **BTS** stimulated this thought process is noteworthy. 73% of participants answered that they have become more interested in Korean art and culture after the exhibition.

### 4.2.3 Non-fans' Understanding of Art Presented at *Connect, BTS* and its Link with Korea: Technology

As the Venn diagram illustrates, for non-fans, the category with the most keywords was the Art category. Non-fans not only paid a great amount of attention to describing what appeared in the artwork such as 'nature' and 'forest', but also to the form of the artwork. In fact, their key word list included four words that solely described the technology aspect of the artwork: 'digital', 'online', 'video' and 'technology'. The featuring of nature was responsible for the frequent usage of the word 'peaceful', while 'modern' and 'immersive' were mainly used to describe the technology-enhanced art experience. The technological nature of the artwork piqued participants' 'curiosity' and challenged their thoughts on art and also encouraged them to feel that the exhibition was 'different' and 'interesting'. Participant 4 further demonstrates this point. For Participant 4, it was the unconventional artistic expression that challenged the participant's understanding of art and increased curiosity: "That **art** does not just have to be a series of dusty paintings. It adapts with the times, embracing **modern technology**. Also that **art** has broad appeal and is a uniting force! Anybody can get behind it." For some non-fans like Participant 5, it was the unique and in some ways contrasting combination of concepts of nature and technology that piqued their

interest, “I was intrigued by the description of intertwining **nature** and **technology**.” For some non-fans, it was the technology that was used that sparked their interest. This is clear in Participant 6’s answer, “I learnt how advanced **technology** has become. The graphic in the video is unreal.” The novelty surrounding the artwork for involving technology translated into non-fans’ curiosity and interest. However, what is noteworthy is that their focus on technology went further by them associating it with their pre-existing understanding of Korea as a technologically advanced country and consequently, their interests towards Korean culture and art also increased. Participant 2’s quote demonstrates this thought process, “I thought it made sense that this particular work was chosen by a **Korean boy band** because it involves **technology**. I have always had the image that **Korea** is a **technologically advanced** country. I specifically remember how they pulled off the drone performance very well at the **PyeongChang Winter Olympics**. I also have the impression that **Koreans** are very **tech-savvy**. So I associated this **technological** aspect of the exhibition with the **tech-savvy image of Korea**. I got interested in learning more about **Korea’s culture**, how it uses **technology**, especially for **art**”. Other participants also linked the exhibition with Korea. Participant 7, for example, shared how this exhibition experience reminded the participant of a past exhibition about Korean art that the participant went to and was inspired to search online to jog memories.

In fact, Participant 7 also agreed that the pre-existing concept of Korea being a forerunner in the technology field came up during the exhibition experience, “I thought **Korea** may be **pioneering** in this **new** type of **art**. It made me **interested** to see what else **BTS** sponsors, like what else is coming out of **Korea** that's similar to this.” The novelty of the artwork, specifically its use of technology, motivated participants to become interested in the exhibition and feel that this exhibition was different. The technological aspect reminded participants of their existing thoughts on Korea.

### 4.3 Analysis of Fans' Understanding

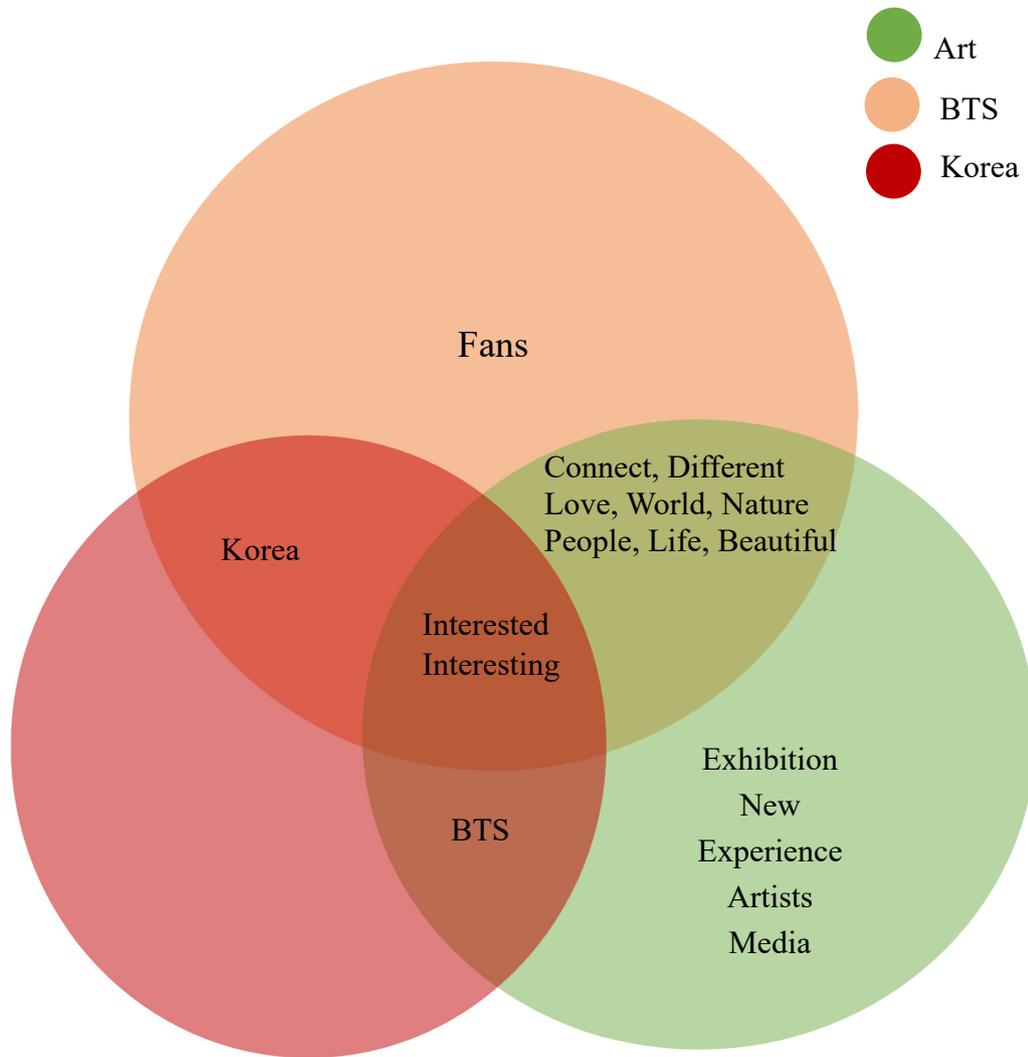


Figure 4. Fans' Thought Process, Author 2020

### 4.3.1 BTS: Main Interpretation Framework to *Connect, BTS*

As both the keyword chart and diagram further illustrate, for fans, the main interpretation framework of the exhibition revolved around BTS. This is supported by their answers to what attracted them to the exhibition. All fans included BTS in their answers. All fans wrote that they were familiar with BTS prior to the exhibition and 80% of participants answered that they were familiar with Korean art and culture before the exhibition. As illustrated by the Venn diagram, the words that describe BTS' messages prevailed and those concepts were also used by participants to interpret their exhibition experience and to connect them with BTS. In fact, specific parts of the exhibition like the elements in the artwork acted as catalysts to encourage fans' reference to BTS during their experience. For fans, this experience was not a challenge to their understanding towards BTS like it was for non-fans but it was an opportunity where they could reaffirm their existing positive thoughts about BTS. This is reflected in the two words that were used for all three categories of BTS, Korea, and Art: **'interested'** and **'interesting'**. Fans already had interests in all three categories but this experience enhanced their interests. In fact, all fans answered that their interest towards BTS was enhanced after the exhibition, reaffirming their pre-existing interest in BTS. In the following sections, I examine fans' thought processes in

detail by looking at how they understood the link between the art presented by the *Connect, BTS* London exhibition and BTS. Based on a thorough analysis of the survey responses and follow-up interviews, it became clear that BTS was a significant part of their interpretation of the exhibition experience. In order to better understand their understanding of BTS and their association with the exhibition experience, I realized themes involving BTS had to be broken down into several sub-themes. In the following section, I outline their thought processes and notable themes in detail.

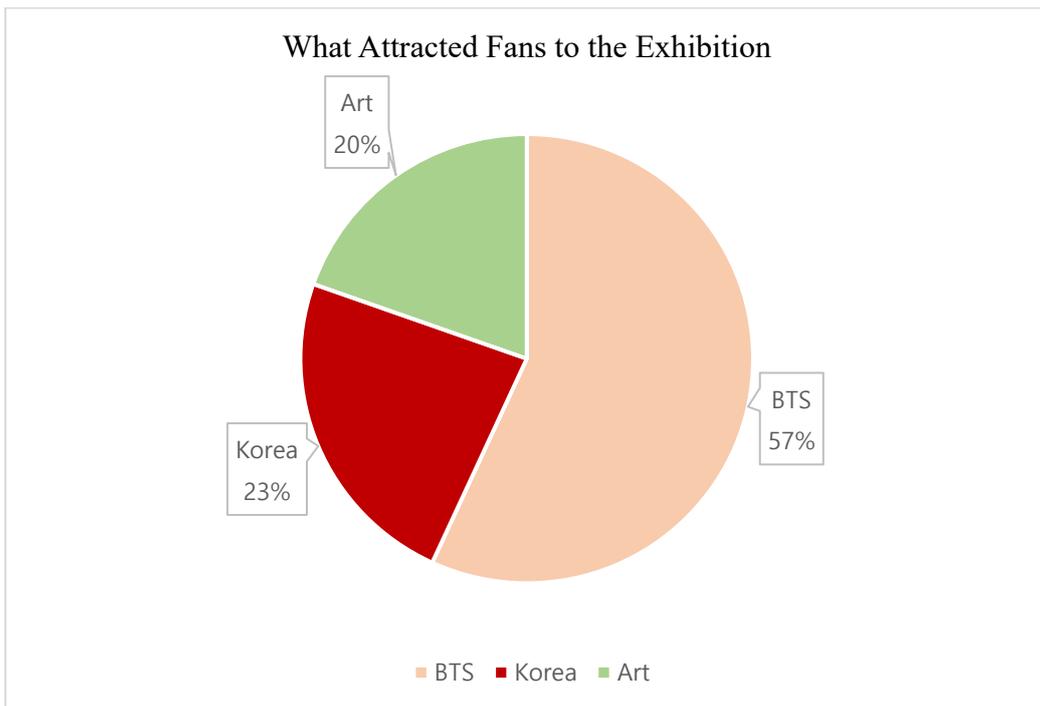


Figure 5. What Attracted Fans to the Exhibition

#### 4.3.1.1 The *Connect, BTS* London Exhibition Connects

##### BTS and Fans

Many fans understood the *Connect, BTS* London exhibition as an opportunity to connect with BTS. They saw the *Connect, BTS* project as a gesture from BTS to connect with their fans. This is clear in Participant 1's answer, "It was exciting that **BTS** were **connecting with their fans** and the **world** through a variety of art forms." In fact, for many fans, the exhibition was not only an opportunity to bond with BTS but also with other fans. Participant 2's answer demonstrates this understanding well, "There is no doubt that **BTS** must've chosen to **share with fans** because they enjoyed it...it's become a really big bonding experience for **BTS fans**. I was lucky enough to meet two **fans** who were actually from where I used to live. Back when I lived there, it was very rare to find **BTS fans**, so it was **a connection opportunity** not just to explore and experience amazing **art** and phenomenal **artists**, but also **connect** and experience this **exhibition** with other **ARMYs** (BTS fans' name)." The exhibition brought together fans and BTS but also fans around the world and this aspect of the project encouraged fans' understanding of BTS as a connector. It was seen as BTS' care for fans. This is clear in Participant 3's answer, "...Seeing this **exhibition** promoted by them **makes me so proud of them** and makes me **love them** even more for seeing how

much **they care about us...**". The fans' understanding of the exhibition signals their unique and strong relationship with BTS and in fact, this resonates with previous studies' on their relationship. As Besley (2019, p.182) wrote, BTS and their fan group ARMY cannot be separated. From BTS' beginning as "Dirt Spoon Idols", an anonymous idol group from a minor agency, to the global stars of today, BTS members have been actively documenting their journey with fans online and directly communicating with them on social media. Sharing their thoughts, passion, and daily lives have been common culture between BTS and their fans and in this sense, they have "grown up" together. As Yoon (2019, p.23) notes, the journeys of the seven members growing up were translated to their music and dance and this won the hearts of teens and twenty-somethings around the world. BTS and ARMY are connected via diverse routes and they communicate actively (Besley 2019, p.182). BTS sharing what they appreciate and communicating with fans via doing so has been a common culture within the community and in this sense, fans understood the *Connect, BTS* London exhibition as a way for BTS to connect with fans and for fans to connect with other fans.

#### **4.3.1.2 The *Connect*, *BTS* London Exhibition Reaffirms Fans’**

##### **Understanding of BTS Being Different**

Another popular theme that frequently came up in fans’ responses was their understanding of BTS being “different”, specifically, their identity as changemakers, for constantly challenging the status quo. To fans, BTS does not represent a mere Korean pop band like for many non-fans. BTS is different not only because of their unique background of starting off as a band from a minor agency to becoming a global super star but also because of their message. As Kim (2019, p.111) writes, BTS is the only K-pop group that actively built its identity around youth and growth - topics that many idol groups have dodged - and successfully channeled these ideas into incredible music. BTS represents the ambition and aspiration of its generation, and this differentiates them from other K-pop groups (Besley 2018, p.24). “After listening to BTS music, listeners usually claim to feel ‘healed’ or ‘empowered’ more than they do ‘impressed’.

This comes from not only Korean listeners but also from fans across the globe. BTS’ positive message is not difficult to understand and the sweet and cheerful melodies of their music make it even more contagious,” explains Kim (2019, p.198) in his book, *BTS, The Review*. To fans, the certain aspects of the artwork and the project that were considered “different”, worked as a catalyst for them to

relate it with their understanding of BTS being distinctive. For example, the fact that the exhibition includes a non-traditional expression of art was an element that was considered as a “new experience” for many fans. Participant 8’s quote demonstrates this, “The experience of a digital nature which was very **unique** and I had never seen before.” However, what is important to note is how fans could make the link between this unconventional element of the artwork and their understanding of BTS being different. Participant 9’s quote further illustrates this thought process: “My impression of BTS is [that] they came from a very small company. They just have very humble backgrounds. And I feel like especially with **contemporary art**, it's **not very conventional** and I feel like people tend to know less about it compared to traditional artwork, like paintings. I think **BTS** might be more inclined to support the **underdogs**, like pieces that people might not know as much about...because **they have that kind of background.**”

The global scale and diversity involved in the project were also other elements of the project that impressed fans and reaffirmed their belief that BTS is different. Participant 3’s quote further demonstrates this point, “I never heard about a project like that, **connecting** artists from all over the world from **different** countries, languages and **different** ways to express themselves, and still work on

the same subject.” This aspect of the artwork increased fans’ interest in the project. However, what is noteworthy is that instead of being surprised like non-fans for BTS challenging their existing belief about BTS, for fans, this was a reaffirmation of their existing understanding of BTS. Participant 9’s answer reflects this thought process, “...I am **not at all surprised** by this collaboration. **BTS** has never failed to amaze me with their **lack of limitations** - they always surpass the guidelines set by the general public toward "K-pop idols" and I am very **proud** of them for doing so.” It is also important to note that in many fans’ answers, the unique relationship between BTS and fans was reflected. As participant 16’s response demonstrates, BTS has constantly been trying something different and fans were encouraged to do the same, “**The band** frequently **encouraged fans** to take an interest in other things apart from their music. For example, they have set up an online course to teach fans Korean”. For fans, the *Connect, BTS* London exhibition was an opportunity to reaffirm that BTS is different for challenging the status quo and this understanding was stimulated by specific characteristics of the artworks and project.

### 4.3.1.3 The *Connect*, *BTS* London Exhibition Reaffirms Fans’

#### Understanding of *BTS* as Global Goodwill Ambassadors

##### Promoting Love

The understanding of *BTS* as global goodwill ambassadors promoting love, was another theme that constantly came up during fans’ explanation of their exhibition experience. These were brought about mainly due to the elements of the exhibition including nature and the fact that *BTS* did not appear in the artwork itself but was involved as supporters of art pieces. Fans interpreted these elements as *BTS* spotlighting the artists and promoting a global cause of environmentalism and also demonstrated how it specifically fits in with *BTS*’ messages like self-care and self-love. For example, participant 11 demonstrates how the nature element of the artwork fits into *BTS*’ message of loving oneself and one’s surrounding, “I think with *Catharsis*, with it being kind of centered around **nature** and in essence, kind of wanting to preserve **nature**, I think it's that thing of also being aware of the **environment** and being aware of what is around you and kind of protecting that as well, as yourself being aware of your effect on the planet and wanting to be **environmentally-conscious** as possible. So, I would say that also ties into their message too.” Participant 12 also shared the link, “Their philosophy on **life**, how we all should **love ourselves, our planet, and**

**each other.”** Fans’ understanding of the exhibition via BTS’ message of self-love resonates with past findings on BTS which asserted that loving oneself has become a popular BTS’ message. In her research on BTS’ communication, Yoon (2019, p.20) wrote the following: “Their music videos are like a musical that visually tells the stories of worries and conflicts that any young person can relate to...Their music and videos communicate messages, surpassing boundaries such as country lines or the language barrier and successfully bringing about empathy.” Kim (2019, p.112) also noted that the frustration and the misery of the vulnerable youth and the hope that lies within those experiences is what differentiated BTS and vanquished K-pop’s weakness: the authenticity of the message. It is also worth noting that BTS’ fans are referred to as ARMY which is an acronym for ‘Adorable Representative MC for Youth’. Like the group, the fan club also became a voice representing the youth (Beasley 2018, p.175). BTS’ message of self-love is central to BTS’ identity and for winning the hearts of fans. In her study, Yoon (2019, p.20) further noted how BTS’ message of self-love was so well integrated and conveyed in their communication. She writes, “By highlighting ‘you’ as the main subject, BTS helps us see that the society’s structural contradictions as our common problem not just of an individual... In BTS’ songs, many different aspects of oneself appear. The fear of love, friendship, goodbyes, success, growth and the future transforms into a problem that goes

beyond me and you; they are problems for all of society and thus it becomes a message that brings together a community.” The fact that many fans in the study understood the exhibition in the framework of self-love once again shows BTS’ successful communication of the message of loving oneself.

While sharing their exhibition experiences, fans also tended to make a specific reference to particular members of the group. This is clear in participant 13’s answer, “As a BTS fan, I could see how **Namjoon** was the one who wanted this kind of exhibition to happen as he is into **nature** and would love to go for walks in forests just like Mr. Steensen does. This **exhibition** is soothing like **BTS** songs.” Fans’ survey and interview answers well demonstrated their ability to understand the exhibition via BTS’ message and to make a connection between BTS and the exhibition. In fact, their understanding of their unique relationship with BTS where BTS shares their love and connects with fans via diverse means, was reflected once again when sharing their interpretations of the artwork. Participant 3’s answer further illustrates this point, “I believe they realize people spend too much time on social media and [the] internet. And **they tried to show how we can connect to nature, to our inner selves, between us**. And also to expand our vision about what is **art**. **Art** can be used to express someone's view, but also to

send a message, to help people, to change lives (as they do with their music). This exhibition is another kind of **art** that also tries to touch us and communicate with us, to make us think so we can change and become better people. And I believe **BTS** does it, too.”

What is important to note is that for many fans, BTS’ image of loving, specifically, loving others, also came through when understanding BTS’ involvement in the project as being goodwill ambassadors, using their fame for good purpose. This understanding is well demonstrated in participant 1’s answer, “**BTS** have used their platform to **lift up other artists** and also to introduce their **fans** to further artistic expression and **experiences**.” Another element of the project that encouraged fans to understand is the fact that they did not appear visually in the artwork themselves. Participant 11’s response further illustrates this understanding, “...**BTS let the artists have their moment** and made it more about the **art** and the **artist** than about **BTS** themselves.” What is noteworthy is that from fans’ accounts, it was clear that this exhibition experience was not a first event per se that encouraged fans to think BTS were goodwill ambassadors. BTS has built its reputation as goodwill ambassadors for fans and this project was an additional event that further enhanced this image in fans’ minds. This

understanding is well reflected in participant 10's answer: "I've been a fan of **BTS** for a long time and it was incredible watching them become [a] worldwide influence. Again, I'm **happy** about **what they choose to promote using their popularity.**" In other words, BTS' image as being loving and being global goodwill ambassadors as a result, was already existing in fans' minds either through their message of self-love or their previous activities in social cause and this event enhanced their understanding. The *Connect, BTS* London exhibition reaffirmed fans' existing interest in BTS.

#### **4.3.2 The *Connect, BTS* London Exhibition Reaffirms Fans'**

##### **Association between BTS and Korea**

Although fans' account of experiences mainly revolved around BTS' identity, the link between BTS and Korea due to the fact that BTS is from Korea still appeared in fans' explanation of their exhibition experience. This demonstrates that although BTS is seen as an entity that surpasses the typical stereotype of a Korean pop band, fans still associate BTS with Korea to a certain extent. This is extremely important to note as it offers possible soft power resources for Korea. What is important to note is that this exhibition did not explicitly have links to Korea per se, yet some fans made the links to Korea through BTS. As one can see from Participant 14's quote, for example, this experience sparked her interest

in Korean culture: “I **want to find out** about more subtle aspects of **Korean** culture, such as the aspects of how **nature** is viewed.” Participant 15 also brought up the experience of visiting an exhibition related to Korea and made the link between the two experiences, “Funny enough I had just seen [the] **Nam June Paik** exhibition at the Tate Modern without knowing he was **Korean** before I visited. These two artists are **connected** in that Paik is renowned for digital **art** in the 1970s.” In fact, after the exhibition, some fans including Participant 11 found themselves searching for Korean artists who were doing similar artworks to ‘Catharsis’, showing their increased interest in Korean art and culture. Several participants like Participant 11 also wrote that they would like to see a similar scale exhibition, but focused on featuring Korean artists’ artwork to learn more about Korean art and culture. This increased curiosity in Korean art and culture is also reflected in the survey results where 86.7% of respondents said that their interest towards Korean art and culture was enhanced after the exhibition.

## CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

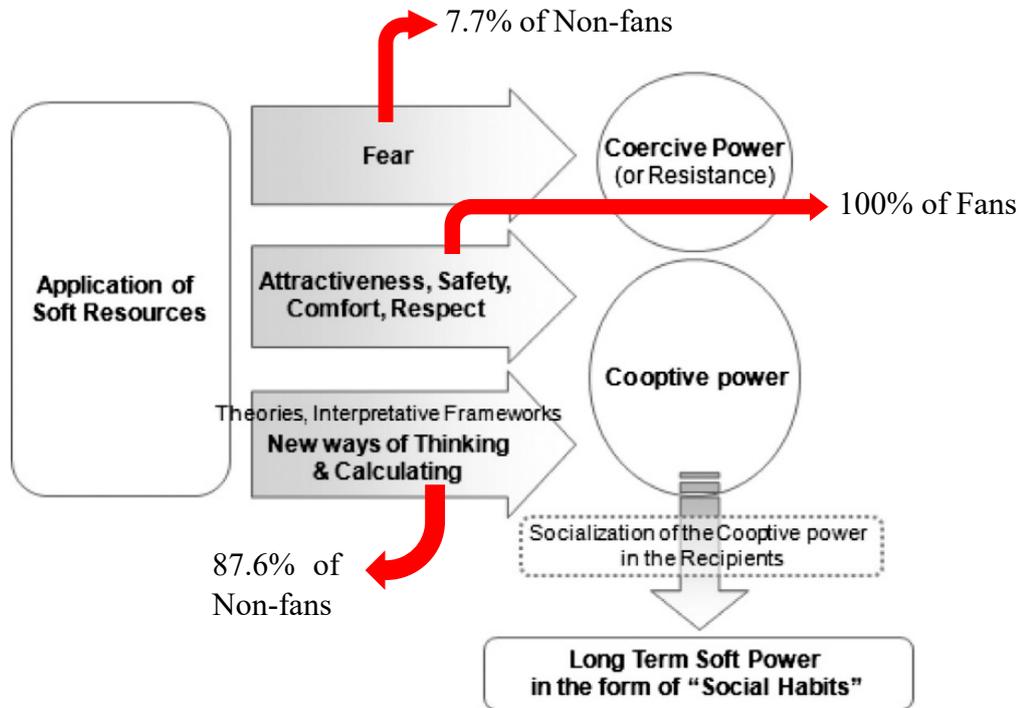


Figure 6. Conversion Process of Soft Power (Lee 2009, p. 211)

Despite the fact that BTS did not visually appear in the artwork of the *Connect*, *BTS* London exhibition and that there was no explicit connection between the exhibition and Korea, the majority of participants from both groups of *BTS* fans and non-fans' interest towards *BTS* and/or Korean art and culture increased. A small number of non-fans showed resistance towards *BTS*. I look at the reasons, similarities, and differences between the two groups in detail below and also

explain why this was a successful case of Lee (2009)’s notion of “cooptive power” being produced, but how the theory could not grasp the subtle perception changes that did not necessarily turn into either “cooptive” or “coercive power”. I also include the limitations of this study.

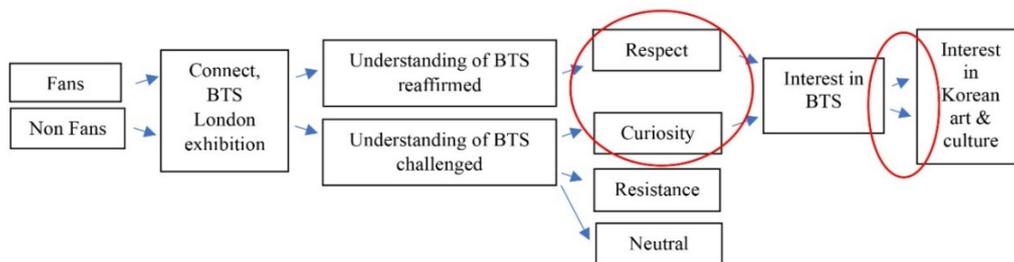


Figure 7. Comparative Understanding of Fans and Non-fans’ Thought Process

## 5.1 Both Groups’ Increased Interest in BTS and Korean Art and Culture: Coptive Power

As outlined in the analysis section, for non-fans, the *Connect, BTS* London exhibition was considered as a positive challenge to their existing understanding or discovery of a Korean pop band and Korean culture. It offered a new way of thinking and thus provoked their curiosity towards BTS and Korea in general. 84.6% of non-fans’ interest in BTS increased. On the other hand, for all fans, the

exhibition experience enhanced their existing positive view of BTS, further strengthening their respect for the group. Both groups' increased interest in the form of curiosity and reinforced admiration towards BTS and Korean art and culture can be understood as Lee (2009)'s concept of "cooptive power" in the soft power conversion process.

## **5.2 Non-fans' Resistance towards *Connect, BTS*: Coercive Power**

Although small in number, 7.7% of participants from the non-fans' group showed resistance towards the project, falling into the category of Lee (2009)'s "coercive power". "When the soft resources can create "fear", it is very likely that the soft resources will be diverted into "coercive power" (or strong resistance)." This mainly came from existing skeptical understanding of BTS, exhibitions in general and/or specific parts of Korean culture like Korean pop music. The participant had a specific understanding of BTS and/or Korea as shown in Participant 8's answer, "The Korean Wave is what damages the reputation of Korea in the Western educated world. K-pop mostly appeals to Southeast Asians, not to the European high-society which would, on the other hand, be fascinated by Goryeo celadon like it is for Chinese Ru Ware". The participant also viewed the *Connect, BTS* project as a marketing strategy, "The use of the BTS name seems simply like a publicity stunt for a group of artists." For Participant 9, it

was mainly the pre-existing belief toward exhibitions in general, “I wouldn’t say exhibitions like this can be an effective way of promoting Korean art and culture.” As a result, they were less motivated to search for the link. Although it is true that this group felt strong resistance and therefore fits in Lee (2009)’s coercive power category, it is important to note that the cause was not necessarily “fear” in this case.

### **5.3 Not Cooptive nor Coercive, Neutral**

It is important to note that, although small in number, 11.5% of participants from the non-fans’ group said that they felt indifferent toward BTS, meaning they did not produce either cooptive or coercive power, a category that has not been closely covered in Lee (2009)’s theory of soft power. As it was the case with participant 10, the main reason was because the participants could not relate to the exhibition or with BTS, “I couldn’t see any link between BTS and the exhibition. If it was another artist or a topic I was passionate about, then maybe I would have been more interested in searching for the links.”

## 5.4 BTS as the Main Catalyst to Korea

For both groups of fans and non-fans, BTS worked as an important catalyst for them to relate their experiences to Korean art and culture, demonstrating Lee (2007, quoted in Lee 2009, p.215)'s assertion that Korean celebrities have become significant soft resources for Korea. Participants from both groups who felt curious and interested in the *Connect, BTS* London exhibition extended their experience to their interest in Korean art and culture. As shown in the analysis section, whether it was through making links with participants' pre-existing thoughts about Korean art and culture or remembering past exhibitions that they went to, the strong association between BTS and Korea appeared. This is supported by the survey result that 86.7 % of fans and 73% of non-fans' interest towards Korean art and culture was enhanced after the exhibition. This finding is significant in the sense that it demonstrated the link. However, pinpointing the exact degree of how this particular exhibition influenced their interest is beyond this study's scope. To grasp the subtle understanding and audience's thought process, a more detailed analytical matrix is essential.

## CHAPTER 6. IMPLICATIONS

Although it is beyond the scope of this study to determine whether the short-term changes that occurred within non-fans' understanding of BTS and Korean art and culture will consequently become long-term changes, I strongly argue that *Connect, BTS* has offered valuable insights for both BTS and Korea's soft power strategies, specifically, in reaching out to a wider audience. A close analysis of both groups' thought processes and interviews shed light on possible soft resources that may be particularly useful for enhancing Korean art and culture internationally.

### 6.1 Korean Wave Offers a Wider Audience

*Connect, BTS* has demonstrated that the Korean Wave offers not only an opportunity for new types of collaborations but also serves as a window via which a wider audience than regular exhibition attendees alone can be reached. In fact, according to Serpentine Galleries, a large proportion of the visitors to the exhibition had never been to Serpentine Galleries before, proving how the exhibition allowed the museum to connect with a wider audience. The exhibition not only welcomed about 10,135 visitors physically from 14 January to 15 March but also about 64,000 visitors attended the exhibition online from 14 January to

31 May. Collaboration with Korean celebrities who share values or images similar to those of artworks or artifacts in the exhibit can be one effective way for exhibition makers to promote specific Korean art and culture to reach a wider, more non-traditional audience.

Considering that those who are interested in the Korean Wave are generally also interested in Korean art and culture, the Korean Wave is one area that has great potential for exhibition makers who promote Korean art and culture to explore and create strategies for wider outreach. In fact, 93.3 % of fans and 92.3 % of non-fans agreed that the Korean Wave offers new insights for enhancing Korean art and culture in overseas museums and 86.7 % of fans and 88.5 % of non-fans agreed that Korean art and culture are underrepresented in overseas museums compared to those of Japan and China. In interviews, several fans and non-fans also frequently mentioned that a global project like *Connect, BTS* specifically promoting Korean artists, artworks, or cultural objects, would be interesting to attend. 90% of fans and 88.5% of non-fans believed that the *Connect, BTS* London exhibition offered insights for enhancing Korean art and culture in overseas museum exhibitions.

## **6.2 Utilize Korea's rising image to establish itself as the Rule Maker in Contemporary Art World**

A thorough analysis of the thought-processes of non-fans, many of whom were unfamiliar with BTS and/or Korea in general, shed light on some of the potential soft resources that can be useful to enhance Korean art and culture. Participants' linking of Korea's image as a technologically advanced country and the technology aspect of the artwork is a good example. In today's society where there is rapidly growing fascination over the application of technology in the field of art including Artificial Intelligence Art, Korea's pre-existing reputation as a tech-savvy country is a great advantage for Korea to project itself as a forerunner in the new field of art. Korea's image as being the forerunner of contemporary culture and rising as a changemaker in global society, can also enhance such an image. As mentioned by participants in the analysis section, contemporary art can be cultivated into Korea's strength in its soft power. One non-fan participant's quote further demonstrates this point, "When you think of Contemporary art, you think American art, French art, you don't think Asian. I feel like you can add Korea to that champion of the vulgar and conceptual artistry. Actually with its strength in contemporary culture, I think Korea is in the perfect position."

### **6.3 Use Korea's Strength in Contemporary Culture When Presenting Korea's Culture in Exhibitions**

It is also important to remember that Korea's strength in contemporary culture can be used to both strengthen its position in the contemporary art world as well as to bring contemporary context to existing cultural objects in overseas museums. This point is further illustrated by one non-fan participant's explanation, "Korea's contemporary culture is popular and Korea shares many common values with the West. Exhibition makers can take advantage of these two factors. For example, instead of lining up cultural objects, if the presentation has more of the contemporary context and the story that people today can relate to, that will be great and the Korean Wave can be helpful. For example, an exhibition where visitors can learn about how Koreans lived in an environmentally friendly manner during a certain time and how their cultural objects tell us so. Alongside this, Korean celebrities like BTS, known for promoting global cause or environmentalism, can participate. It is not a matter of having more cultural objects or a bigger space in this case, it is about finding the right contemporary context and Korea has so much resources for this."

## **6.4 Increase interest indirectly but creatively**

One of the main reasons why non-fans' interest in Korean art and culture increased is because these were supported by BTS, a boy band, and not the government. This unusualness provoked their curiosity. The success of the *Connect, BTS* London exhibition in raising interest in Korean culture and art despite the lack of an explicit link between the two is something the Korean government and BTS should pay attention to as they search for creative soft power strategies. In this case, BTS worked as the main catalyst to participants' interest in Korea and especially because of the identity of BTS as a 'boy band' and the unexpectedness of BTS bringing together two seemingly different worlds provoked interest among participants. This is because this challenged the public's pre-existing bias towards BTS and that turned that into curiosity and interest. However, it is important to note that similar strategies can be set up and, if implemented rightly, it doesn't always have to be the Korean government benefiting from celebrity effect like with BTS as it was in this case, but also vice versa. When the images of non-governmental actors like BTS and Korean government are combined creatively, either side can establish a new side of the branding and reach a wider audience. As the present study has demonstrated, indirect involvement such as being art patrons instead of direct involvement such

as being featured in the artworks, can also be effective in influencing, as further noted by a non-fan participant in the study, “Another thing that is very interesting is the idea that K-pop could become a major patron of the arts. When you have a patronage, it tends to shape the artistic direction of production. So, having a band like BTS funding the creation of artwork means it can serve a completely different purpose from the classical role of collectors who have a somewhat conservative view of how art works should be produced.” This successful way of increasing interest indirectly and creatively, signals a whole new range of possibilities of soft power strategies for both the Korean government and BTS. Although it is beyond the study’s scope to scrutinize and determine whether this is a limited effect only applicable to BTS, this is one area that future research should be conducted to better explore possible soft resources and in search for soft power strategies for BTS as well as Korea’s soft power.

## CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION

We live in a world where *Parasite* wins Oscars and BTS sweeps the Billboard Music Awards. Yet, finding a single book on Korean art and culture in world's libraries and inside top museums and galleries remains a challenge while books on Chinese and Japanese art fill the Asian art section. While searching for answers, I came across the news on the *Connect, BTS* project. With the aim of finding out whether the exhibition offers any new insights with regard to enhancing the promotion of Korean art and culture in overseas museum exhibitions, I conducted a comparative thematic analysis of BTS fans and non-fans' perception changes. By scrutinizing participants' online survey answers as well as follow-up interview responses, I outlined the similarities and differences in non-fans and fans' understanding of the exhibition. For non-fans, the exhibition was a challenge to their pre-existing beliefs towards a Korean pop band and it stimulated their curiosity and interest in BTS. This was extended to their interest in Korean art and culture. On the other hand, for fans, the exhibition was not a challenge but a reaffirmation of their beliefs toward BTS. Fans also showed the tendency to relate their experience with their pre-existing beliefs about Korea and their interest in Korean art and culture. Although small in number, there was a group among non-fans who showed resistance instead of

interest towards BTS after the exhibition. This was mainly due to their set understanding of BTS and Korean culture, specifically the Korean pop music industry. These three different groups' feelings were explained through Lee (2009)'s resources-based soft power theory. Most of the non-fans' response belonged to Lee (2009)'s grouping of 'cooptive power', specifically, where people learn a new way of thinking and calculating. On the other hand, fans belonged to the same category of 'cooptive power' but for a different reason, their respect. The group who showed resistance belonged to the category of 'coercive power' for feeling resistance. However, Lee (2009)'s theory could not grasp the subtle delicacies within perception changes, where participants did not produce either coercive or cooptive power. By demonstrating a close analysis of thought processes of both non-fans and fans and their perception changes, this study proved the celebrity effect between Korea and BTS as BTS served as the catalyst for prompting both groups' to associate their exhibition experience with Korea. It also shed light on possible soft resources Korea as well as BTS can leverage in order to come up with creative strategies to reach a wider audience. This study is significant as it contributed to further understanding of Korea's soft power, BTS as Korea's soft power agents and to finding solutions to enhance the promotion of Korean art and culture in overseas museum exhibitions. However, I strongly argue that the study has room to be improved for more accurate

understanding of the effect of the exhibition on peoples' perception changes. In order to fully understand the effect, testing whether the short term cooptive power produced by non-fans transform to long-term cooptive power is required. A more detailed matrix with a scale that can better grasp the degree in which the exhibition influenced participants' thought process and a bigger sampling are also essential for more accurate analysis. Though with its room for improvement, I take pride in that this research has shed light on an overlooked aspect of the Korean Wave studies, its potential for museum exhibitions as an attempt to answer some of the challenging and long standing questions that must be addressed for Korea's cultural objects in overseas museums to be appreciated in a way that they deserve.

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## APPENDIX

### Survey Sample

Background	<p>Name (All information in the survey will be only used for research purposes and names will not be published)</p> <p>Sex (If you prefer not to say, please write N/A)</p> <p>Age (If you prefer not to say, please write N/A)</p> <p>Email Address (For follow-up purposes)</p> <p>Nationality</p> <p>Did you visit the exhibition online or offline?</p> <p>Did you visit the exhibition with anyone else?</p> <p>Consent of participation and for your answers to be used in the study (All information in the survey will be only used for research purposes and names will not be published).</p>
BTS	<p>Do you consider yourself a fan of BTS?</p> <p>Were you familiar with BTS before organizing/attending the exhibition?</p> <p>Are you more interested in BTS after the exhibition?</p> <p>How do you think the exhibition relates to BTS?</p>

Exhibition	<p>Please tell me how you first got to know about the exhibition and how you felt when you found out about it.</p> <p>What did you look forward to the most?</p> <p>What attracted you to the “Connect, BTS” exhibition? (Select all that apply)</p> <p>Please tell me about your experience with the exhibition and the artwork. What came to your mind?</p> <p>What did you learn from the Connect, BTS London exhibition as an organizer and/or a visitor?</p> <p>The Times described “Connect, BTS” as “one of the most unusual collaborations so far this century: Korean pop music and contemporary art. K-pop meets C-art, for short.” Do you agree?</p> <p>Do you think Connect, BTS London exhibition offers new insights to finding solutions to the existing challenges in promoting Korean art and culture in overseas museum exhibitions?</p> <p>Have you talked about the Connect, BTS experience with anyone online or offline?</p>
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Korea	<p>Were you familiar with Korean art or culture before organizing/ attending the exhibition?</p> <p>From low numbers of collections and levels of cultural understanding, to the range of cultural objects, curators of Korean art and culture have often faced challenges in promoting Korean art and culture at US museums in comparison to art from China or Japan according to Min and Jin (2017). Do you think Korean art and culture has also been underrepresented in overseas museums compared to art and culture from China or Japan?</p> <p>What do you think are some of the challenges in promoting Korean art and culture in foreign country and in overseas museum exhibitions?</p> <p>Do you think the Korean Wave offers new insights to finding solutions to the existing challenges in promoting Korean art and culture in overseas museum exhibitions?</p> <p>Are you more interested in Korean art and culture after the exhibition?</p>
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- 1) Name (All information in the survey will be only used for research purposes and names will not be published)
- 2) Sex (If you prefer not to say, please write N/A)
- 3) Age (If you prefer not to say, please write N/A)
- 4) Email Address (For follow-up purposes)
- 5) Nationality
- 6) Did you visit the exhibition online or offline?
- 7) Did you visit the exhibition with anyone else?
- 8) Consent of participation and for your answers to be used in the study (All information in the survey will be only used for research purposes and names will not be published).

- 9) Please tell me how you first got to know about the exhibition and how you felt when you found out about it.
- 10) What did you look forward to the most?
- 11) What attracted you to the “Connect, BTS” exhibition? (Select all that apply)
- 12) Were you familiar with Korean art or culture before organizing/ attending the exhibition?
- 13) Were you familiar with BTS before organizing/ attending the exhibition?
  
- 14) Please tell me about your experience with the exhibition and the artwork. What came to your mind?
- 15) What are the 3 keywords that best describe your experience with the exhibition and the artwork?
- 16) How do you think the exhibition relates to BTS?
- 17) What did you learn from the Connect, BTS London exhibition as an organizer and/or a visitor?
- 18) The Times described “Connect, BTS” as “one of the most unusual collaborations so far this century: Korean pop music and contemporary art. K-pop meets C-art, for short.” Do you agree?
- 19) From low numbers of collections and levels of cultural understanding, to the range of cultural objects, curators of Korean art and culture have often faced challenges in promoting Korean art and culture at US museums in comparison to art from China or Japan according to Min and Jin (2017). Do you think Korean art and culture has also been underrepresented in overseas museums compared to art and culture from China or Japan?
  
- 20) What do you think some of the challenges in promoting Korean art and culture in foreign country and in overseas museum exhibitions?
- 21) Do you think the Korean Wave offers new insights to finding solutions to the existing challenges in promoting Korean art and culture in overseas museum exhibitions?
- 22) Do you think Connect, BTS London exhibition offers new insights to finding solutions to the existing challenges in promoting Korean art and culture in museum exhibitions?
- 23) Are you more interested in Korean art and culture after the exhibition?
  
- 24) Are you more interested in BTS after the exhibition?

- 25) Have you talked about the Connect, BTS experience with anyone online or offline?
- 26) Anything you would like to add? (This is the last question. Please click 'Done' button and wait several seconds to make sure the survey is complete! Thank you very much!)

## 국문초록

BTS 영향:

BTS 팬들과 일반 방문객들의 인식 변화에 대한 주제별 비교 분석

성명: 김민정

서울대학교 국제대학원 국제지역학 전공

‘커넥트, BTS’는 런던, 베를린, 부에노스아이레스, 뉴욕, 서울 5개 도시에서 BTS가 22인 예술가들과 함께 선보인 현대 미술 프로젝트이다. 방탄소년단의 철학에 공감하는 전 세계 미술 기획자들이 공동으로 전시를 기획한 역사적인 프로젝트라고 공식 웹사이트는 소개한다. 흥미로운 점은 작품에 BTS가 직접 등장하지 않음에도 불구하고 ‘커넥트, BTS’를 관람한 BTS 팬과 일반 방문객들의 BTS에 대한 관심이 증가했다는 사실이다. BTS 팬들에게 런던 전시는 BTS에 관한 그들의 호감을 재확인할 수 있는 기회였고 일반인들에게는 BTS에 대한 편견을 호기심으로 변하게 하는 기회가 되었다. 참가자중 일부는 부정적인 태도 혹은 중립적인 태도를 보였지만 흥미로운 점은 BTS 팬들과 일반인 관람객들 모두 한국 문화 예술에 대한 관심 또한 증가했다는 점이다. 이 연구는 설문조사와 인터뷰를 통해 BTS 팬들과 일반 방문객들의 인식 변화를 주제별 비교 분석하고자 한다. 서울대학교 국제대학원 이근 교수의 2009년 소프트파워 이론을 기반으로 하여 ‘커넥트, BTS’ 런던 전시가 해외 박물관 한국 문화 예술 전시에 어떤 새로운 시사점을 제시하는가를 알아보려고 하는데 의미가 있다.

주제어: BTS, 소프트파워, 한류, 한국, 예술, 전시, 문화, 박물관, 큐레이터

학번: 2017-26755

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I hope that this research will contribute to our understanding of our dynamic society and to building a more inclusive world. I would like to conclude by expressing my wish that more students around the globe will be able to enjoy similar international learning opportunities with the support that they deserve, such as that which led to this work and which I am forever grateful for experiencing.

**Min Jung Kim**

김민정



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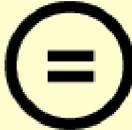
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Master's Thesis of International Studies

**THE BTS IMPACT:  
A COMPARATIVE THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF BTS  
FANS AND NON-FANS' CHANGES IN  
PERCEPTION**

BTS 영향:  
BTS 팬들과 일반 방문객들의 인식 변화에 대한  
주제별 비교 분석

August 2020

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## ABSTRACT

*Connect, BTS* is a contemporary art project that involves five cities around the world. Located in London, Buenos Aires, Berlin, Seoul and New York, this project was created by BTS and 22 contemporary artists and curators who related to BTS' philosophy, according to its official website. One interesting aspect of BTS' involvement in this project is that BTS does not appear visually in the selected artworks. Yet, both groups of BTS fans and non-fans' interest in BTS increased after their London exhibition experience. For BTS fans, this project reaffirmed their positive understanding of BTS, thus enhancing their interest in BTS. Meanwhile, non-fans saw it as a pleasant surprise that challenged their existing bias towards BTS, resulting in new curiosity and therefore increased interest in the group. A small group of non-fans' interpretation of the project turned into resistance and neutrality. Interestingly, most of the participants including both BTS fans and non-fans' interests in Korean art and culture also increased. This study conducts a comparative thematic analysis to effectively understand the findings of both the surveys and interviews. Using Lee (2009)'s theoretical framework of soft power, this study aims to find effective soft power

resources for enhancing the promotion of Korean art and culture in overseas  
museum and gallery exhibitions.

**Keywords:** BTS, Soft Power, Korea, Art, Exhibition, Korean Wave, Hallyu,  
Culture, Museum, Curator

**Student Number:** 2017- 26755, Min Jung Kim

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION</b> .....	1
<b>CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW</b> .....	4
2.1 Museum Exhibitions and Soft Power .....	4
2.2 Historical Understanding of the Representation of Korean Art and Culture in Overseas Museums and the Challenges .....	7
2.3 BTS, Korean Wave and Soft Power Resources .....	10
2.4 <i>Connect, BTS</i> .....	15
<b>CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH DESIGN</b> .....	17
3.1 Research Setting.....	17
3.2 Research Question, Methods, and Sample.....	18
3.3 Analytical Framework .....	20
<b>CHAPTER 4. ANALYSIS</b> .....	24
4.1 Keywords .....	24
4.2 Analysis of Non-fans' Understanding .....	26
4.2.1 The <i>Connect</i> , BTS London Exhibition Challenges Non-fans' Understanding of BTS as a Korean Pop Band.....	27
4.2.1 Associating Their Experiences with Their Pre-existing Understanding of Contemporary Korea.....	30
4.2.2 Non-fans' Understanding of Art Presented at <i>Connect, BTS</i> and its Link with Korea: Technology .....	32

4.3	Analysis of Fans’ Understanding.....	35
4.3.1	BTS: Main Interpretation Framework to <i>Connect, BTS</i> .....	36
4.3.1.1	The <i>Connect, BTS</i> London Exhibition Connects BTS and Fans .....	38
4.3.1.2	The <i>Connect, BTS</i> London Exhibition Reaffirms Fans’ Understanding of BTS Being Different .....	40
4.3.1.3	The <i>Connect, BTS</i> London Exhibition Reaffirms Fans’ Understanding of BTS as Global Goodwill Ambassadors Promoting Love .....	43
4.3.2	The <i>Connect, BTS</i> London Exhibition Reaffirms Fans’ Association Between BTS and Korea .....	47
<b>CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION</b> .....		<b>49</b>
5.1	Both Groups’ Increased Interest in BTS and Korean Art and Culture: Cooptive Power.....	50
5.2	Non-fans’ Resistance Towards <i>Connect, BTS</i> : Coercive Power .....	51
5.3	Not Cooptive nor Coercive, Neutral .....	52
5.4	BTS as the Main Catalyst to Korea.....	53
<b>CHAPTER 6. IMPLICATIONS</b> .....		<b>54</b>
6.1	Korean Wave Offers a Wider Audience .....	54
6.2	Utilize Korea’s Rising Image to Establish Itself as the Rule Maker in Contemporary Art World.....	56
6.3	Use Korea’s Strength in Contemporary Culture When Presenting Korea’s Culture in Exhibitions .....	57

6.4 Increase Interest Indirectly But Creatively .....	58
<b>CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION</b> .....	60
<b>REFERENCE</b> .....	63
<b>APPENDIX</b> .....	68
<b>ABSTRACT IN KOREAN</b> .....	73

## LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure 1. Conversion Process of Soft Power .....	23
Figure 2. Non-fans' Thought Process .....	26
Figure 3. What Attracted Non-fans to the Exhibition.....	30
Figure 4. Fans' Thought Process .....	35
Figure 5. What Attracted Fans to the Exhibition .....	37
Figure 6. Conversion Process of Soft Power .....	49
Figure 7. Comparative Understanding of Fans and Non-fans' Thought Process .....	50
Table 1. Keywords for each group based on MAXQDA's algorithm .....	25

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

*“One of the most unusual collaborations so far this century: Korean pop music and contemporary art. K-pop meets C-art, for short.” – Sanderson 2020, Times*

In an interview with *Ocula*, one of Korea's most influential art curators, Lee Daehyung, recounted an emotional experience while he was studying in Columbia University's curatorial studies program. His classmates, who were interested in Asia, came to him to ask about Chinese and Japanese art, but ignored Korean art. This motivated him to focus on Korean art: “I got a bit angry. So I said, ‘Really? I’m not doing Asian art anymore. I’m only doing Korean.’” (Min 2014). Many scholars in the museology and art fields have noted the challenges that Korean art curators face in promoting Korean art at museums overseas in comparison to art from China or Japan. These range from low numbers of collections and levels of cultural understanding in other countries to the limited range of cultural objects. However, in 2020, Lee’s groundbreaking project *Connect, BTS* sparked a debate among Korean art curators as well as in the global contemporary art world. *Connect, BTS* involves Korea’s boy band BTS (an acronym for *Bangtan Sonyeondan* and the English abbreviation: *Beyond the Scene*) and 22 world-renowned artists and curators in five major cultural cities across the globe. The project’s official website describes the initiative as “a

collective curatorial practice by curators around the world who resonated with BTS' philosophy". Sanderson (2020) from *The Times* described the project as "one of the most unusual collaborations so far this century: Korean pop music and contemporary art. K-pop meets C-art, for short" while *The Financial Times* referred to BTS as "art patrons". The nature of *Connect, BTS* generates important questions about the influence of "Hallyu", the Korean Wave, on museum and gallery exhibitions. What is noteworthy is that BTS did not visually appear in the artwork. Instead their role was to be the patrons in the project, supporting the curators, artists, and artworks. This unique exhibition offers a valuable scholarly opportunity as it enables a direct test on perception of BTS and understanding of BTS as soft power resources for Korea. This study conducted a survey and interviews to explore the experience of those that attended the exhibition, with the aim of determining whether specific elements of their experience influenced their interest towards BTS and Korea. It uses a close thematic analysis on their responses to better understand their thought processes. The research findings are then examined in the context of soft power. This study uses Lee's (2009) soft power conversion process to answer the research question of the study: Can the *Connect, BTS* London exhibition offer insights for promoting Korean art and culture in overseas museum exhibitions? By examining an often overlooked aspect of the Korean Wave and its connection with exhibitions, this study

contributes to literature on the Korean Wave, soft power studies, as well as finding solutions to some of the existing challenges in representing Korean art and culture in overseas museums.

## CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Museum Exhibitions and Soft Power

*“Whether browsing the physical galleries, viewing exhibitions online, attending a lecture, watching films, or seeing the world go by with friends, museums are setting agendas and persuading people to think about many ideas and issues.”*

*– Lord, 2017*

Soft power, as termed by Harvard professor Joseph Nye (1990), refers to the power of attraction: the ability to get what one wants by attraction and persuasion rather than coercion or payment. This concept has become extremely relevant in today’s connected global society wherein many institutions and organizations are continuously attempting to measure countries’ soft power abilities. Museum and gallery art exhibitions are considered important criteria of soft power. The annual Soft Power 30 rank index report by Portland, Facebook, and the USC Center on Public Diplomacy for example, includes annual museum attendance for the top 100 museums worldwide in their metrics, and Monocle counts the attendance of major art galleries in theirs. Lord and Blankenberg (2015, p. 9) explain that this is because these cultural indicators reveal a country’s persuasion capability. They (2015, p.10) argue that the rise of cities and civil society have brought museums from the margins to the center of soft power. Nye

(2014, quoted in Lord and Blankenberg 2015, p.10) also highlights that soft power is more effective when produced by civil society than by the government and large corporations, the traditional “hard power” backers. As Min and Jin (2017, p.155) also note, countries have been promoting their culture and image through museums. Considering that museums are still a popular tourism spot and a place to experience a new culture, it is understandable why countries attempt to strategically use their cultural objects in museums to support their global image (Min and Jin 2017, p.155). For example, Tate Modern became the top tourist attraction of the UK in 2019, welcoming almost 5.9 million visitors in 2018 (Association of Leading Visitor Attractions 2019). In fact, the soft power of museum and art exhibitions has also become a popular scholarly topic in recent years. Hoogwaerts (2016), for example, examined how art and cultural object exchanges including the loan of Picasso’s *Buste de Femme* (1943) from the Dutch Van Abbemuseum to the International Academy of Art Palestine demonstrated that museums and art institutions can make a positive impact on international relations by fostering mutual respect and understanding. Varutti (2014), Zhang and Courty (2020) examined how China utilizes museums as a soft power instrument for a new politics of identity and cultural nationalism. Cai (2013) tested the relationship between soft power and

museums in the international relations context by assessing both effectiveness and the limits of the concept of cross-cultural museum exchanges as an instrument of soft power and cultural diplomacy in Singaporean and French relations. Kang (2019) examined how Japan's Ukiyoe art has been used for its soft power.

Although Nye's concept of soft power has been widely used in various fields, its popularity has been scrutinized by many scholars who highlight its ambiguity and lack of systemic framework. As Blanchard and Lu (2012) put it, "The very success of the term soft power among the wider public seems to suggest that there is a need for it. Yet, since Nye did not clearly define soft power, there is also the need for a more systemic scholarly discussion". Parmar and Cox (2010, p.2) highlight the ambiguous understanding of the theory partly stems from Nye himself, who gave a wide scope for interpretations and came up with a variety of understandings of his own term throughout time. Ifantis (2011, p.445) even wrote that there seems to be a tendency to refer to anything attractive as soft power. Lee (2009, p.207) also points out that although Nye's concept of soft power sheds light on non-violent and non-coercive ways of influencing others, solid theoretical frameworks that demonstrate the power conversion mechanisms are missing.

Lee (2009) challenges Nye's distinction of "hard power" and "soft power" and redefines the concept of soft power by making a distinction between hard resources and soft resources instead of distinguishing between coercive power and cooptive power. Lee (2009, p.205) writes that when non-material, symbolic "soft resources" are implemented to influence others, the result is considered as soft power, but when material "hard resources" are implemented, the result is considered as hard power. This study utilizes Lee's (2009) "resource-based theory of soft power" to understand the success of the *Connect, BTS* London exhibition, as it offers a soft power conversion process that can measure the effectiveness of soft resources.

## **2.2 Historical Understanding of the representation of Korean Art and Culture in Overseas Museums and the challenges**

Yoo et al. (2011) write that galleries presenting Korean culture within overseas museums significantly helped Koreans to promote their culture. The overseas museums' Korean galleries are important educational and promotional windows that introduce Korean culture to visitors (Yoo et al. 2011, p.34-35). Yoo et al. (2011, p.34-35) add that they encourage museums to understand and research Korean art and encourage the museum's

exchanges with Korean national institutions for Korean artifacts. However, collections of Korean art in overseas museums, including those in the United States and the United Kingdom, have often been limited compared to those from Japan and China. According to Wilkinson (2003), acquisition of Asian art was reliant on the individual preferences of curators working in museums in the 1800s. There was a strong preference for Chinese and Japanese items as so few Korean artifacts were available in the West and Korean items were often misattributed due to the lack of understanding of Korea and its culture (Wilkinson 2003, p.242). Korea, historically limited in its interaction with Europe, particularly compared with Europe's ties to China and Japan, exhibited mainly craft or folk wares. These included textiles, agricultural artifacts and fans (Kim 2002, quoted in Kim 2015, p.88). Korean culture, through Europe's imperialist lens, was primarily understood to be an uncivilized culture. It was not broadly recognized for its aesthetics (Kim 2015, p.88).

It was in the 1960s that Korean galleries were established for the Korean collections in overseas museums, with the Honolulu Art museum known as the first (Korea National Museum 2009, p.892, quoted in Yoo et al. 2011, p.33). However, according to Hong (2014), it was not until the 1990s that a

proper framework for Korean collections was put in place with the development of the culture diplomacy policies on implementation of Korean galleries in overseas museums. The establishment of separate Korean galleries was the start of the exclusive categorization and exhibition of Korean collections (Kim 2015, p.88). However, past studies have highlighted challenges with Korean galleries in overseas museums. Choi (2007, quoted in Yoo et al. 2011, p.34) outlined several of these, including: unbalanced range of collection insufficient to represent the 5000 years of history of Korea, difficulties in purchasing and receiving donations to expand their collections and rarely having curators with expertise in Korean art and culture but curated by staff of East Asian collections in general. Korean galleries tend to be smaller than Japanese and Chinese galleries and are located in places with limited access (Choi 2007, quoted in Yoo et al. 2011, p.34). Most times, Korean galleries lack the exhibition activities and the breadth of content and become stagnant (Yoo et al. 2011, p.34). Yoo et al. (2011) offered guidelines for possible structural reforms to open up the Korean gallery at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the United States to a wider audience. Min and Jin (2017), conversely, focused on documenting the curators' challenges in promoting Korean culture in overseas museum exhibitions. They noted four main challenges: small range of Korean collection, insufficient

documentation of Korean objects, limited funding for the curatorial process and the difficulty to effectively communicate the subtle aesthetics of Korean art. They suggested the following solutions: government institution's continuous and extensive support, conveying a cultural context via storytelling, presenting diverse cultural objects in exhibitions and implementing creative marketing tactics to promote Korean culture.

### **2.3 BTS, Korean Wave and Soft Power Resources**

*“BTS! We haven't seen boy band fandom like this since the Beatles.”*

*– Willingham 2020, CNN*

Lee (2018) notes that we are now in an era where a Korean person's conventional introductory question to foreigners is no longer “Do you know kimchi?” but “Do you know BTS?” BTS is an acronym for the Korean phrase, *Bangtan Sonyeondan*, which translates to “Bulletproof Boy Scouts”. Bangtan's literal meaning, ‘resistant to bullets’, also refers to BTS' protection of those in their teens to 20s and their values from the prejudice and social pressure of society (Cho et. al 2018, p.20). In 2017, BTS added a fresh identity to a new English acronym, “Beyond The Scene”. BTS' agency, Big Hit Entertainment, said in an interview with *Soompi* that the updated branding “symbolizes youth who don't settle for their

current reality and instead open the door and go forward to achieve growth”. There are seven members in BTS: Jin, Suga, J-Hope, RM, Jimin, V, and Jungkook.

The rise in popularity of Korean culture, often referred to as *Hallyu*, meaning “Korean Wave”, is not a new phenomenon, but BTS’ success is seen as an inflection point in its history. BTS has expanded the reach of the Korean Wave to the United States, the center of pop culture, with experts calling it the evolved *Hallyu*, “*Global Hallyu*” (Ko & Heo 2018, quoted in, Yoon 2019, p.15). *Hallyu* refers to the phenomenon of people liking and admiring Korean mass culture (Moon 2014, p.143). According to the Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange (2009, quoted in Moon 2014, p.15), the term itself is known to have been first used by China’s *Beijing Youth Daily* when the Korean drama, *What Is Love All About*, became popular. What is noteworthy about BTS is that they have been constantly making the headlines not only with their historic music achievements including its third No. 1 on the Billboard Main Album Chart, but with their speech at the United Nations General Assembly in 2018 and projects in other areas including the contemporary art with “*Connected, BTS*” and their online Korean language lessons.

BTS' influence and success have turned into a massive economic contribution to the Korean economy. According to the Hyundai Research Institute's "Economic Effects of BTS" (2018) report, the septets' annual contribution to Korea's economy is about 4.1 trillion won - equivalent to that of 26 mid-sized companies. *MK News* referred to BTS as a "walking conglomerate" (Kim 2018). BTS' positive contribution to Korea's branding has also been impactful, with the group becoming one of the most influential soft power agents of Korea. Approximately 800,000 tourists have visited Korea annually for BTS concerts since their debut in 2013. This means BTS attracted 7.6% of Korea's annual visitors (Hyundai Research Institute 2018, p.7-8). The report also notes that if their popularity continues through 2023, BTS is estimated to contribute 56 trillion won to the Korean economy since 2014, which is worth more than the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympics. BTS' contribution to Korean soft power certainly demonstrates why the government has been capitalizing on the Korean Wave since its early days. The term *Hallyu* first appeared in an official presidential statement in 2001 when then-President Kim Dae-jung referred to it as a "chimney-less industry" and a driver of economic development that brings about high-added value with less expenditure compared to industrial development (Suntikul 2019, *The Diplomat*). The key question for policy makers at the time

was how to transform the Korean Wave into a sustainable source of income (Cho 2005, p. 160). Kim and Jin (2016)'s analysis of presidential speeches on the Korean Wave phenomenon and cultural diplomacy from 1998 to 2014 also shows that the Korean government has actively tried to capitalize on *Hallyu* economically and culturally by combining it with cultural policies and cultural diplomacy. According to Otmazgin (2008), the goal of cultural diplomacy is to promote new images of the nation via cultural products and thereby enhance its global influence. Popular culture has become an important asset for soft power diplomacy, transcultural collaborations, dialogues, and for winning the hearts and minds of people (Nye & Kim, 2013, p. 35). For Korea, in spite of its astonishing economic development and success, establishing a positive country brand has been a challenge (Elfving-Hwang, 2013; R. Kim, 2011, quoted in Kim and Jin 2016, p. 5517).

The rise of BTS not only offers valuable scholarly insights regarding the K-pop industry but also to the broader culture industry (Jung 2019, p. 64). Yet, despite the septet's tremendous multifaceted influence, research on BTS remains limited. Jung (2019) writes that there is a lack of scholarly research on BTS and asserts that most research has been confined to genres like music, choreography, and

performance. Kim (2019) examined the success of K-pop as a music genre by studying BTS as a case study while Cho et al. (2018) focused on analyzing BTS' star attributes and its effects on success. Byun and Ryu (2019) focused on how BTS' usage of social media contributed to their success and suggested ways social media can enhance the Korean Wave while Li (2019) on the other hand, studied the ecosystem of BTS' global fandom and Yoon (2019) looked at the role global fandom plays in BTS' success. Choi and Lim (2019) conducted a comparative analysis of BTS, EXO, and Twice (two other K-pop bands) as an attempt to outline unique traits to BTS and examine their success. As BTS continues to challenge the boundaries of what a traditional idol group can do, interdisciplinary discussions about the group have also started to emerge. Jung and Lee (2018) explained why and how BTS could positively contribute to promoting the Korean alphabet, Hangeul, by coming up with Hangeul fashion designs that fit BTS' branding while Cho (2019) wrote why and how K-pop effectively promotes Korean traditional art. He specifically looked at how BTS successfully reinterpreted and promoted elements of traditional culture via their music videos and performances. The Korean Wave has been an important soft power resource for Korea and BTS has certainly been one of Korea's valuable soft power resources. This link between Korea's soft power and BTS is demonstrated by Lee's (2009) understanding of soft power resources. Lee (2009,

p.134) writes, “The Korean Wave is not soft power, but is one of Korea’s many soft resources and when one successfully mobilizes these resources to achieve certain political and economic goals and national interests, one can say that soft resources have turned into soft power.”

## **2.4 Connect, BTS**

*“Curator and Art Director Daehyung Lee was sitting at a cafe in Venice during the biennale with Hans-Ulrich Obrist and a few other globally famous art curators bemoaning the fact that every couple of years all this great art was produced to basically talk to the same audience without hardly any breakthrough into the wider community. What could be done to get these artist’s messages across to the bigger community that existed outside of the contemporary art world - Why not use the platform of the biggest global boy band (BTS) to promote a select group of artists (22) across five cities and four continents - thus was born, CONNECT, BTS.”*

*– Westall 2020, FAD Magazine*

Like how many media organizations have paid attention, “Connect, BTS” is special in many ways, especially because it was not a project in which BTS themselves created works of art or directly appeared in the works of art. Instead their role was to be the patrons in the project, supporting the curators, artists, and works of art. This is noteworthy as art patrons often have influence over direction of exhibitions. As the curator and art director who developed the exhibit, Lee Daehyung said in *The JoongAng Daily*, “this project is a series of exhibitions

created by artists and curators who share BTS' philosophy in the form of support for diversity and love and care for the periphery". This unique aspect of the project and the relationship with BTS can also be seen in the description written on the official website of the project: "Connect, BTS' is a global project to connect five cities and 22 artists, each of whom contributes their unique philosophy and imagination to it. This project aims to redefine the relationships between art and music, the material and immaterial, artists and their audiences, artist and artists, theory and practice." The project involved five exhibitions in London, Berlin, Buenos Aires, Seoul, and New York. Not only the nationalities, but also the specialties of artists and the works of art involved in the project were diverse ranging, from performance art and audio-video work to installations. In other words, the project gave the freedom for viewers including both BTS fans, non-fans as well as organizers like the involved curators and artists to relate, interpret, and express BTS' philosophy. This unique communication process offers a valuable research opportunity to explore people's understanding of BTS, its philosophy in global society, and test its effectiveness as a soft power resource for Korea.

## CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH DESIGN

### 3.1 Research Setting

The *Connect BTS* London exhibition at Serpentine Galleries presented the artwork *Catharsis* by Danish artist, Jakob Kudsk Steensen. The *Connect, BTS* website introduces the artwork as the following: “‘Catharsis’ is an artwork by Jakob Kudsk Steensen immersing audiences within a digital simulation of a re-imagined old-growth forest, a forest that has developed undisturbed over hundreds of years. Based on field work undertaken by Steensen and his primary collaborator Matt McCorkle, the work’s virtual ecosystem and synchronised audio comprise 3D textures and sounds gathered from several North American forests. Set up as a single continuous shot that moves from the watery underground roots to the surveying viewpoint of the canopy, ‘Catharsis’ draws on Steensen’s conception of ‘slow media’ whereby digital technologies can foster attention to the natural world and create new narratives about our ecological futures. ‘Catharsis’ becomes a digital portal, a simulated journey that offers audiences access to past and present natural environments, slowed down and up close. ‘Catharsis’ was originally open to the public from January 14<sup>th</sup> to March 15<sup>th</sup>.” However, the end part of the exhibition overlapped with the sudden outbreak of the COVID-19 in the UK. Many museums and galleries including

Serpentine Galleries closed down as part of protective measures. However, the nature of Steensen's work enabled it to be open to the public online. In fact, Serpentine Galleries made Instagram posts of clips of Steensen's work on their account to inform the public that online viewing of the work had been extended to May 31<sup>st</sup>, allowing a wider audience range to experience the artwork and for me to include a global audience sample in my study.

### **3.2 Research Question, Methods, and Sample**

This study aims to answer the following question: *Can the Connect, BTS London exhibition offer new insights for promoting Korean art and culture in overseas museum exhibitions?* It explores the question by combining a survey to spot notable trends in two groups of fans and non-fans and follow-up interviews with those who showed interest in conducting interviews to further understand the contexts of the trends. The survey included multiple choice questions as well as short answer questions to enable respondents to elaborate on their exhibition experiences and offer contextual meanings to their answers. One-on-one interviews were conducted via digital communication platforms like Skype and Facebook Messenger, in order to follow up on certain parts of their responses to

better understand their thought processes. Each survey question and follow up interview question was carefully crafted to address the research aims with flexibility to adapt to participants' desire to elaborate on specific parts of their answers or their thought process. This type of interview, where interviewers adapt to interviewees' responses with the intention of continuously improving the research, is known as "responsive interviewing" according to Rubin and Rubin (2012, p.70). There were four main categories of questions: Background, BTS, Exhibition and Korea. As this study aims to understand participants' exhibition experiences, the focus of the survey evolved around the 'Exhibition' category. Questions in the categories of BTS and Korea helped me better understand and test participants' background, existing beliefs and thought process. The link to the survey included the link to the online exhibition. The survey was distributed online on social media networks to adapt to the COVID-19 global pandemic situation where most people around the world were in lockdown and could only be reached online. Both groups of participants were gathered via the snowball effect on social media networks. For fans, I put up a post about the study on social media groups such as BTS fan pages on Facebook. A number of BTS fans who participated in the study spread the word about my study on their own social media networks. A total of 56 respondents including 30 fans and 26 non-fans participated in the survey. Follow-up interviews were

conducted with 17 participants. Participants consisted of 25 males and 31 females. The ages of participants ranged from 17 to 51. The most popular age group was 20s. One participant, by selecting N/A, declined to name their country. The most common country represented was the United Kingdom.

### **3.3 Analytical Framework**

Thematic analysis has been a popular analytical tool for organizing qualitative data sets, especially for exploratory researchers attempting to understand a phenomenon or specific groups' experiences. Thematic analysis is more than counting phrases or words, it detects patterns, themes, across datasets, to explain the phenomenon under investigation (Guest, 2012, quoted in El Said 2017, p.733). As Braun and Clark (2006, p.79) wrote, it is a tool that identifies, analyzes and outlines patterns within data. In order to cross-check and to detect patterns of thought process within and between the two groups, I scrutinized the whole data set by conducting multiple close readings and by using qualitative and mixed methods research software MAXQDA. By using its word frequency function, I derived the top 100 keywords from participants' answers from the exhibition category in their surveys and cross-checked why and how the keywords were used. The top 100 keywords list also included a rank and frequency level next to each word. Some rank may have multiple keywords, as they were used with the

same frequency. This explains why the list includes several instances of rank 97, for example. To understand the algorithm and to ensure that the list was accurate for the purpose of this study, I went through each word of the list and filtered separately.

My filtering of the list included: 1) Excluding words that were used frequently for grammatical reasons such as articles like 'a' and 'the' along with pronouns like 'I' and 'you', as well as prepositions such as 'in'. 2) As the algorithm focused on frequency, sometimes it even included words that did not necessarily share the same meaning but contained the specific phrase it was looking for. For example, for the word 'all', it even included times where 'call' was used as it shared the three letters, 'all'. I checked the usage of each word that was included in the top 100, to ensure that the frequency was measured in the right context for this study and excluded those that did not meet the criteria. 3) I paid particular attention to words with double meanings and grammatical functions and excluded them if the algorithm did not measure it in the correct context. Examples include 'like', as it can be used to describe something that one likes or used before someone is giving an example.

Using Excel's search function, I filtered each word in the lists to ensure that I understood the contextual meanings of the keywords and checked that they represented what the respondents were referring to. The keywords were then sorted out to relevant themes according to contextual understanding of survey responses as well as follow-up interviews with participants from both fan and non-fan groups. A thorough cross-check and analysis of participants' responses were conducted to assure that I understood and coded themes of participants' thought process accurately. The research findings were then analyzed through Lee (2009)'s soft power conversion mechanism. The *Connect, BTS* London exhibition was explored as an application of soft resources and audiences' meaning making processes were sorted out according to the three different categories outlined in the model. These included two types of "cooptive power" and the "coercive power (or Resistance)". This was to further understand how the *Connect, BTS* London exhibition influenced BTS fans and non-fans' perceptions towards BTS and Korean art and culture and to answer the research question of the study: whether the *Connect, BTS* London exhibition offers insights to enhancing Korean art and culture in overseas museum exhibitions.

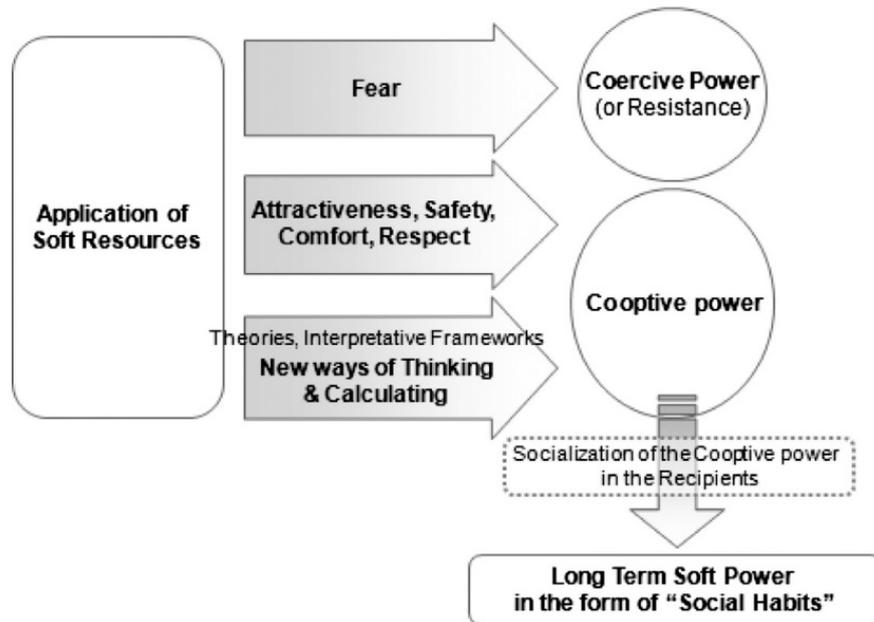


Figure 1. Conversion Process of Soft Power (Lee 2009, p. 211)

## CHAPTER 4. ANALYSIS

### 4.1 Keywords

As the table shows, the most frequent word used by fans when describing their experience was ‘BTS’, while it was ‘Art’ for non-fans. This difference in interpretation framework is further demonstrated in the keywords that follow. For fans, keywords related to the identity of BTS or the BTS message such as ‘world’ and ‘connect’ came after, while for non-fans, words that describe the art itself followed, such as ‘nature’ and ‘digital’. After a thorough contextual analysis of each word based on the survey responses as well as the follow-up interviews with participants from each group, I have visually outlined fans’ and non-fans’ interpretation frameworks of their exhibition experiences. Certain keywords belonged in more than one category, showing the linkages of different categories. There were three main categories in participants’ thought processes: BTS, Art and Korea. I used Venn diagrams to illustrate these linkages and to more effectively demonstrate the interactive relations’ context of the concepts that exist within participants, which were stimulated and influenced by the exhibition. As I explain how keywords and concepts were used, I bold them to assist readers’ understanding of the analysis and context.

Fans		Non-fans	
Top words	Frequency %	Top words	Frequency %
BTS	1.95	Art	1.17
Art	1.21	BTS	0.91
Exhibition	0.64	Exhibition	0.67
World	0.41	Nature	0.65
Connect	0.34	Digital	0.52
Nature	0.34	Korea	0.39
Artists	0.32	Online	0.39
Experience	0.30	Curious	0.31
Different	0.29	Immersive	0.31
Fans	0.27	Interesting	0.31
People	0.27	Pop	0.29
Artist	0.25	Peaceful	0.26
Life	0.25	Forest	0.23
Love	0.25	Music	0.23
New	0.23	Technology	0.23
Interested	0.20	Contemporary	0.21
Korea	0.20	Modern	0.21
Interesting	0.18	New	0.21
Beautiful	0.16	Different	0.18
Media	0.16	Video	0.18

Table 1. Keywords for Each Group Based on MAXQDA's Algorithm,  
Author 2020

## 4.2 Analysis of Non-fans' Understanding

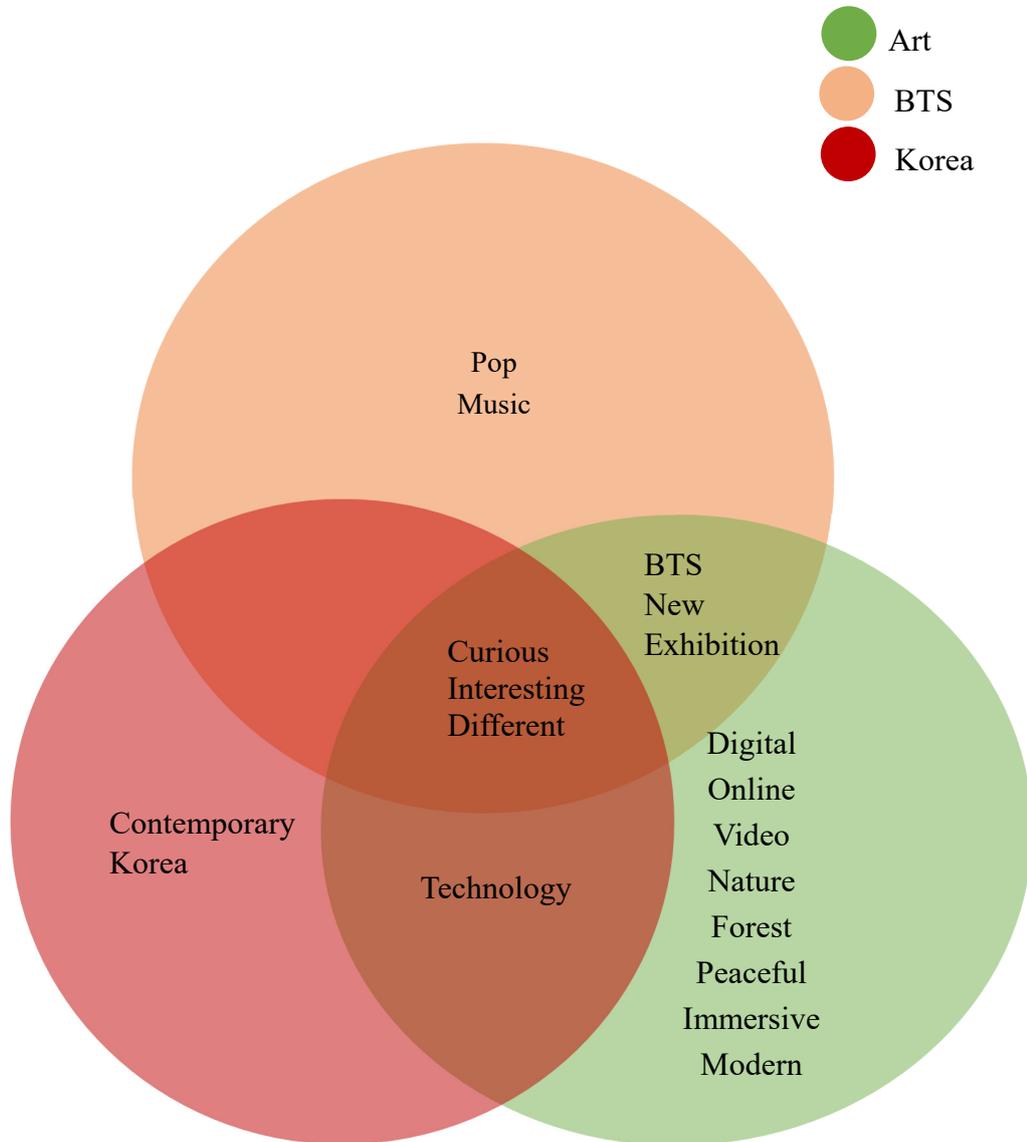


Figure 2. Non-fans' Thought Process, Author 2020

#### **4.2.1 The *Connect, BTS* London Exhibition Challenges Non-fans' Understanding of BTS as a Korean Pop Band**

As the keyword chart suggests and as the diagram further illustrates, for non-fans, their main interpretation framework did not revolve around BTS. In fact, this resonates with their answers through their attraction to the exhibition. Only 8.33% of participants included BTS for what attracted them to the exhibition. In fact, only 11 participants knew what BTS was prior to the exhibition. BTS was mainly understood to be a Korean pop music band as illustrated in the description in the Venn diagram with 'pop' and 'music'. However, this limited understanding of BTS as a typical Korean pop band is also what turned into a pleasant surprise when their understanding of BTS was challenged through the *Connect, BTS* project. What is important to note is that the *Connect, BTS* London exhibition did not feature BTS in the artwork. This made it difficult for non-fans to instantly understand the link between the two compared to fans. However, this characteristic of the exhibition rather encouraged them to think that the exhibition was a different and refreshing positive experience. In other words, the combination of the two seemingly different worlds provoked participants' curiosity and interest towards the exhibition and BTS. This thought process was clear when Participant 1 said: "I was surprised because I thought, this is not my

idea of a typical **Korean boy band** to me. My stereotype is that they have a very glamorous and glitzy look, wearing makeup and being onstage with lots of flashing lights and being very energetic. ‘Catharsis’ didn't seem like that at all. It was not decadent or glitzy, it was just quite peaceful...It made me think maybe I should be less dismissive of a boy band like a **Korean pop boy band**. It made me realize that I compartmentalized Korean boy bands as rubbish and not my thing, whereas this made me think, actually, I was being quite close-minded. Maybe these guys could be quite **interesting**, actually.” This quote demonstrates that the participant’s understanding of BTS and the artwork did not align at first and challenged the participant’s existing perception towards BTS as a Korean pop boy band but that turned into curiosity and interest towards the group. Other participants’ challenged thoughts also demonstrate their pre-existing understanding of BTS and how the exhibition influenced their thought processes, specifically how it increased their interest in BTS. For example, Participant 2’s account shows the participant’s contrasting pre-existing belief towards K-pop and contemporary art and how that was challenged, “I didn’t know anything about **BTS** but I always associated **Korean pop** as **low culture**, which young teenage girls like. So I was a little **surprised** and rather confused to see that a **Korean boy band** was involved in contemporary art, let alone, sponsor it, because that is high culture. I thought that was a great way to open up people's

minds and to **connect** two **different** worlds. In the end, art is something that connects everyone not owned by a specific group of generation or people. This experience was **different** and I am definitely more **interested** in BTS now.” For Participant 3, the *Connect BTS* was a ‘**new**’ type of collaboration that challenged their pre-existing understanding of not only BTS as artists but the status quo of the art world, “In the art world, I think Asian artists like **Koreans** are seen as inferior to some extent by Westerners. But, I could really see that the Western artists really love **BTS**, they praised them and they really wanted to work with BTS. This exhibition was a ‘**new**’ type of collaboration and I also learned a ‘**new**’ side of BTS.” What is noteworthy is that in all participants’ accounts above, their association between BTS and Korea was referenced, shedding light on their pre-existing understanding of BTS as a boy band from Korea. For many non-fans, the *Connect BTS* London exhibition was a new experience that challenged their way of thinking towards BTS and provoked their curiosity and interest in them. This is supported by the survey result which says 80.8% of non-fans’ interest in BTS increased.

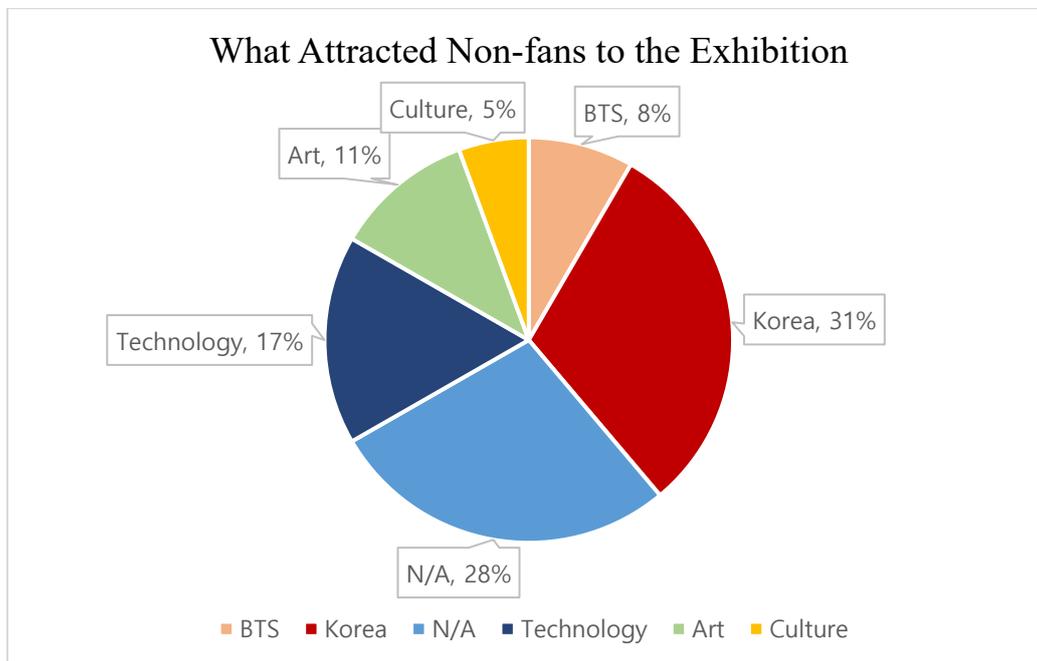


Figure 3. What Attracted Non-fans to the Exhibition

#### 4.2.2 Associating Their Experiences with Their Pre-existing Understanding of Contemporary Korea

In non-fans' explanations of their experiences, there was an interesting tendency for them to relate their experiences to their pre-existing thoughts on Korean culture, specifically by understanding BTS as a part of Korea's contemporary culture. This thought process is clear in the following quote by Participant 2, "I see **BTS** as part of **Korea's contemporary** culture. This project made me think

that **BTS** are **changemakers** bringing together **different** worlds and it actually reminded me of **Korea's rising image as the changemaker** in global society with its handling of the COVID-19 outbreak and *Parasite* winning the Oscar and so on. These came to my mind and made me more **interested** about **contemporary Korean culture**. I also got more **curious** about **Korean art and culture** because the fact that a 'boy band' is supporting an **art** project, made me wonder if **Koreans** are generally interested in **art**, which attracts me as an **art** enthusiast." Participant 7 also noted how the *Connect, BTS* exhibition encouraged the participant to think about Korea's advantage in contemporary culture and art. "Contemporary is **Korea's** advantage. Japan and China rely a lot on traditional culture and **art** like old paintings and historical sculptures and the likes. But if you think about it, in some ways, **Korea** shares more similar societal values to other parts of the world than Japan and China like with democracy and entertainment for example. I feel that **Korea** can differentiate itself by being completely new and **contemporary** and it has the right resources to do it." The fact that these participants extended their exhibition experience to their thoughts, curiosity, and interest towards Korea, and that **BTS** stimulated this thought process is noteworthy. 73% of participants answered that they have become more interested in Korean art and culture after the exhibition.

### 4.2.3 Non-fans' Understanding of Art Presented at *Connect, BTS* and its Link with Korea: Technology

As the Venn diagram illustrates, for non-fans, the category with the most keywords was the Art category. Non-fans not only paid a great amount of attention to describing what appeared in the artwork such as 'nature' and 'forest', but also to the form of the artwork. In fact, their key word list included four words that solely described the technology aspect of the artwork: 'digital', 'online', 'video' and 'technology'. The featuring of nature was responsible for the frequent usage of the word 'peaceful', while 'modern' and 'immersive' were mainly used to describe the technology-enhanced art experience. The technological nature of the artwork piqued participants' 'curiosity' and challenged their thoughts on art and also encouraged them to feel that the exhibition was 'different' and 'interesting'. Participant 4 further demonstrates this point. For Participant 4, it was the unconventional artistic expression that challenged the participant's understanding of art and increased curiosity: "That **art** does not just have to be a series of dusty paintings. It adapts with the times, embracing **modern technology**. Also that **art** has broad appeal and is a uniting force! Anybody can get behind it." For some non-fans like Participant 5, it was the unique and in some ways contrasting combination of concepts of nature and technology that piqued their

interest, “I was intrigued by the description of intertwining **nature** and **technology**.” For some non-fans, it was the technology that was used that sparked their interest. This is clear in Participant 6’s answer, “I learnt how advanced **technology** has become. The graphic in the video is unreal.” The novelty surrounding the artwork for involving technology translated into non-fans’ curiosity and interest. However, what is noteworthy is that their focus on technology went further by them associating it with their pre-existing understanding of Korea as a technologically advanced country and consequently, their interests towards Korean culture and art also increased. Participant 2’s quote demonstrates this thought process, “I thought it made sense that this particular work was chosen by a **Korean boy band** because it involves **technology**. I have always had the image that **Korea** is a **technologically advanced** country. I specifically remember how they pulled off the drone performance very well at the **PyeongChang Winter Olympics**. I also have the impression that **Koreans** are very **tech-savvy**. So I associated this **technological** aspect of the exhibition with the **tech-savvy image of Korea**. I got interested in learning more about **Korea’s culture**, how it uses **technology**, especially for **art**”. Other participants also linked the exhibition with Korea. Participant 7, for example, shared how this exhibition experience reminded the participant of a past exhibition about Korean art that the participant went to and was inspired to search online to jog memories.

In fact, Participant 7 also agreed that the pre-existing concept of Korea being a forerunner in the technology field came up during the exhibition experience, “I thought **Korea** may be **pioneering** in this **new** type of **art**. It made me **interested** to see what else **BTS** sponsors, like what else is coming out of **Korea** that's similar to this.” The novelty of the artwork, specifically its use of technology, motivated participants to become interested in the exhibition and feel that this exhibition was different. The technological aspect reminded participants of their existing thoughts on Korea.

### 4.3 Analysis of Fans' Understanding

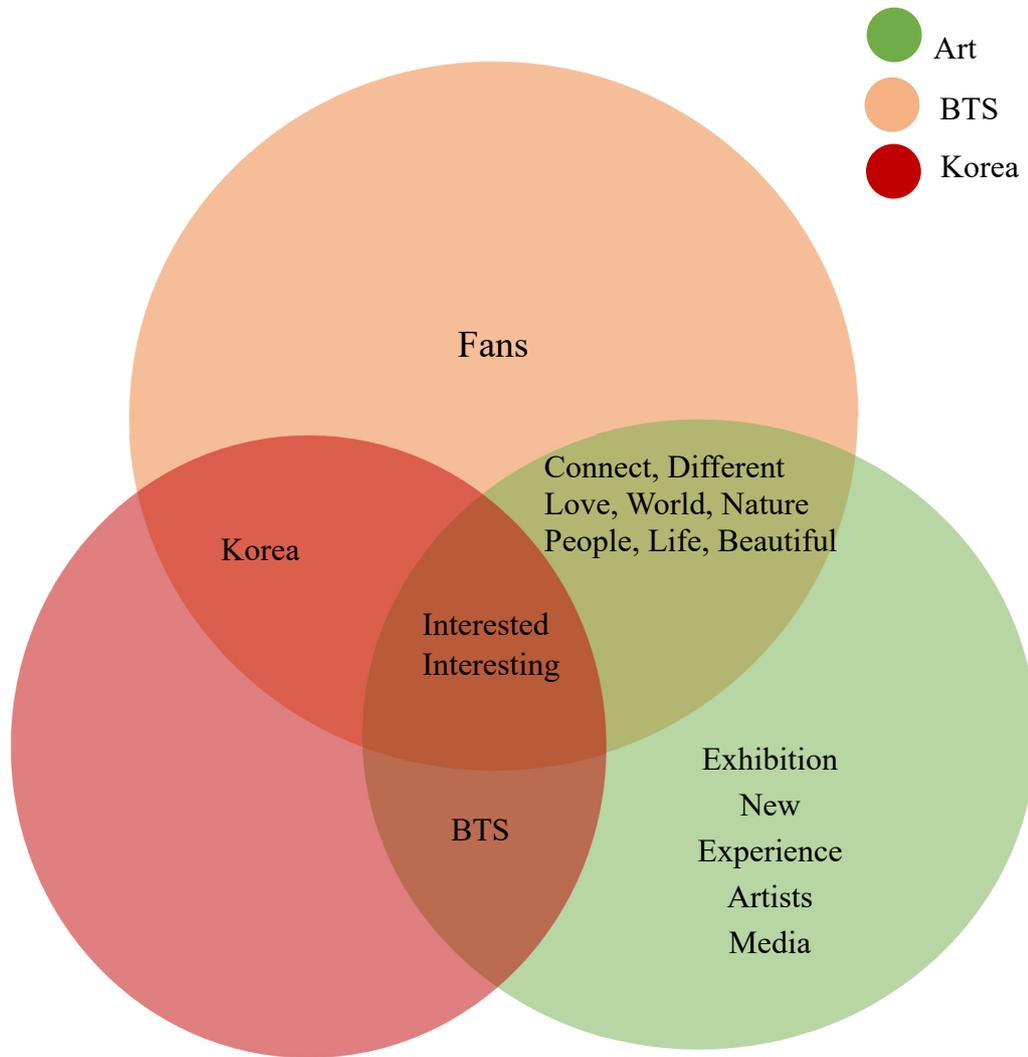


Figure 4. Fans' Thought Process, Author 2020

### 4.3.1 BTS: Main Interpretation Framework to *Connect, BTS*

As both the keyword chart and diagram further illustrate, for fans, the main interpretation framework of the exhibition revolved around BTS. This is supported by their answers to what attracted them to the exhibition. All fans included BTS in their answers. All fans wrote that they were familiar with BTS prior to the exhibition and 80% of participants answered that they were familiar with Korean art and culture before the exhibition. As illustrated by the Venn diagram, the words that describe BTS' messages prevailed and those concepts were also used by participants to interpret their exhibition experience and to connect them with BTS. In fact, specific parts of the exhibition like the elements in the artwork acted as catalysts to encourage fans' reference to BTS during their experience. For fans, this experience was not a challenge to their understanding towards BTS like it was for non-fans but it was an opportunity where they could reaffirm their existing positive thoughts about BTS. This is reflected in the two words that were used for all three categories of BTS, Korea, and Art: **'interested'** and **'interesting'**. Fans already had interests in all three categories but this experience enhanced their interests. In fact, all fans answered that their interest towards BTS was enhanced after the exhibition, reaffirming their pre-existing interest in BTS. In the following sections, I examine fans' thought processes in

detail by looking at how they understood the link between the art presented by the *Connect, BTS* London exhibition and BTS. Based on a thorough analysis of the survey responses and follow-up interviews, it became clear that BTS was a significant part of their interpretation of the exhibition experience. In order to better understand their understanding of BTS and their association with the exhibition experience, I realized themes involving BTS had to be broken down into several sub-themes. In the following section, I outline their thought processes and notable themes in detail.

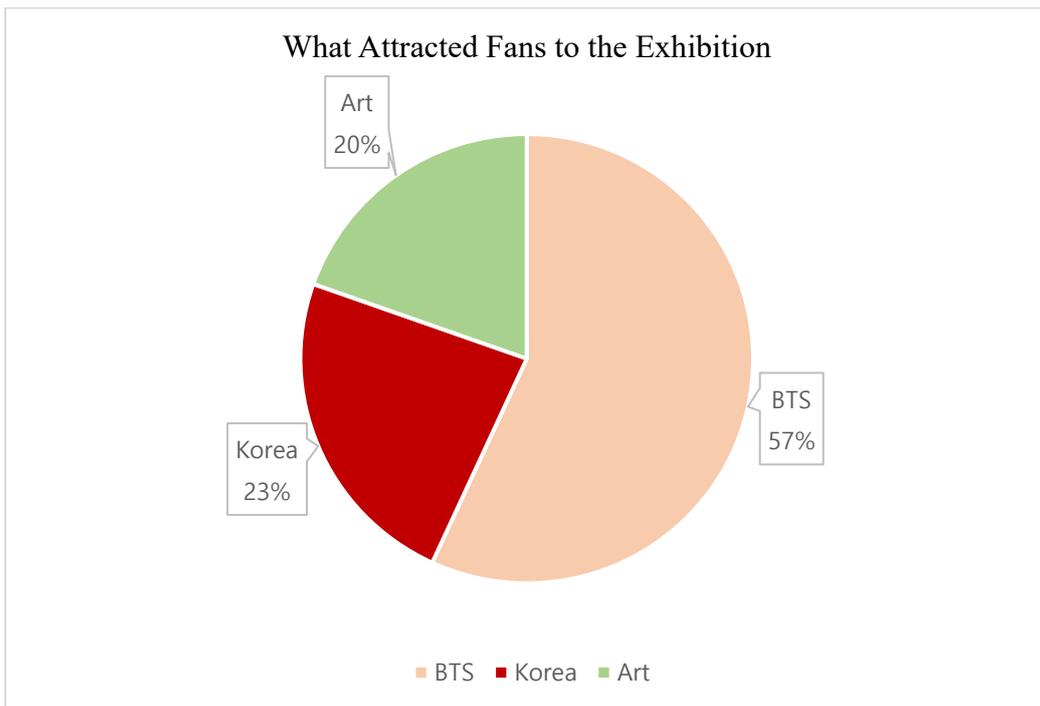


Figure 5. What Attracted Fans to the Exhibition

### 4.3.1.1 The *Connect, BTS* London Exhibition Connects

#### BTS and Fans

Many fans understood the *Connect, BTS* London exhibition as an opportunity to connect with BTS. They saw the *Connect, BTS* project as a gesture from BTS to connect with their fans. This is clear in Participant 1's answer, "It was exciting that **BTS** were **connecting with their fans** and the **world** through a variety of art forms." In fact, for many fans, the exhibition was not only an opportunity to bond with BTS but also with other fans. Participant 2's answer demonstrates this understanding well, "There is no doubt that **BTS** must've chosen to **share with fans** because they enjoyed it...it's become a really big bonding experience for **BTS fans**. I was lucky enough to meet two **fans** who were actually from where I used to live. Back when I lived there, it was very rare to find **BTS fans**, so it was **a connection opportunity** not just to explore and experience amazing **art** and phenomenal **artists**, but also **connect** and experience this **exhibition** with other **ARMYs** (BTS fans' name)." The exhibition brought together fans and BTS but also fans around the world and this aspect of the project encouraged fans' understanding of BTS as a connector. It was seen as BTS' care for fans. This is clear in Participant 3's answer, "...Seeing this **exhibition** promoted by them **makes me so proud of them** and makes me **love them** even more for seeing how

much **they care about us...**". The fans' understanding of the exhibition signals their unique and strong relationship with BTS and in fact, this resonates with previous studies' on their relationship. As Besley (2019, p.182) wrote, BTS and their fan group ARMY cannot be separated. From BTS' beginning as "Dirt Spoon Idols", an anonymous idol group from a minor agency, to the global stars of today, BTS members have been actively documenting their journey with fans online and directly communicating with them on social media. Sharing their thoughts, passion, and daily lives have been common culture between BTS and their fans and in this sense, they have "grown up" together. As Yoon (2019, p.23) notes, the journeys of the seven members growing up were translated to their music and dance and this won the hearts of teens and twenty-somethings around the world. BTS and ARMY are connected via diverse routes and they communicate actively (Besley 2019, p.182). BTS sharing what they appreciate and communicating with fans via doing so has been a common culture within the community and in this sense, fans understood the *Connect, BTS* London exhibition as a way for BTS to connect with fans and for fans to connect with other fans.

#### **4.3.1.2 The *Connect*, *BTS* London Exhibition Reaffirms Fans’**

##### **Understanding of BTS Being Different**

Another popular theme that frequently came up in fans’ responses was their understanding of BTS being “different”, specifically, their identity as changemakers, for constantly challenging the status quo. To fans, BTS does not represent a mere Korean pop band like for many non-fans. BTS is different not only because of their unique background of starting off as a band from a minor agency to becoming a global super star but also because of their message. As Kim (2019, p.111) writes, BTS is the only K-pop group that actively built its identity around youth and growth - topics that many idol groups have dodged - and successfully channeled these ideas into incredible music. BTS represents the ambition and aspiration of its generation, and this differentiates them from other K-pop groups (Besley 2018, p.24). “After listening to BTS music, listeners usually claim to feel ‘healed’ or ‘empowered’ more than they do ‘impressed’.

This comes from not only Korean listeners but also from fans across the globe. BTS’ positive message is not difficult to understand and the sweet and cheerful melodies of their music make it even more contagious,” explains Kim (2019, p.198) in his book, *BTS, The Review*. To fans, the certain aspects of the artwork and the project that were considered “different”, worked as a catalyst for them to

relate it with their understanding of BTS being distinctive. For example, the fact that the exhibition includes a non-traditional expression of art was an element that was considered as a “new experience” for many fans. Participant 8’s quote demonstrates this, “The experience of a digital nature which was very **unique** and I had never seen before.” However, what is important to note is how fans could make the link between this unconventional element of the artwork and their understanding of BTS being different. Participant 9’s quote further illustrates this thought process: “My impression of BTS is [that] they came from a very small company. They just have very humble backgrounds. And I feel like especially with **contemporary art**, it's **not very conventional** and I feel like people tend to know less about it compared to traditional artwork, like paintings. I think **BTS** might be more inclined to support the **underdogs**, like pieces that people might not know as much about...because **they have that kind of background.**”

The global scale and diversity involved in the project were also other elements of the project that impressed fans and reaffirmed their belief that BTS is different. Participant 3’s quote further demonstrates this point, “I never heard about a project like that, **connecting** artists from all over the world from **different** countries, languages and **different** ways to express themselves, and still work on

the same subject.” This aspect of the artwork increased fans’ interest in the project. However, what is noteworthy is that instead of being surprised like non-fans for BTS challenging their existing belief about BTS, for fans, this was a reaffirmation of their existing understanding of BTS. Participant 9’s answer reflects this thought process, “...I am **not at all surprised** by this collaboration. **BTS** has never failed to amaze me with their **lack of limitations** - they always surpass the guidelines set by the general public toward "K-pop idols" and I am very **proud** of them for doing so.” It is also important to note that in many fans’ answers, the unique relationship between BTS and fans was reflected. As participant 16’s response demonstrates, BTS has constantly been trying something different and fans were encouraged to do the same, “**The band** frequently **encouraged fans** to take an interest in other things apart from their music. For example, they have set up an online course to teach fans Korean”. For fans, the *Connect, BTS* London exhibition was an opportunity to reaffirm that BTS is different for challenging the status quo and this understanding was stimulated by specific characteristics of the artworks and project.

### 4.3.1.3 The *Connect*, *BTS* London Exhibition Reaffirms Fans’

#### Understanding of *BTS* as Global Goodwill Ambassadors

##### Promoting Love

The understanding of *BTS* as global goodwill ambassadors promoting love, was another theme that constantly came up during fans’ explanation of their exhibition experience. These were brought about mainly due to the elements of the exhibition including nature and the fact that *BTS* did not appear in the artwork itself but was involved as supporters of art pieces. Fans interpreted these elements as *BTS* spotlighting the artists and promoting a global cause of environmentalism and also demonstrated how it specifically fits in with *BTS*’ messages like self-care and self-love. For example, participant 11 demonstrates how the nature element of the artwork fits into *BTS*’ message of loving oneself and one’s surrounding, “I think with *Catharsis*, with it being kind of centered around **nature** and in essence, kind of wanting to preserve **nature**, I think it's that thing of also being aware of the **environment** and being aware of what is around you and kind of protecting that as well, as yourself being aware of your effect on the planet and wanting to be **environmentally-conscious** as possible. So, I would say that also ties into their message too.” Participant 12 also shared the link, “Their philosophy on **life**, how we all should **love ourselves, our planet, and**

**each other.”** Fans’ understanding of the exhibition via BTS’ message of self-love resonates with past findings on BTS which asserted that loving oneself has become a popular BTS’ message. In her research on BTS’ communication, Yoon (2019, p.20) wrote the following: “Their music videos are like a musical that visually tells the stories of worries and conflicts that any young person can relate to...Their music and videos communicate messages, surpassing boundaries such as country lines or the language barrier and successfully bringing about empathy.” Kim (2019, p.112) also noted that the frustration and the misery of the vulnerable youth and the hope that lies within those experiences is what differentiated BTS and vanquished K-pop’s weakness: the authenticity of the message. It is also worth noting that BTS’ fans are referred to as ARMY which is an acronym for ‘Adorable Representative MC for Youth’. Like the group, the fan club also became a voice representing the youth (Beasley 2018, p.175). BTS’ message of self-love is central to BTS’ identity and for winning the hearts of fans. In her study, Yoon (2019, p.20) further noted how BTS’ message of self-love was so well integrated and conveyed in their communication. She writes, “By highlighting ‘you’ as the main subject, BTS helps us see that the society’s structural contradictions as our common problem not just of an individual... In BTS’ songs, many different aspects of oneself appear. The fear of love, friendship, goodbyes, success, growth and the future transforms into a problem that goes

beyond me and you; they are problems for all of society and thus it becomes a message that brings together a community.” The fact that many fans in the study understood the exhibition in the framework of self-love once again shows BTS’ successful communication of the message of loving oneself.

While sharing their exhibition experiences, fans also tended to make a specific reference to particular members of the group. This is clear in participant 13’s answer, “As a BTS fan, I could see how **Namjoon** was the one who wanted this kind of exhibition to happen as he is into **nature** and would love to go for walks in forests just like Mr. Steensen does. This **exhibition** is soothing like **BTS** songs.” Fans’ survey and interview answers well demonstrated their ability to understand the exhibition via BTS’ message and to make a connection between BTS and the exhibition. In fact, their understanding of their unique relationship with BTS where BTS shares their love and connects with fans via diverse means, was reflected once again when sharing their interpretations of the artwork. Participant 3’s answer further illustrates this point, “I believe they realize people spend too much time on social media and [the] internet. And **they tried to show how we can connect to nature, to our inner selves, between us**. And also to expand our vision about what is **art**. **Art** can be used to express someone's view, but also to

send a message, to help people, to change lives (as they do with their music). This exhibition is another kind of **art** that also tries to touch us and communicate with us, to make us think so we can change and become better people. And I believe **BTS** does it, too.”

What is important to note is that for many fans, BTS’ image of loving, specifically, loving others, also came through when understanding BTS’ involvement in the project as being goodwill ambassadors, using their fame for good purpose. This understanding is well demonstrated in participant 1’s answer, “**BTS** have used their platform to **lift up other artists** and also to introduce their **fans** to further artistic expression and **experiences**.” Another element of the project that encouraged fans to understand is the fact that they did not appear visually in the artwork themselves. Participant 11’s response further illustrates this understanding, “...**BTS let the artists have their moment** and made it more about the **art** and the **artist** than about **BTS** themselves.” What is noteworthy is that from fans’ accounts, it was clear that this exhibition experience was not a first event per se that encouraged fans to think BTS were goodwill ambassadors. BTS has built its reputation as goodwill ambassadors for fans and this project was an additional event that further enhanced this image in fans’ minds. This

understanding is well reflected in participant 10's answer: "I've been a fan of **BTS** for a long time and it was incredible watching them become [a] worldwide influence. Again, I'm **happy** about **what they choose to promote using their popularity.**" In other words, BTS' image as being loving and being global goodwill ambassadors as a result, was already existing in fans' minds either through their message of self-love or their previous activities in social cause and this event enhanced their understanding. The *Connect, BTS* London exhibition reaffirmed fans' existing interest in BTS.

#### **4.3.2 The *Connect, BTS* London Exhibition Reaffirms Fans'**

##### **Association between BTS and Korea**

Although fans' account of experiences mainly revolved around BTS' identity, the link between BTS and Korea due to the fact that BTS is from Korea still appeared in fans' explanation of their exhibition experience. This demonstrates that although BTS is seen as an entity that surpasses the typical stereotype of a Korean pop band, fans still associate BTS with Korea to a certain extent. This is extremely important to note as it offers possible soft power resources for Korea. What is important to note is that this exhibition did not explicitly have links to Korea per se, yet some fans made the links to Korea through BTS. As one can see from Participant 14's quote, for example, this experience sparked her interest

in Korean culture: “I **want to find out** about more subtle aspects of **Korean** culture, such as the aspects of how **nature** is viewed.” Participant 15 also brought up the experience of visiting an exhibition related to Korea and made the link between the two experiences, “Funny enough I had just seen [the] **Nam June Paik** exhibition at the Tate Modern without knowing he was **Korean** before I visited. These two artists are **connected** in that Paik is renowned for digital **art** in the 1970s.” In fact, after the exhibition, some fans including Participant 11 found themselves searching for Korean artists who were doing similar artworks to ‘Catharsis’, showing their increased interest in Korean art and culture. Several participants like Participant 11 also wrote that they would like to see a similar scale exhibition, but focused on featuring Korean artists’ artwork to learn more about Korean art and culture. This increased curiosity in Korean art and culture is also reflected in the survey results where 86.7% of respondents said that their interest towards Korean art and culture was enhanced after the exhibition.

## CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

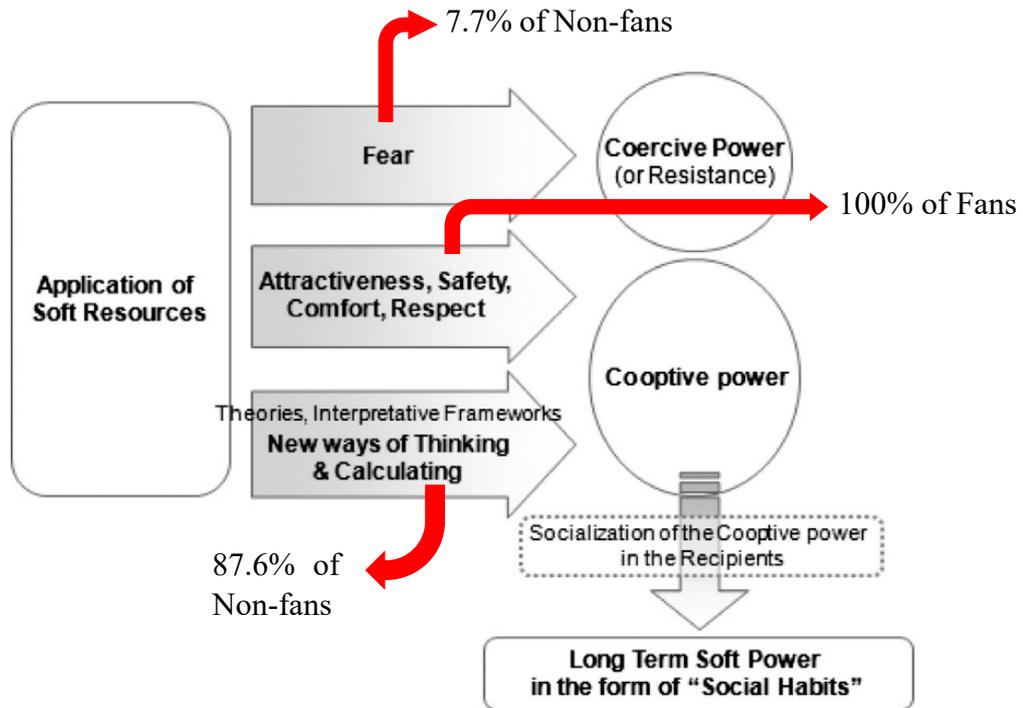


Figure 6. Conversion Process of Soft Power (Lee 2009, p. 211)

Despite the fact that BTS did not visually appear in the artwork of the *Connect*, *BTS* London exhibition and that there was no explicit connection between the exhibition and Korea, the majority of participants from both groups of *BTS* fans and non-fans' interest towards *BTS* and/or Korean art and culture increased. A small number of non-fans showed resistance towards *BTS*. I look at the reasons, similarities, and differences between the two groups in detail below and also

explain why this was a successful case of Lee (2009)’s notion of “cooptive power” being produced, but how the theory could not grasp the subtle perception changes that did not necessarily turn into either “cooptive” or “coercive power”. I also include the limitations of this study.

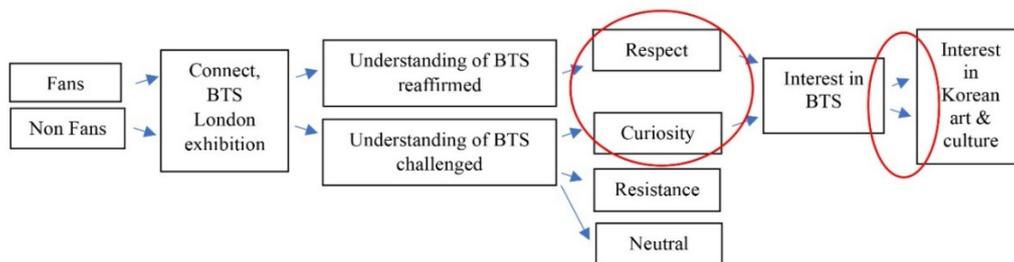


Figure 7. Comparative Understanding of Fans and Non-fans’ Thought Process

## 5.1 Both Groups’ Increased Interest in BTS and Korean Art and Culture: Coptive Power

As outlined in the analysis section, for non-fans, the *Connect, BTS* London exhibition was considered as a positive challenge to their existing understanding or discovery of a Korean pop band and Korean culture. It offered a new way of thinking and thus provoked their curiosity towards BTS and Korea in general. 84.6% of non-fans’ interest in BTS increased. On the other hand, for all fans, the

exhibition experience enhanced their existing positive view of BTS, further strengthening their respect for the group. Both groups' increased interest in the form of curiosity and reinforced admiration towards BTS and Korean art and culture can be understood as Lee (2009)'s concept of "cooptive power" in the soft power conversion process.

## **5.2 Non-fans' Resistance towards *Connect, BTS*: Coercive Power**

Although small in number, 7.7% of participants from the non-fans' group showed resistance towards the project, falling into the category of Lee (2009)'s "coercive power". "When the soft resources can create "fear", it is very likely that the soft resources will be diverted into "coercive power" (or strong resistance)." This mainly came from existing skeptical understanding of BTS, exhibitions in general and/or specific parts of Korean culture like Korean pop music. The participant had a specific understanding of BTS and/or Korea as shown in Participant 8's answer, "The Korean Wave is what damages the reputation of Korea in the Western educated world. K-pop mostly appeals to Southeast Asians, not to the European high-society which would, on the other hand, be fascinated by Goryeo celadon like it is for Chinese Ru Ware". The participant also viewed the *Connect, BTS* project as a marketing strategy, "The use of the BTS name seems simply like a publicity stunt for a group of artists." For Participant 9, it

was mainly the pre-existing belief toward exhibitions in general, “I wouldn’t say exhibitions like this can be an effective way of promoting Korean art and culture.” As a result, they were less motivated to search for the link. Although it is true that this group felt strong resistance and therefore fits in Lee (2009)’s coercive power category, it is important to note that the cause was not necessarily “fear” in this case.

### **5.3 Not Cooptive nor Coercive, Neutral**

It is important to note that, although small in number, 11.5% of participants from the non-fans’ group said that they felt indifferent toward BTS, meaning they did not produce either cooptive or coercive power, a category that has not been closely covered in Lee (2009)’s theory of soft power. As it was the case with participant 10, the main reason was because the participants could not relate to the exhibition or with BTS, “I couldn’t see any link between BTS and the exhibition. If it was another artist or a topic I was passionate about, then maybe I would have been more interested in searching for the links.”

## 5.4 BTS as the Main Catalyst to Korea

For both groups of fans and non-fans, BTS worked as an important catalyst for them to relate their experiences to Korean art and culture, demonstrating Lee (2007, quoted in Lee 2009, p.215)'s assertion that Korean celebrities have become significant soft resources for Korea. Participants from both groups who felt curious and interested in the *Connect, BTS* London exhibition extended their experience to their interest in Korean art and culture. As shown in the analysis section, whether it was through making links with participants' pre-existing thoughts about Korean art and culture or remembering past exhibitions that they went to, the strong association between BTS and Korea appeared. This is supported by the survey result that 86.7 % of fans and 73% of non-fans' interest towards Korean art and culture was enhanced after the exhibition. This finding is significant in the sense that it demonstrated the link. However, pinpointing the exact degree of how this particular exhibition influenced their interest is beyond this study's scope. To grasp the subtle understanding and audience's thought process, a more detailed analytical matrix is essential.

## CHAPTER 6. IMPLICATIONS

Although it is beyond the scope of this study to determine whether the short-term changes that occurred within non-fans' understanding of BTS and Korean art and culture will consequently become long-term changes, I strongly argue that *Connect, BTS* has offered valuable insights for both BTS and Korea's soft power strategies, specifically, in reaching out to a wider audience. A close analysis of both groups' thought processes and interviews shed light on possible soft resources that may be particularly useful for enhancing Korean art and culture internationally.

### 6.1 Korean Wave Offers a Wider Audience

*Connect, BTS* has demonstrated that the Korean Wave offers not only an opportunity for new types of collaborations but also serves as a window via which a wider audience than regular exhibition attendees alone can be reached. In fact, according to Serpentine Galleries, a large proportion of the visitors to the exhibition had never been to Serpentine Galleries before, proving how the exhibition allowed the museum to connect with a wider audience. The exhibition not only welcomed about 10,135 visitors physically from 14 January to 15 March but also about 64,000 visitors attended the exhibition online from 14 January to

31 May. Collaboration with Korean celebrities who share values or images similar to those of artworks or artifacts in the exhibit can be one effective way for exhibition makers to promote specific Korean art and culture to reach a wider, more non-traditional audience.

Considering that those who are interested in the Korean Wave are generally also interested in Korean art and culture, the Korean Wave is one area that has great potential for exhibition makers who promote Korean art and culture to explore and create strategies for wider outreach. In fact, 93.3 % of fans and 92.3 % of non-fans agreed that the Korean Wave offers new insights for enhancing Korean art and culture in overseas museums and 86.7 % of fans and 88.5 % of non-fans agreed that Korean art and culture are underrepresented in overseas museums compared to those of Japan and China. In interviews, several fans and non-fans also frequently mentioned that a global project like *Connect, BTS* specifically promoting Korean artists, artworks, or cultural objects, would be interesting to attend. 90% of fans and 88.5% of non-fans believed that the *Connect, BTS* London exhibition offered insights for enhancing Korean art and culture in overseas museum exhibitions.

## **6.2 Utilize Korea's rising image to establish itself as the Rule Maker in Contemporary Art World**

A thorough analysis of the thought-processes of non-fans, many of whom were unfamiliar with BTS and/or Korea in general, shed light on some of the potential soft resources that can be useful to enhance Korean art and culture. Participants' linking of Korea's image as a technologically advanced country and the technology aspect of the artwork is a good example. In today's society where there is rapidly growing fascination over the application of technology in the field of art including Artificial Intelligence Art, Korea's pre-existing reputation as a tech-savvy country is a great advantage for Korea to project itself as a forerunner in the new field of art. Korea's image as being the forerunner of contemporary culture and rising as a changemaker in global society, can also enhance such an image. As mentioned by participants in the analysis section, contemporary art can be cultivated into Korea's strength in its soft power. One non-fan participant's quote further demonstrates this point, "When you think of Contemporary art, you think American art, French art, you don't think Asian. I feel like you can add Korea to that champion of the vulgar and conceptual artistry. Actually with its strength in contemporary culture, I think Korea is in the perfect position."

### **6.3 Use Korea's Strength in Contemporary Culture When Presenting Korea's Culture in Exhibitions**

It is also important to remember that Korea's strength in contemporary culture can be used to both strengthen its position in the contemporary art world as well as to bring contemporary context to existing cultural objects in overseas museums. This point is further illustrated by one non-fan participant's explanation, "Korea's contemporary culture is popular and Korea shares many common values with the West. Exhibition makers can take advantage of these two factors. For example, instead of lining up cultural objects, if the presentation has more of the contemporary context and the story that people today can relate to, that will be great and the Korean Wave can be helpful. For example, an exhibition where visitors can learn about how Koreans lived in an environmentally friendly manner during a certain time and how their cultural objects tell us so. Alongside this, Korean celebrities like BTS, known for promoting global cause or environmentalism, can participate. It is not a matter of having more cultural objects or a bigger space in this case, it is about finding the right contemporary context and Korea has so much resources for this."

## **6.4 Increase interest indirectly but creatively**

One of the main reasons why non-fans' interest in Korean art and culture increased is because these were supported by BTS, a boy band, and not the government. This unusualness provoked their curiosity. The success of the *Connect, BTS* London exhibition in raising interest in Korean culture and art despite the lack of an explicit link between the two is something the Korean government and BTS should pay attention to as they search for creative soft power strategies. In this case, BTS worked as the main catalyst to participants' interest in Korea and especially because of the identity of BTS as a 'boy band' and the unexpectedness of BTS bringing together two seemingly different worlds provoked interest among participants. This is because this challenged the public's pre-existing bias towards BTS and that turned that into curiosity and interest. However, it is important to note that similar strategies can be set up and, if implemented rightly, it doesn't always have to be the Korean government benefiting from celebrity effect like with BTS as it was in this case, but also vice versa. When the images of non-governmental actors like BTS and Korean government are combined creatively, either side can establish a new side of the branding and reach a wider audience. As the present study has demonstrated, indirect involvement such as being art patrons instead of direct involvement such

as being featured in the artworks, can also be effective in influencing, as further noted by a non-fan participant in the study, “Another thing that is very interesting is the idea that K-pop could become a major patron of the arts. When you have a patronage, it tends to shape the artistic direction of production. So, having a band like BTS funding the creation of artwork means it can serve a completely different purpose from the classical role of collectors who have a somewhat conservative view of how art works should be produced.” This successful way of increasing interest indirectly and creatively, signals a whole new range of possibilities of soft power strategies for both the Korean government and BTS. Although it is beyond the study’s scope to scrutinize and determine whether this is a limited effect only applicable to BTS, this is one area that future research should be conducted to better explore possible soft resources and in search for soft power strategies for BTS as well as Korea’s soft power.

## CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION

We live in a world where *Parasite* wins Oscars and BTS sweeps the Billboard Music Awards. Yet, finding a single book on Korean art and culture in world's libraries and inside top museums and galleries remains a challenge while books on Chinese and Japanese art fill the Asian art section. While searching for answers, I came across the news on the *Connect, BTS* project. With the aim of finding out whether the exhibition offers any new insights with regard to enhancing the promotion of Korean art and culture in overseas museum exhibitions, I conducted a comparative thematic analysis of BTS fans and non-fans' perception changes. By scrutinizing participants' online survey answers as well as follow-up interview responses, I outlined the similarities and differences in non-fans and fans' understanding of the exhibition. For non-fans, the exhibition was a challenge to their pre-existing beliefs towards a Korean pop band and it stimulated their curiosity and interest in BTS. This was extended to their interest in Korean art and culture. On the other hand, for fans, the exhibition was not a challenge but a reaffirmation of their beliefs toward BTS. Fans also showed the tendency to relate their experience with their pre-existing beliefs about Korea and their interest in Korean art and culture. Although small in number, there was a group among non-fans who showed resistance instead of

interest towards BTS after the exhibition. This was mainly due to their set understanding of BTS and Korean culture, specifically the Korean pop music industry. These three different groups' feelings were explained through Lee (2009)'s resources-based soft power theory. Most of the non-fans' response belonged to Lee (2009)'s grouping of 'cooptive power', specifically, where people learn a new way of thinking and calculating. On the other hand, fans belonged to the same category of 'cooptive power' but for a different reason, their respect. The group who showed resistance belonged to the category of 'coercive power' for feeling resistance. However, Lee (2009)'s theory could not grasp the subtle delicacies within perception changes, where participants did not produce either coercive or cooptive power. By demonstrating a close analysis of thought processes of both non-fans and fans and their perception changes, this study proved the celebrity effect between Korea and BTS as BTS served as the catalyst for prompting both groups' to associate their exhibition experience with Korea. It also shed light on possible soft resources Korea as well as BTS can leverage in order to come up with creative strategies to reach a wider audience. This study is significant as it contributed to further understanding of Korea's soft power, BTS as Korea's soft power agents and to finding solutions to enhance the promotion of Korean art and culture in overseas museum exhibitions. However, I strongly argue that the study has room to be improved for more accurate

understanding of the effect of the exhibition on peoples' perception changes. In order to fully understand the effect, testing whether the short term cooptive power produced by non-fans transform to long-term cooptive power is required. A more detailed matrix with a scale that can better grasp the degree in which the exhibition influenced participants' thought process and a bigger sampling are also essential for more accurate analysis. Though with its room for improvement, I take pride in that this research has shed light on an overlooked aspect of the Korean Wave studies, its potential for museum exhibitions as an attempt to answer some of the challenging and long standing questions that must be addressed for Korea's cultural objects in overseas museums to be appreciated in a way that they deserve.

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## APPENDIX

### Survey Sample

Background	<p>Name (All information in the survey will be only used for research purposes and names will not be published)</p> <p>Sex (If you prefer not to say, please write N/A)</p> <p>Age (If you prefer not to say, please write N/A)</p> <p>Email Address (For follow-up purposes)</p> <p>Nationality</p> <p>Did you visit the exhibition online or offline?</p> <p>Did you visit the exhibition with anyone else?</p> <p>Consent of participation and for your answers to be used in the study (All information in the survey will be only used for research purposes and names will not be published).</p>
BTS	<p>Do you consider yourself a fan of BTS?</p> <p>Were you familiar with BTS before organizing/attending the exhibition?</p> <p>Are you more interested in BTS after the exhibition?</p> <p>How do you think the exhibition relates to BTS?</p>

Exhibition	<p>Please tell me how you first got to know about the exhibition and how you felt when you found out about it.</p> <p>What did you look forward to the most?</p> <p>What attracted you to the “Connect, BTS” exhibition? (Select all that apply)</p> <p>Please tell me about your experience with the exhibition and the artwork. What came to your mind?</p> <p>What did you learn from the Connect, BTS London exhibition as an organizer and/or a visitor?</p> <p>The Times described “Connect, BTS” as “one of the most unusual collaborations so far this century: Korean pop music and contemporary art. K-pop meets C-art, for short.” Do you agree?</p> <p>Do you think Connect, BTS London exhibition offers new insights to finding solutions to the existing challenges in promoting Korean art and culture in overseas museum exhibitions?</p> <p>Have you talked about the Connect, BTS experience with anyone online or offline?</p>
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Korea	<p>Were you familiar with Korean art or culture before organizing/ attending the exhibition?</p> <p>From low numbers of collections and levels of cultural understanding, to the range of cultural objects, curators of Korean art and culture have often faced challenges in promoting Korean art and culture at US museums in comparison to art from China or Japan according to Min and Jin (2017). Do you think Korean art and culture has also been underrepresented in overseas museums compared to art and culture from China or Japan?</p> <p>What do you think are some of the challenges in promoting Korean art and culture in foreign country and in overseas museum exhibitions?</p> <p>Do you think the Korean Wave offers new insights to finding solutions to the existing challenges in promoting Korean art and culture in overseas museum exhibitions?</p> <p>Are you more interested in Korean art and culture after the exhibition?</p>
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- 1) Name (All information in the survey will be only used for research purposes and names will not be published)
- 2) Sex (If you prefer not to say, please write N/A)
- 3) Age (If you prefer not to say, please write N/A)
- 4) Email Address (For follow-up purposes)
- 5) Nationality
- 6) Did you visit the exhibition online or offline?
- 7) Did you visit the exhibition with anyone else?
- 8) Consent of participation and for your answers to be used in the study (All information in the survey will be only used for research purposes and names will not be published).

- 9) Please tell me how you first got to know about the exhibition and how you felt when you found out about it.
- 10) What did you look forward to the most?
- 11) What attracted you to the “Connect, BTS” exhibition? (Select all that apply)
- 12) Were you familiar with Korean art or culture before organizing/ attending the exhibition?
- 13) Were you familiar with BTS before organizing/ attending the exhibition?
- 14) Please tell me about your experience with the exhibition and the artwork. What came to your mind?
- 15) What are the 3 keywords that best describe your experience with the exhibition and the artwork?
- 16) How do you think the exhibition relates to BTS?
- 17) What did you learn from the Connect, BTS London exhibition as an organizer and/or a visitor?
- 18) The Times described “Connect, BTS” as “one of the most unusual collaborations so far this century: Korean pop music and contemporary art. K-pop meets C-art, for short.” Do you agree?
- 19) From low numbers of collections and levels of cultural understanding, to the range of cultural objects, curators of Korean art and culture have often faced challenges in promoting Korean art and culture at US museums in comparison to art from China or Japan according to Min and Jin (2017). Do you think Korean art and culture has also been underrepresented in overseas museums compared to art and culture from China or Japan?
- 20) What do you think some of the challenges in promoting Korean art and culture in foreign country and in overseas museum exhibitions?
- 21) Do you think the Korean Wave offers new insights to finding solutions to the existing challenges in promoting Korean art and culture in overseas museum exhibitions?
- 22) Do you think Connect, BTS London exhibition offers new insights to finding solutions to the existing challenges in promoting Korean art and culture in museum exhibitions?
- 23) Are you more interested in Korean art and culture after the exhibition?
- 24) Are you more interested in BTS after the exhibition?

- 25) Have you talked about the Connect, BTS experience with anyone online or offline?
- 26) Anything you would like to add? (This is the last question. Please click 'Done' button and wait several seconds to make sure the survey is complete! Thank you very much!)

## 국문초록

BTS 영향:

BTS 팬들과 일반 방문객들의 인식 변화에 대한 주제별 비교 분석

성명: 김민정

서울대학교 국제대학원 국제지역학 전공

‘커넥트, BTS’는 런던, 베를린, 부에노스아이레스, 뉴욕, 서울 5개 도시에서 BTS가 22인 예술가들과 함께 선보인 현대 미술 프로젝트이다. 방탄소년단의 철학에 공감하는 전 세계 미술 기획자들이 공동으로 전시를 기획한 역사적인 프로젝트라고 공식 웹사이트는 소개한다. 흥미로운 점은 작품에 BTS가 직접 등장하지 않음에도 불구하고 ‘커넥트, BTS’를 관람한 BTS 팬과 일반 방문객들의 BTS에 대한 관심이 증가했다는 사실이다. BTS 팬들에게 런던 전시는 BTS에 관한 그들의 호감을 재확인할 수 있는 기회였고 일반인들에게는 BTS에 대한 편견을 호기심으로 변하게 하는 기회가 되었다. 참가자중 일부는 부정적인 태도 혹은 중립적인 태도를 보였지만 흥미로운 점은 BTS 팬들과 일반인 관람객들 모두 한국 문화 예술에 대한 관심 또한 증가했다는 점이다. 이 연구는 설문조사와 인터뷰를 통해 BTS 팬들과 일반 방문객들의 인식 변화를 주제별 비교 분석하고자 한다. 서울대학교 국제대학원 이근 교수의 2009년 소프트파워 이론을 기반으로 하여 ‘커넥트, BTS’ 런던 전시가 해외 박물관 한국 문화 예술 전시에 어떤 새로운 시사점을 제시하는가를 알아보려고 하는데 의미가 있다.

**주제어:** BTS, 소프트파워, 한류, 한국, 예술, 전시, 문화, 박물관, 큐레이터

**학번:** 2017-26755

## LETTER OF THANKS

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I hope that this research will contribute to our understanding of our dynamic society and to building a more inclusive world. I would like to conclude by expressing my wish that more students around the globe will be able to enjoy similar international learning opportunities with the support that they deserve, such as that which led to this work and which I am forever grateful for experiencing.

**Min Jung Kim**

김민정