



# Visual Culture in Boyband K-Pop: Netnographic Insights into Global Fan Communities

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**Abstract.** Social media makes it easy for anyone to interact and share information. This makes cultural exchange through the internet has no time and space limit. Such as visual culture whose representations can be in the form of movies, music, designs, lifestyles and others that are easily formed through social media. The research objective is to describe the visual culture of Army BTS Sidoarjo using netnography method. The research method is a qualitative approach with Sidoarjo Army informants. Data collection techniques using netnographic data collection such as archival data, elicitation data and field notes data. Then the netnography data analysis technique uses an inductive approach. The result of the research is that the visual culture of Army BTS Sidoarjo is created through activities created together such as posting photos, videos, works through the Army Sidoarjo WhatsApp group or on Instagram @armysidoarjo\_ which are created to form a certain perception of Army Sidoarjo.

**Keywords:** visual culture, bts army, netnography, instagram, whatsapp

## 1 Introduction

In the digital age, it is very easy for people to share information. And this visual culture is closely related to the times. Visual culture is a form of conceptual culture (values) and material culture (objects) that can be seen by the visual senses. So that visual culture is various aspects related to the final form of human ideas or ideas to go global. Which is realized in the art of a work, print media, advertisements, films, television broadcast content, then fashion or style. Which means that it is not just a 'shirt' that only displays the beauty of the outside but has a value on the quality of people's lives [1]. With visual technology such as computers or cell phones, we can now find all of that on the internet not only through television or newspapers. Mass media has a big role as the main source of information, where mass media is able to provide any information and is able to bring something new to the surrounding environment [2].

Because it cannot be denied, we also exchange information through digital platforms, namely social media, which mostly use visual interactions. Technology also has a role as a tool to help us spread visual culture socially. As a result, cultural exchange between countries is inevitable because there is no time and space limit. As fans of the boy band BTS do on social media Instagram and WhatsApp. The Korean Wave is considered as a driving force that makes South Korean culture very recognizable in Indonesia [3]. They upload various kinds of fan activities and interact with each other through visuals on the internet. Because they have the same passion, they create a fan community on social media as well as share information related to fan activities they do and are continuously connected in the fanbase Instagram account and WhatsApp group Army BTS Sidoarjo.

In previous research conducted by Shane Savera Sa'diyah [4], with the title "Fan Culture in the Digital Age (Virtual Ethnographic Study of BTS Fans on Twitter)". In the study, it was concluded that fan culture in the digital era experienced significant changes, which were initially filled with activities in the real world such as using idol-style fashion, purchasing idol physical works and others, which then became integrated activities via the internet, namely social media. Fan culture also shows that fans not only act as connoisseurs of media texts, but also text or media makers through many of their participation activities on social media, namely, Twitter.



**Fig. 1.** Latest event information, 2022

The @armysidoarjo\_ Instagram account carries out fan activities in terms of showing their love for being a media partner event for fellow BTS boy band fans. The community account is seen to be active in various matters regarding the involvement of fans who carry out activities such as sharing the latest event information, watching together concerts held online and meeting between community members through the @armysidoarjo\_ Instagram account and the Army BTS Sidoarjo WhatsApp group.

BTS Army is a term for fans of the boy band BTS (Bangtan Seonyeondan) [5]. Which in Indonesia has a fanbase that uses social media for the continuity of communication and fan activities. One of them is the Army BTS Sidoarjo fanbase which is active through the @armysidoarjo\_ Instagram account, where the account has 1,668 followers. The fanbase also has a WhatsApp group which allows fellow Sidoarjo ARMYs to carry out fan activities. The ARMY BTS Sidoarjo fanbase Instagram account, which was formed on January 11, 2019, always makes annual events that are not far from things related to the BTS boy band itself. Fans will refer to a situation where someone is fond of something or everything that includes fan culture and behavior [6].

Seeing this phenomenon, the researcher is interested in conducting research on ARMY BTS Sidoarjo. By using Kozinets' netnography theory which has two stages, namely the first learning includes; finding similarities, absorbing culture, learning rules and techniques, taking a sense of community, reflection on reciprocity, and sharpening skillsets. Second, doing includes; commenting on a post, asking questions, receiving feedback, trying to get involved in a project, assessing and reviewing, and taking a leadership role [7]. The purpose of this research is to describe the visual culture of Army BTS Sidoarjo using the netnography method.

## 2 Research Methods

The research approach used in this research is a qualitative approach, which is a culture that exists in the social sciences which essentially adheres to a person's view and sees from a person's point of view with good meaning in the world, behavior, beliefs and different interests [8]. Using the netnography method, which is used because in this research the researcher utilizes the internet as a place of research. According to Kozinets, netnography is a technique developed to study the habits or traditions and the online population itself. With this method, researchers can explore beliefs, values, culture and certain individuals or groups online [9].

This research data comes from primary data sources and secondary data sources. Primary data sources are data obtained and data collected by researchers directly by the data source [10]. Primary data in the study are uploads on the Instagram account of the BTS Sidoarjo ARMY community, @armysidoarjo\_. Then the interaction between members on the BTS ARMY Sidoarjo whatsapp group. Which of the two primary data sources can be obtained or collected by researchers as the visual culture of ARMY BTS Sidoarjo. Meanwhile, secondary data is data obtained or collected by researchers from various existing sources [10]. Researchers will use secondary data from various books, journals, reports, and others related to visual culture in the BTS Sidoarjo ARMY community.

This research uses several netnographic data collection techniques: 1) Archival data, looking at how the content and visual cultural values produced on the Instagram account of @armysidoarjo\_, as well as those formed in the ARMY BTS Sidoarjo whatsapp group. 2) Elicitation data, data that has been formed by researchers through individual and global or community interactions with members of a culture. Posting, commenting, emailing, instant messaging, and interviewing researchers are common ways to capture data in netnography. 3) Field note data, researchers enhance with notes from interviews with research informants, then photographic or video evidence uploaded through social media and the BTS ARMY Sidoarjo whatsapp group [11].

## 3 Results and Discussion

Initially, the BTS (Bangtan Soenyeondan) fan community in Sidoarjo did not have a large platform where fans could share their fondness for the same things on social media, such as meeting each other, then creating an interesting event for fans in Sidoarjo, etc. Most of them created accounts under the name Sidoarjo but just as a place for them to gather and meet without any major activities. Most of them create an account under the name Sidoarjo but just as a place for them to gather and meet without any major activities and only follow a forum that is already available in the Surabaya Fanbase. The community in Surabaya is already very large and has many official followers.

Then there is an initiative of the owner of the online shop "All About Korea Merch (AAKM) Sidoarjo" with an Instagram account @allaboutkoreamerch which deliberately forms its own fanbase or community for Sidoarjo. So that fans in Sidoarjo do not need to go far to build relationships between fans in the same city. Finally at the end of 2018, the Army BTS Sidoarjo fanbase was formed from initially without supporters and of course the online shop "All About Korea Merch (AAKM) Sidoarjo" became a sponsor to hold various events. Until finally the BTS Sidoarjo Fanbase became the official community for the city of Sidoarjo and was included in the list at ARMY Jatim @officialarmyjatim.

Through research using netnography, visual culture in the BTS ARMY community is formed through fan activities on Instagram and WhatsApp social media. The results of the study are illustrated by explaining the data with two stages of netnography as follows:

### 3.1 Learning

In learning, researchers study a cultural activity in a community via the internet in six ways.

#### 3.1.1 Finding similarities

Finding similarities in fan activity about one of the members in the BTS Sidoarjo ARMY WhatsApp group about an invitation to watch the Permission To Dance in Los Angeles (PTD in LA) concert on November 11, 2021. On Instagram, the fanbase account @armysidoarjo\_ also posted a poster containing an invitation to followers to watch together Permission To Dance in Los Angeles (PTD in LA) on November 11, 2021.



Fig. 2. Results of finding fan similarities on WhatsApp and Instagram social media

#### 3.1.2 Absorbing culture

In the BTS Sidoarjo ARMY WhatsApp group, a culture of consumption about the collaboration product between BTS's (Bangtan Seonyeondan) BT21 and Chatime was formed. The launch was in the form of a drink with a BT21 cover and merchandise. One of the group members provided information so that other group members would not be left behind with updates about things related to boy band BTS on December 12, 2021. On Instagram, the ARMY Sidoarjo fanbase account @armysidoarjo\_ as a media partner for SobatesBeeeye drink products. Only with a minimum purchase of thirty-five thousand rupiah, you can get a random BTS boyband photocard, cup sleeve and door prize on December 9, 2021.



Fig. 3. Results of absorbing culture on WhatsApp and Instagram social media

### 3.1.3 Rules and techniques

One of the rules of the Sidoarjo ARMY WhatsApp group is that you must introduce yourself to other group members when you are allowed to join the group. On Instagram, before joining the WhatsApp group, you must direct message the Instagram admin and will be directed to the WhatsApp admin. On WhatsApp, those who want to become members must introduce themselves to the WhatsApp admin and must follow the @armysidoarjo\_fanbase account.

### 3.1.4 Taking a sense of community

One of the members of the WhatsApp group asked for help in the form of prayers so that he would be spared from all the dangers of the earthquake that occurred in East Nusa Tenggara and other members prayed for him on December 14, 2021. On Instagram, the ARMY BTS Sidoarjo fanbase account posted an open donation poster for the volcano eruption in Lumajang to help ARMYs and local residents on December 4, 2021.



Fig. 4. Results of taking a sense of community on WhatsApp and Instagram social media

### 3.1.5 Reciprocity

There was an issue response about BTS boy band member Jimin who was informed to be sick. Group members asked each other questions about what caused Jimin BTS to get sick on January 31, 2022. On Instagram, the fanbase account @armysidoarjo\_ and the fanbase account @armybyts.lumajang interacted with each other in the comments column on the open donation post for the erupting mountain in Lumajang. The fanbase account @armybyts.lumajang is grateful for the participation of the @armysidoarjo\_ account which helps in the form of donations which can be in the form of cash, masks, food on December 4, 2021.

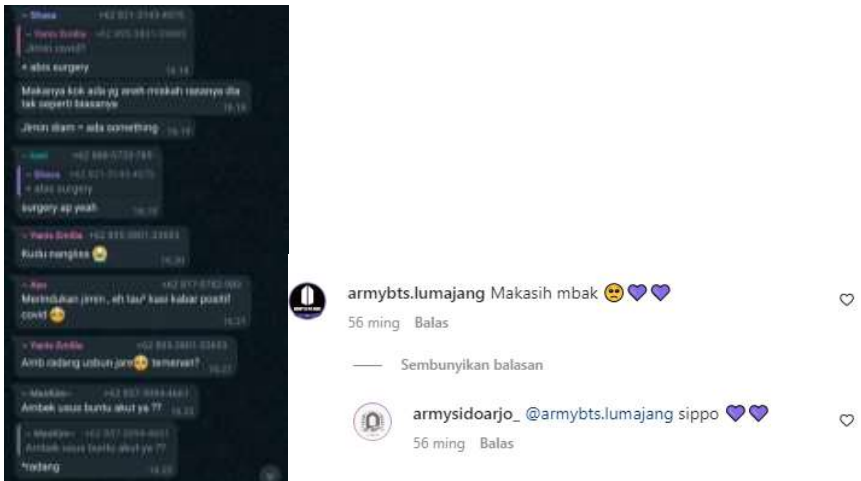


Fig. 5. Reciprocal results on WhatsApp and Instagram social media

### 3.1.6 Sharpening skillset

In the Sidoarjo BTS ARMY WhatsApp group, the group admin pointed out that the Sidoarjo ARMY fanbase succeeded in becoming an official account and was recognized as one of the Sidoarjo representatives and entered into one of the lists of official East Java ARMY communities on January 15, 2022. On Instagram in a post by the @armysidoarjo\_ account, ARMY Sidoarjo performed a dance to a BTS song at the Permission to Dance online concert meeting on December 9, 2021.

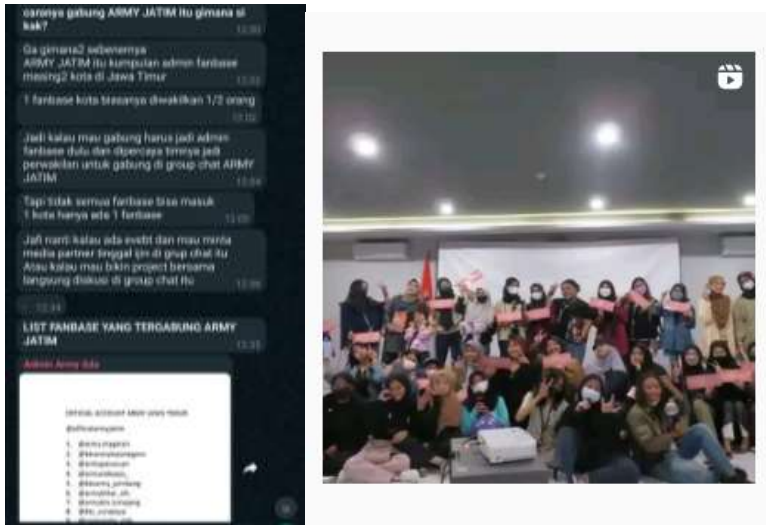


Fig. 6. Results of sharpening skillsets on WhatsApp and Instagram

### 3.2 Doing

In doing, researchers looked at what the community did to achieve the potential in learning and there were six ways.

#### 3.2.1 Commenting on a post

Enthusiastic members of the WhatsApp group ARMY Sidoarjo with the official personal account of boy band BTS active. They chatted with each other on December 6, 2021. On Instagram, the @armsidoarjo\_ account made one of its followers enthusiastic because this fanbase held a joint viewing of boy band BTS's online concert entitled Permission to Dance on November 7, 2021.

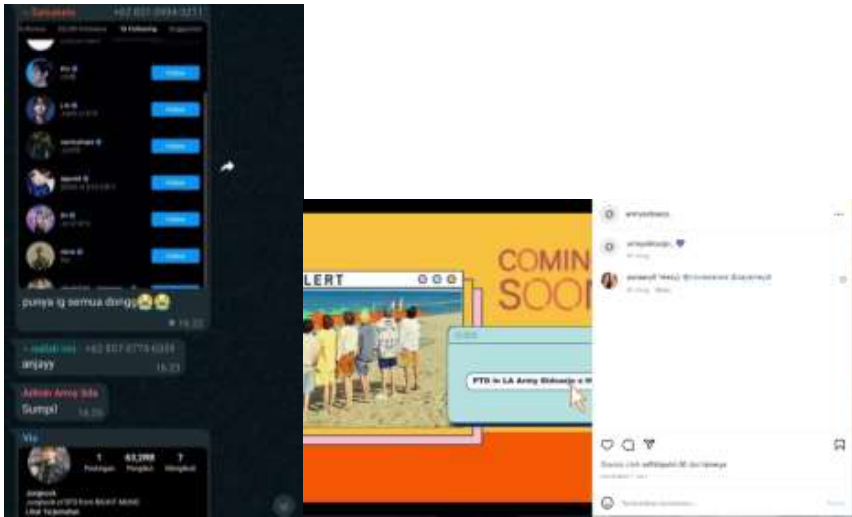


Fig. 7. Results of commenting on a post on WhatsApp and Instagram

### 3.2.2 Question

In the Sidoarjo ARMY WhatsApp group, members asked about where the BTS boy band Permission to Dance online concert was held. And members who know answered that the online concert was held at a private hotel in the city of Sidoarjo on November 12, 2021. On Instagram, followers of the @armsidoarjo\_ account questioned the availability of the BTS boy band Permission to Dance online concert slot through Instagram stories on November 7, 2021.



Fig. 8. Inquiry results on WhatsApp and Instagram



### 3.2.3 Receiving feedback

WhatsApp group members ask each other questions about the BTS boy band Permission to Dance online concert on November 12, 2021. On Instagram, the fanbase account @armysidoarjo\_ asked questions through Instagram stories about the BTS boy band Permission to Dance online concert which is so that @armysidoarjo\_ Instagram followers are not confused and can directly ask, on November 7, 2021.

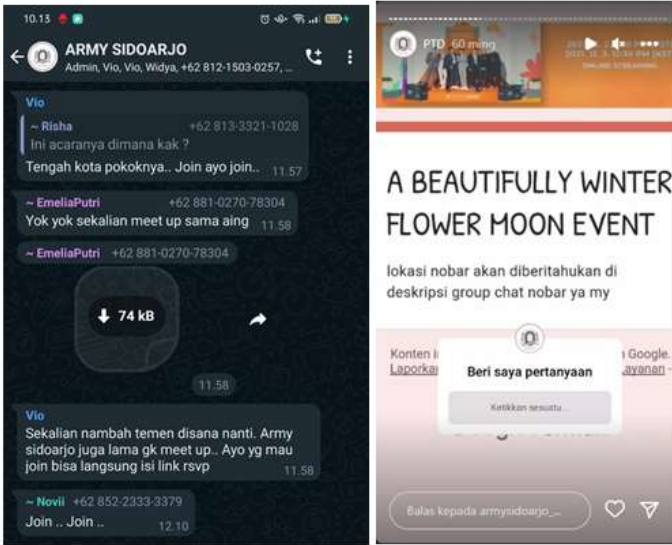


Fig. 9. Results of receiving feedback on WhatsApp and Instagram

### 3.2.4 Trying to get involved in a project

Members of the Sidoarjo ARMY WhatsApp group invited to contribute to the Surabaya ARMY project. There were several members who participated, including the admin of the ARMY Sidoarjo group, on March 18, 2022. On Instagram, the fanbase @armysidoarjo\_ became a media partner of the ARMY Surabaya project to watch together the BTS boy band Permission to Dance online concert on January 13, 2022.



Fig. 10. Results of trying to engage in a project on WhatsApp and Instagram

3.2.5 Assess and review

On January 15, 2022, the admin of the group on WhatsApp ARMY Sidoarjo would like to review the opinions and complaints while being a member of the WhatsApp ARMY Sidoarjo group as an anniversary of the formation of the fanbase.

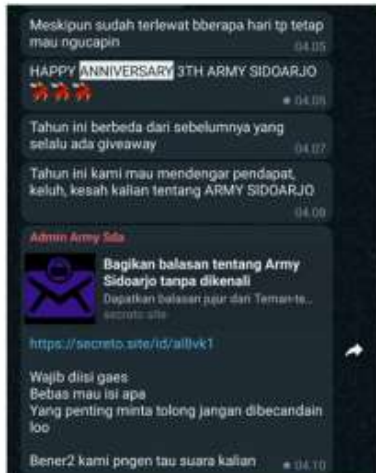


Fig. 11. Rating and review results on WhatsApp

### 3.2.6 Taking a leadership role

The admin of the WhatsApp group ARMY Sidoarjo arranged to watch together the online concert of boy band BTS Permission to Dance in Seoul at a cinema in Sidoarjo from booking seats and others on February 24, 2022. In the fanbase Instagram account @armysidoarjo\_, successfully brought together the ARMYs in Sidoarjo at the BTS boy band Permission to Dance online concert. Here the ARMY BTS Sidoarjo fanbase succeeded in taking on the role of a forum for fan activity on December 9, 2021.



Fig. 12. Assessment and review results on WhatsApp

From the above presentation, it can be explained that according to Kozinets' netnography, researching an online community there are several things we learn in it, namely finding similarities with each other from what they experience and feel, absorbing their culture, learning the rules and techniques they do, taking a sense of togetherness in the community, seeing reflection and reciprocity and also honing the skills of the community under study. Some of these things are done to describe the visual culture of Army BTS Sidoarjo. Fans bond with each other because a fan will always need a place where they are appreciated and find a place to share the same likes even though they are not from the same background. These fans can create their own universe around something they admire. Then each other build a chemistry that is formed because their interactions explore what the group of fans want to know and also show some actions that they are a true fan [12].

In the visual culture of Army BTS Sidoarjo, they created a fanbase which contains a group of Army in the city of Sidoarjo. Then they create events to establish friendship and build relationships among the Army. Army Sidoarjo also shares all information about BTS (Bangtan Seonyeondan) be it photos, concert schedules, mass products, works and others in the Army Sidoarjo WhatsApp group. The Sidoarjo Army group also looks like a family that helps each other. Because communities on social media usually arise because of the facility of the expression space itself and the similarity of attraction [13].

In interactions between members of the Army Sidoarjo WhatsApp group, they use Indonesian and Javanese. Not only these two languages, Korean is also included. Then the consumption activity is also high for the latest mass products issued by BTS (Bangtan Seonyeondan). Such as music albums, Army Bomb lightsticks, cooperation products with BTS (Bangtan Seonyeondan) and so on. Army Sidoarjo also uses special terms in the fandom, both from activities carrying handbanners, wearing all-purple attributes, BTS headbands, ARMY Bomb lightsticks, and BT21 dolls. The symbol they often use is purple, as a detection of identity that he is Army BTS. The content of their conversations is like everyday friends. And the rules for joining the community are clearly written and must be obeyed. This means that social media is no longer just entertainment, but rather a use of technology to build business or the same relevance [14].

Visual culture as a form of love for the Army BTS Sidoarjo fanbase for the boy band BTS is also contained in the @armysidoarjo\_ Instagram account. They share activities that are made together whether through posting photos, videos, posters and others. They are not only fans who only like but build visual images as a socially diffused structure. Fans are not only consumers but also active producers by creating content to share with other fans." [15]

#### 4 Conclusions

Through research using netnography in the ARMY BTS community, visual culture is formed through fan activities on the @armysidoarjo\_ Instagram account and the ARMY BTS Sidoarjo WhatsApp group. Between Instagram accounts and WhatsApp groups have continuity with each other. By following the two stages of netnography, namely learning and doing, each social media shows activities that lead to visual culture such as sharing online concert posters on Instagram and WhatsApp. The forms of conceptual culture and material culture are BT21 product collaboration drinks with Chatime and SobatesBeyee drinks that provide designs on the drink bottles. Then make a meeting of fellow ARMY BTS Sidoarjo to watch a movie that will become a visual image that can be recognized and remembered.

The visual culture that occurs in the Sidoarjo ARMY WhatsApp group is not as much as that in the @armysidoarjo Instagram fanbase account. Because WhatsApp groups are more often used to interact between members in the Sidoarjo ARMY community, although they still exist. While on Instagram, the @armysidoarjo\_ account displays visuals that describe their activities. Whether it's posters, videos of ARMY Sidoarjo meetings at online concerts, the form of visual culture is more clearly visible. In it they use attributes such as handbanners, BT21 dolls, ARMY Bomb (lightstick), dance performance art using BTS boy band songs and so on.

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