

Reviewing the culture and impact of pop culture tourism: A case study of BTS from the Perspective of fans

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ABSTRACT

As the popularity of K-pop culture grows, K-pop-motivated tourism continues to receive attention from scholars. Due to the relatively later development of K-pop tourism research, there are limited studies in relation to sustainability of destination competitiveness. Therefore, this dissertation expands the existing knowledge of K-Pop cultural tourism, fan and contributes to the theory of pop culture tourism. The outcome of this dissertation has practical implications for destination marketers developing pop culture tourism to improve their competitiveness.

The aim of this dissertation is to examine the phenomenon of K-pop culture tourism, using BTS (Bangtan Sonyeondan) as a case study, and to analyse the tourism activities undertaken by BTS fans using the concept of place attachment. The dissertation employs qualitative research and an interpretive approach. Non-participatory Netnography is used to observe and analyse 20 users' Instagram posts from the open social platform. This dissertation examines the tourism activities that tourists engage in as a result of their loyalty to K-pop culture and further discusses the longevity of K-pop tourism in sustaining the tourism destination competitiveness of a place. The findings demonstrate that the place dependence and place identity attributes of place attachment have different manifestations in K-pop tourism activities. The different manifestations reflect the influence of place attachment on tourists' preferences for K-pop tourism activities. This dissertation reveals the positive impact of tourists' emotional factors due to place attachment on the competitiveness of the destination tourism market. The practical implications of the dissertation reflect the significance of pop culture and fan markets in sustaining the competitiveness tourism destinations.

ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material of which a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

Tourists tend to construct different meanings of place in interaction with specific landscapes, cultures, heritage, and lifestyles (Nilsson, 2011) and are more likely to revisit the same destination once they have constructed a personal meaning of place (Prayag & Ryan, 2012). This enduring relationship between people and place is the key and driving force behind sustaining the competitiveness of tourism destinations. There are many factors that influence the behaviour of tourists to revisit; they can revisit because of people and events or because of places and scenery, but the common denominator is that tourists have established an emotional connection with the place they revisit, and this human-place emotion can be based on family, love, hometown, idols or ordinary things related to their memories, making place a symbol and vehicle for such emotions (Yuksel et al., 2013). Such emotional connection between people and places could be explained by the concept of place attachment (Williams & Vaske, 2003).

With the diversification of cultural forms and the development of modern technology and online media, pop culture tourism is becoming increasingly popular around the world (Larson et al., 2013). While most pop culture tourism research focuses on screen tourism (Beeton, 2016), it also includes literature (Hoppen et al., 2014), music (Lashua et al., 2014) or film stars (Yen & Teng, 2015). In addition, theme parks (Waysdorf & Reijnders, 2018) and an increasing number of special events are also be considered within the scope of pop culture tourism. Several pop culture-related tourism products have been developed globally, with some destinations using pop culture for place identity and marketing (Bolan & Kearney, 2017; Alderman et al., 2012). Even visitors who participate in pilgrimage tours of sacred sites are described as fans of pop culture themes such as film stars, music, and theatre (Larson et al., 2013).

Among the studies related to pop culture tourism, there are fewer studies on K-pop idols compared to film tourism. In the relationship between idols and fans, fans are a unique niche consisting of a loyal market of consumers attached to a specific object or image with special personal, public, and symbolic values (Winnicott, 1974). This dissertation considers the fan base as the tourists, or consumers of pop culture tourism, who bear significant value for the economic and cultural development of tourism destinations. Since fan behaviour, decisions and characteristics are further influenced by socio-cultural and economic capital, fan consumption has been recognised and valued by the general public, the media, and the business sectors (Gray et al., 2007). Of particular interest to this study are the pop star fans, a unique group of people who are highly engaged due to their emotional attachment and loyalty to their respective pop stars.

K-pop tourism has since played an important role in increasing international tourism in Korea and in creating a positive perception of Korea as a tourist destination (Hogarth, 2013; Jung, 2006; Kim et al., 2007). For fans of Korean pop culture, their favourite celebrities play a significant role in shaping and reinforcing a positive image of the destination, that is, celebrities are directly involved in creating a new sustainable image of the destination (Zhou et al., 2021). Because there are places that are more than just physical buildings and environments in the eyes of fans, they give special meaning to these places, where they engage with their idols and interact with other fans, and therefore they have special emotions and attachments to these places (Brocato et al., 2015).

The merits of a destination's natural and human resources do not fully influence a tourist's decision making; instead, most tourists have an emotional connection to the destination (Williams & Roggenbuck, 1989). In the context of pop culture tourism, this emotional connection between fans and destinations can be interpreted as place attachment, which is essentially an emotional/emotional and cultural bond between the individual and the environment (Altman & Low, 1992). In this concept, destinations are attractive because of their attributes that meet fans' activity demands and allow fans to feel an emotional connection and symbolic meaning to the destination, thus creating a functional and emotional attachment to the destination (Guo et al., 2016).

In the context of place attachment, tourists' emotions towards the destination play a vital role in destination marketing. Destination marketers can benefit from using place attachment as an important appeal to drive tourism, as well as develop a competitive edge for the tourist destination (Duman et al., 2018). Up until now, most studies have only examined the quantitative relationship between tourists' place attachment factors and their willingness to revisit (Han et al., 2019), and have not yet studied this qualitatively with a specific cultural group. This dissertation proposes the need to focus on the emotional relationship between tourists and destinations and the role of tourism activities in this relationship in influencing destinations. Fans as tourists are defined as people who engage in popular culture tourism (Larson et al., 2013), and their behaviours have only been studied in the past 3 decades (Gray et al., 2007). Most academic research on fans has been confined to the realm of sports fans (Laverie & Arnett, 2000). However, sports fandom is different from pop culture fandom (Fiske, 1992).

In summary, as there are relatively few studies on fan tourism behaviour of Korean pop idols in pop culture tourism research, this dissertation takes fan behaviour as the main object of study and adopts a qualitative research approach and the use of place attachment theory, to examine and analyse the impact of pop culture tourists' behaviours on the sustainable development of tourist destination.

1.2 Introduction to the case

This section will introduce the case in the study, mainly drawing from the perspective of BTS's influence and BTS's fans.

1.2.1 Who is BTS?

BTS (Korean: 방탄소년단), also known as Bangtan Sonyeondan, is a South Korean idol boy band that debuted in 2013 under Big Hit Entertainment, consisting of members Jin, Suga, J-Hope, RM, Jimin, V and Jungkook, who co-write and co-produce most of their own productions (Herman, 2018).

BTS have achieved the feat of gaining global dominance in the history of K-pop. Their numerous accolades include six American Music Awards, 12 Billboard Music Awards, 24 Gold Record Awards, and two Grammy and two All-British Music Award nominations (Herman, 2018). In 2019, BTS became the first K-pop band to attend the Grammys, in 2020, they became the first K-pop group to perform at the Grammys, and in 2021, they received their first Grammy nomination (Kanozia & Ganghariya, 2021). BTS have performed at major stadiums that hold important moments in the history of music; for example, they became the first K-pop group to perform at the 2019 Wembley concert at the UK's largest stadium, in front of 60,000 people (Ahn, 2019). The financial benefits of the concerts are huge. For the 'BTS 5th Muster (Magic Shop)' concerts in Busan and Seoul in June 2019, BTS generated an economic effect of US\$374 million (US\$105.5 million from the Busan concert and US\$269.0 million from the Seoul concert), which for Busan and Seoul is equivalent to the two cities' 2018 GDP of 1.6% and 0.9% (Yonhap, 2019).

1.2.2 BTS' impact

Beyond music, BTS have collaborated with UNICEF to launch the 'Love Myself' campaign against violence, spoken at three sessions of the UN General Assembly, and become the youngest ever recipients of the Korean Presidential Medal of Culture for their contribution to spreading Korean culture and language (Proctor, 2021).

K-pop has become a cultural soft power over the past decade. The widespread global popularity of BTS has quickly shifted much of the government's efforts towards harnessing its image as a soft power tool and, with idols' hometowns spread across the country, representing the unique images of Korea (Oh, 2018). In 2017, BTS became an honorary tourism ambassador for the city of Seoul, a title that has led to a plethora of tourism advertisements utilising the band's image, such as the 'Live Seoul Like I Do' campaign, which allows virtual fans to visit their favourite places in Seoul (Haddad, 2019). The Seoul Metropolitan Government credits BTS for helping to revive tourism in

Seoul. Of the top five locations in a survey of Korea's most popular attractions are destinations connected to BTS (Kim, 2019). It is rare for any country to have tourism driven by a specific demographic rather than an attraction or event (Kim, 2019).

In the food and beverage sector, the Korean food restaurant Yoojung Sikdang and the variety show filming location & gather cafe, which are frequented by BTS, are popular (Shin, 2019). In terms of merchandise shopping, in 2017, BTS launched the BT21 collaboration project with Korean brand LINE, where eight characters created by BTS members were launched as free downloadable emojis, clothing and other merchandise, and the chain became a regular place for fans to visit (Kim et al., 2019). BTS also has its own pop-up shops, which update their merchandise with BTS albums and performances, making them a must-visit shopping mecca for fans (Shin, 2019).

BTS not only represents Korea on the global stage; they also represent the promoters of Korean culture through their performances on the international stage. The music video for their 2018 album title track 'Idol' features the members in traditional Korean costumes, combining these cultural images with images and sounds celebrating their transnational status through their music video (Big Hit Labels, 2018). BTS showcased parts of Seoul's Gyeongbokgung Palace during a stage performance on The Tonight Show hosted by Jimmy Fallon, with the group performing for the former in hanbok (Dodson, 2020; Shetty, 2020). Through these instances, BTS not only represented Korea as a nation state but also promoted and showcased their culture through their performances on mainstream American television. The group's ability to celebrate and represent Korean culture has also been recognised by the Korean government and the international community, with the group receiving the Order of Korean Cultural Merit in 2018 (Herman, 2018b). Clearly, the Korean government is aware of the potential and power that BTS has as a global movement and cross-cultural influencing entity.

1.2.3 BTS and their fans ARMY

The official fan name for BTS is ARMY, which stands for Adorable Representative MC for Youth, and it is one of the largest fan groups today (Tina & Utami, 2020). ARMY operates through social media and has no central leadership but has successfully coordinated and managed various projects (McLaren & Dal Yong, 2020), such as various online and offline events such as pop-up stores parties, producing BTS-related content, creating popular BTS labels, collective voting on music charts such as Billboard, and various forms of charity work (Parc & Kim, 2020). Lee (2019) highlights the unique relationship between the BTS and ARMY, which has been established through social networks and internet platforms since their emergence. Lee (2019) argues that ARMY supports BTS, not because it is a K-pop band but because their music sends a meaningful and positive message to their followers. Such fans will be inspired and willing to share this message

with others. Moreover, because of all the minority elements that the BTS has, such as non-English, Asian, and boy bands, these fans have the opportunity to consider the experiences of other social minorities, such as discrimination by their peers for enjoying different musical tastes or prejudice because of their ethnicity. This has led them to support BTS and other charitable activities in many ways (Lee, 2019).

1.3 Research purpose and objectives

This dissertation takes BTS as a case study and tries to understand and analyse this tourism phenomenon by collecting BTS-related information shared by users on the social networking platform. To achieve this research aim, this dissertation seeks to address the following research questions in the context of pop culture tourism.

Question 1: How are BTS fan tourism activities influenced by their place attachment?

Question 2: What implications does place attachment have on sustaining the competitiveness of the tourism destination?

1.4 Research paradigm and method

1.4.1 Research paradigm

The subject of this dissertation focuses on a specific group of people, and, as interpretivist methods are primarily applicable to research that focuses on human subjects, the goal of understanding the subjective meanings of people in the field under study is crucial (Goldkuhl, 2012). Therefore, an interpretivist paradigm is deemed to be appropriate. Research in the interpretivist paradigm more often uses qualitative methods to gain a deeper understanding of the research subject (Gray, 2021). Therefore, this dissertation adopts qualitative research as the primary research method to observe and evaluate in order to capture the meaning of the phenomenon of tourism activity.

1.4.2 Research Method

This dissertation is a qualitative study that uses the research method of Netnography to understand the subjective and emotional reality of internet users by obtaining information about their shared experiences (Kozinets, 2002). Content analysis and thematic analysis were the methods adopted for data analysis, as the data had information such as images and text. Instagram was the main source of data for this dissertation because Instagram users can not only upload photos but also text descriptions, and the coordinate function can mark the location of places, which qualifies for the study and provides authenticity.

1.5 Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation provides a literature review in Chapter 2, covering the theoretical concepts of K-pop tourism, fan consumption, place attachment, and destination sustainability. Chapter 3 describes the choice and process that guided the research methodology for this dissertation. The findings of the data analysis are presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 discusses the sustainability of pop-culture tourism destination competitiveness. The dissertation draws conclusions and insights in Chapter 6.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This literature review will begin with an overview of pop culture tourism in section 2.2, focusing on K-pop tourism within Korean Wave tourism, in order to better understand the context in which this study is situated. Section 2.3 will elaborate on the tourism activities and consumption psychology of fans as tourists. In section 2.4, Place attachment-related concepts are introduced in detail in this section as the theoretical basis for doing this dissertation. The relevant aspects of the impact of Place attachment on the sustainability of destinations are explored in section 2.5, mainly from the perspective of destination competitiveness. The literature review concludes with the conceptual framework, which is discussed in section 2.6.

2.2 Popular culture tourism

As the context of this dissertation is popular culture, this section introduces popular culture and its significance for tourism research. This dissertation focuses on Korean popular culture, and in this section the concept and implications for tourism destinations are addressed.

2.2.1 Popular culture and tourism

Popular culture, or pop culture, encompasses entertainment in the form of films, soap operas, music, literature, television programmes and pop stars (Beeton et al., 2013). Numerous studies have demonstrated that pop culture is an effective tool for attracting tourists to a destination, promoting economic impact (Connell, 2005; Hugo et al, 2001; Riley et al., 1998; Tooke & Baker, 1996) and reinforcing a positive image of the destination (Connell, 2005; Crockett & Wood, 2002; Lee & Bai, 2016; Lee et al., 2015). In relation to pop culture tourism research, tourism associated with film and television has generated much research over the last few decades (Connell, 2012). Hudson and Ritchie (2006) show that almost all destinations could be more active in developing film tourism. Film-induced tourism accounts for a large proportion of the tourism industry and is showing rapid growth (Beeton, 2005). Film tourism in popular culture tourism has been widely recognised as a driving force in the development of tourism in many destinations, and this tourism specifically discusses the impact of film, television and video on tourism (Beeton, 2005). The impact of film tourism has been investigated from a number of perspectives, including visitor experience, destination image, travel motivation, future behavioural intentions, destination branding and resident response (Busby & Klug, 2001; Busby et al., 2003; Busby & O'Neill, 2006; O'Connor & Bolan, 2008; Roesch, 2009; Ward & O'Regan, 2009). In addition, celebrities appearing in films or television series can be effective marketing tools for the media to induce visitors to promote

specific destinations (Yen & Teng, 2015). These tools provide an opportunity for viewers to imagine what they actually see, do, touch, feel or think in a particular destination (Crouch et al., 2005). The same applies to Korean pop culture, which is widely recognised in a variety of countries and regions through mass media entertainment, such as dramas, films, and music (Lee & Bai, 2016). This trend is known as Hallyu.

2.2.2 Hallyu phenomenon

The Hallyu phenomenon represents the rapid growth of the Korean cultural industry and its export of pop culture, a transnational phenomenon that gained popularity initially in Asia and then outside of Asia (Dal Yong, 2018). Hallyu is generally understood as Korean cultural products such as dramas, films, music, and food (Kim et al., 2009). Hallyu is a Chinese term 韩流, translated as Korean Wave, which is a popular phenomenon of Korean popular culture overseas (Lee & How, 2021). The Hallyu phenomenon began in the early 21st century when a number of popular Korean television dramas and films introduced tourists to places to visit, such as the popular Korean television series *Winter Sonata* (Han & Lee, 2008). In 2020, the Korean film *Parasite* became the first non-English language film to win the Oscar for Best Picture, further throwing the limelight on Korea.

With the spin-off effects of the Hallyu phenomenon, the impact of Hallyu celebrities (Korean Pop Artists), which saw an increased in product loyalty (Kim et al., 2014), national image (Kim & Nam, 2016; Lee et al., 2015), and intention to revisit Korea (Yen & Teng, 2015), has been examined in existing literature. The Hallyu culture has played an important role in increasing international tourism to Korea as well as creating a positive impression of Korea as a tourist destination (Hogarth, 2013; Jung, 2006; Kim et al., 2007; Lee et al., 2008; Yu et al., 2012). The Hallyu phenomenon also reflects the fact that the increase in the number of international tourists visiting Korea may be due to increased interest and attachment to Korean celebrities and mass media programmes (Lee et al., 2008), which means that the demand for Korean tourism from Hallyu fans is closely related to their attachment (Wong & Lai, 2015).

2.2.3 K-pop and Tourism

Korean pop culture is increasingly flourishing today, with K-pop in particular rapidly growing its fan base around the world. K-pop has become a truly global phenomenon thanks to its unique blend of addictive melodies, flamboyant arrangements and production values, and endless appeal (Romano, 2018). The influence of K-pop has become a topic of worldwide interest in recent years and has been discussed by different scholars (Boman, 2020; Romano, 2018; Zhao, 2021). K-pop is the South Korean term for popular music, and K-pop slowly entered the international scene in the late 1990s (Ryu et al., 2020). Initially, K-pop was mainly popular in East Asia (Boman, 2020); however, over time, K-pop's popularity has expanded beyond East Asia and continues to grow in

Europe, North and South America, and Africa, gaining a large and loyal fan base (Zhao, 2021). Following the huge success of ‘Gangnam Style’, K-pop videos were viewed over 2 billion times in 2012 (Madichie, 2013). Korean singer Psy, who performed the song, went on to become Korean’s ambassador in October 2012 (Cha, 2013). Recently, BTS has emerged as an even greater success story, bringing K-pop unprecedented international attention. It has the largest fan base in the world (Tina & Utami, 2020), which is not only global but also extremely loyal (Lee, 2019; McLaren & Dal Yong, 2020; Parc & Kim, 2020).

The overseas expansion of K-pop has seen a chain reaction along with the enhancement of the national image. Many Korean industries have benefited from K-pop’s overseas expansion and the Korean Wave culture (Eom et al., 2019). Thus, the continued expansion of K-pop in overseas markets has had a positive impact, not only on the development of the Korean music industry but also on the national tourism economy (Seo & Kim, 2020). Hallyu tourism is closely linked to the national image of Korea, promoting a positive national image, which is then linked to the behavioural intentions of tourists (Lee & Lockshin, 2011). Music events by K-pop artists are also well recognised. They are considered to be positive economic and social drivers of the tourism sector (Richards & Wilson, 2004; Soria et al., 2014).

Beyond its success and expansion in recent years, the popularity of K-pop has increased the overall national brand value of Korea (Kim et al., 2018). It has been stated that those who enjoy Korean pop culture have positive attitudes towards Korean products and are more likely to have positive attitudes towards Korea (Kim et al., 2009; Lee & Kim, 2020; Yu et al., 2012). Therefore, scholars consider K-pop to be a sustainable strategic national industry worth cultivating (Oh & Park, 2013).

2.3 Fandom and tourism

The focus of this dissertation is mainly on tourists influenced by popular culture, with many of them exhibiting fan identities while participating in tourism activities in the destination. It is therefore the purpose of this section to introduce the concept of fandom and to elaborate on the tourist activities and consumer psychology associated with fandom.

2.3.1 Fandom

Fans are those who have “a focused interest in a particular topic, subject, or person” (Thorne, 2011, p. 161), while fandom is a subculture of like-minded people, “typified by a feeling of closeness to others with the shared interest” (Thorne & Bruner, 2006, p. 53). Fandoms are an increasingly relevant part of post-modern society, creating communities and fostering the development of a

shared interest that is as relevant as part of creating communities that foster social interaction and a sense of belonging based on shared passions (Meyer & Tucker, 2007). Celebrity fandom has been described as a state of profound attention and flattery towards celebrities, manifested in emotions, attitudes and behaviours (Lee & Scott, 2009). Two important aspects of fandom are perceived group membership and communication with other members (Tsay-Vogel & Sanders, 2017).

This reflects the extreme participatory and social nature of fandom, and Jenkins (2012) has dissected the participatory culture of television fans in his book *Textual Poachers*, noting that fans of cultural products not only read or watch it but are also happy to adapt and recreate the original texts to their own wishes and preferences. Digital technologies have enabled this communication and connection beyond the shared interests of individuals around the world (Hillman et al., 2014; Whiteman & Metivier, 2013), allowing phenomena of popular culture, including films, television series, books, music, and celebrities, to reach new forms of appreciation and importance.

2.3.2 Fandom activity in tourism

In research on fandom and tourism, it has been shown that fan culture and fan bases drive special interest tourism (Gyimóthy et al., 2015), where objects of interest can facilitate travel to a specific destination (Agarwal et al., 2018). Interacting with fans who share the same interests in places specifically visited for this purpose can often promote a sense of social and collective identity and act as a contributor to one's social identity – this can be considered a form of serious leisure (Gyimóthy et al., 2015; Stebbins, 2001). Serious leisure is considered to be when people systematically pursue a core activity that is amateur, hobby or voluntary, and they find it so fulfilling and interesting that they begin their leisure career centred on acquiring and expressing their particular combination of skills, knowledge, and experience (Stebbins, 2006).

Gyimóthy et al. (2015) concurred with the serious leisure perspective, arguing that the more fans identify with the theme, the more likely they are to engage in travel. Events also play an important role in fandom. Fans express emotional involvement and belonging to a group or collective, where shared experiences are important (Connell & Meyer, 2009; Gyimóthy et al., 2015). Attending events or gathering in fan-related spaces both interacts with people who share similar interests and provides a sense of belonging to the fan community (Gyimóthy et al., 2015). These occasions add a unique temporal component to the often-digital reality of being a fan (Booth, 2010), thus providing the opportunity to expand one's community involvement into a face-to-face context (Couldry, 1998). As such, fan participation in events can also be conceptualised as pilgrimage (Connell, 2012; Erdely & Breede, 2017).

Fans have been shown to actively participate in tourist spaces by using visible fan expressions (Waysdorf & Reijnders, 2016), and also by engaging in mental activities such as experiencing a closer connection to their respective fan universes (Kington, 2015). Thus, they facilitate the

emergence of a variety of mental states and processes. A few types of interaction and engagement have been identified, namely role-play (Waysdorf & Reijnders, 2016), exchange of tourist information (Roesch, 2009), and recreation of scenes through props and place settings (Kim, 2010), but these have also been shown to influence visitor satisfaction with destinations, revisiting, and recommendation (Kim, 2012). These displays of fan presence, expressed through interaction and engagement, are directly and interdependently linked to the fan's perceived sense of community (Alderman et al., 2012).

2.3.3 Celebrity Attachment and Fan Consumption

Several studies have been conducted to show that the relationship between K-pop idols and their fans goes beyond traditional celebrity attachment. For fans, attachment to idols creates an intimate and rich emotional connection and a sense of belonging to the idol (Su et al., 2011). This means that fans not only have admiration and love for their idols but also strive to develop intimate relationships with them to enrich this emotion. There is an emotional connection between fans and their idols, and this emotional interaction does not necessarily constitute a substantive experience, which does not limit the experience to fan meetings or concerts (Hinerman, 2002). The stronger a fan's attachment to their idol, the more inclined they are to maintain a closer relationship with their idol (Kim, 2012). Common ways of connecting with idols include using various forms of communication, buying idol-related merchandise, and of course, going on experiential trips to places related to idols, such as idol-run restaurants, idol agencies, and concert halls (Wong & Lai, 2015). Thus, connections between tourists and idol-related places based on celebrity attachments also become possible, and as a result of such emotional attachments. However, it is possible that the views and attitudes of fans or tourists towards idol-related places will change (Hao & Ryan, 2013). Furthermore, these attachments of their idols can be transferred to products or places associated with them because of the symbolism attached by fans (McCracken, 1989).

According to McCracken's (1989) meaning transfer theory, symbolic meanings attached to a celebrity are transferred to a celebrity-endorsed product; therefore, the audience's positive image of the celebrity may be peripherally transferred to the celebrity-endorsed product (Lee et al., 2008). Previous research has established that strong engagement with a celebrity enhances interest in the destination, ultimately leading to behavioural intentions (Kim, 2012; Yen & Teng, 2013). Thus, celebrity attachment has a positive impact on consumer attitudes and behaviours. For example, Barbas (2016), through his study of Hollywood movie fans, points out that Hollywood is the dream factory for fans and their admiration for celebrities is an important part of Hollywood culture. Fans develop a strong admiration and attachment to the personalities of celebrities, actively imitating the way their idols dress, eat and make choices about lifestyle items, and in doing so, bring themselves as close to their ideal selves as possible (Hackley et al., 2015).

2.3.4 K-pop celebrities as destination ambassadors

Celebrity involvement has a positive impact on destination image. Yen and Croy (2016) state that celebrity worship mediates between celebrity engagement and destination image, and that an improved destination image attracts more inbound tourists. The effect of employing pop celebrities as destination promoters is to potentially improve the image of the destination, thus increasing the likelihood of tourists visiting the destination (Glover, 2009). Therefore, as destination promoters, pop stars are spokespeople for their home countries and are introduced to potential customers in the same way as product endorsements.

From a marketing perspective, pop stars have unique personalities and lifestyles that reflect the underlying meaning of their artwork and achievements (McCracken, 1989). When a pop star endorses a product, their review (positive or negative) is transferred to the product (McCracken, 1989) and likewise for places that a pop star has been to. Associating a pop star with a destination is effective when the personality and lifestyle of the pop star fits the destination. Thus, by using celebrity-endorsed advertisements rather than traditional ones, a destination can receive far more positive feedback from visitors (van der Veen, 2008). Destination image involves the cognitive and affective components of a place, and a positive destination image not only strengthens the cognitive but also the affective image of a destination for visitors (Prayag & Ryan, 2012). Celebrity involvement enhances both the cognitive and affective image of a destination for fans, and this emotional response to a physical or social place is also a manifestation of place attachment (Chen, 2018). Therefore, this place attachment derived from the worship of celebrity is a key aspect of tourists engaging in K-pop tourism activities at the destination.

2.4 Place Attachment

The attachment of fans to their idols creates an emotional connection with the destination, and this emotional connection involves the fans' choice of tourism activities and their attitude towards the destination (Zhou et al., 2021). This section introduces the theory of place attachment as the main theoretical basis for this dissertation, emphasising the importance of emotional connection, including the concepts of place dependence and place identity.

2.4.1 The concept of place attachment

Emotional connection is a central feature of place attachment. Relationships are formed with a place when tourists develop emotion, symbolism, and connection with a specific destination (Chen & Phou, 2013; Morais & Lin, 2010; Wester-Herber, 2004). Halpenny (2006) suggests that based on the promotion of the destination by friends, family, or mass media around destination, tourists are likely to form a sense of attachment with the destination before their initial visits. However, other scholars assert that place attachment represents an individual's interaction with a specific place, and

that this particular place is a place that has been visited and experienced by the tourist (Kwenye & Freimun, 2016).

Since the study of Williams and Roggenbuck (1989), place attachment has been associated with people and place, based on the individual's expression of feelings, perceptions of place and practices with place. Up until now, it has been the subject of extensive discussion among researchers in various fields such as environment, human geography, and tourism marketing (Theodorakis et al., 2009). The concept of place attachment was derived from the influential attachment theory in psychology and the theory of place in geography (Ram et al., 2016). Attachment is considered a relatively stable personality trait, and attachment theory is widely used to explain and predict consumer behaviour (Chen et al., 2015). Tuan (1974) first linked the representative attachment theory to the well-known theory of place in geography, where he found a specific attachment relationship between people and certain places and referred to it as "Topophiia". Subsequently, Relph (1976) introduced the concept of sense of place and Steele (1981) argued that a sense of place is a product of the interaction between people and places, an experience created by places, and given by people, and that in a way, people create places and places cannot exist independently of people.

The focus of place attachment has been on the physical contact and interaction between the individual and the place. However, Blake (2002) and Farnum et al. (2005) argue that if a place conveys certain symbolic and cultural meanings, tourists can establish certain emotional connections with it, regardless of whether they have visited it or not. Individuals can also be motivated to develop strong emotional attachments to places through secondary rather than direct sources of information (Beckley et al., 2007). This also implies that individuals sometimes do not have a direct emotional connection to a physical 'place', but rather an emotional connection to an image of the place (Stedman, 2002). Thus, the concept of place attachment describes the relationship between people and places on one hand and emphasises the emotional connection between people and places on the other.

2.4.2 Place dependence and Place identity

This section reviews the theoretical construct following place attachment. According to Wynveen et al. (2012) and Lee et al. (2015), place attachment involves the study of emotional attachment and social connectedness to place identity and place dependence. Although there is consensus on the definition of place and its distinction from related spatial concepts (Low & Altman, 1992; Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977), there is little consensus on how to define and measure the connections between people and place, specifically place attachment, place identity, and place dependence.

While the definition and measurement of these concepts are unclear (Kyle et al., 2004), most of the literature on place attachment divides it into two dimensions: place dependence and place identity.

Williams and Roggenbuck (1989) were the first to point out in their article about the two-dimensional structure of place attachment, which encompasses place attachment and place identity, and this statement was also adopted by Allan (2016), Lee et al., (2012), Prayag and Ryan (2012), and Tsai (2012). Place identity refers to the unconscious or conscious thoughts that individuals form about a destination, given their personal attitudes, values, preferences, and behavioural intentions to achieve emotional attachment and belonging to a place (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001), whilst place dependence refers to an individual's attachment to a place through special activities and events (Stokols, 1981). Place dependence deepens over time as the experience of place deepens. There are specific functions and conditions that the chosen destination offers to satisfy the individual's needs and goals compared to other similar places (Williams & Vaske, 2003). When place dependence and place identity disappear from a place, fans tend to exhibit the psychology of displacement (Fullilove, 1996). This loss of place is often accompanied by a loss of self, as the individual or community dislocates from the place of its former identity, disrupting the psychological relationship between place and identity (Fullilove, 1996). This dissertation will use these constructs to focus on BTS fan tourism behaviour.

2.4.3. Placemaking in Place Attachment

Placemaking is integral to a place (Friedmann, 2011). Unlike place attachment, placemaking activates the act of active human efforts and carefully crafting places that could bring about improvement to places (Seamon, 2013). Placemaking goes through a process of planning, designing, managing, and programming spaces to create cultural, social, economic, and ecological patterns of activity that lead to a better quality of life, a thriving economy, and a healthy environment (Arefi, 2014; Friedmann, 2011; Sorensen & Funck 2007). This embodies an emotional or affective bond between people and place, and pays close attention to the local community, a meaning-making process that transforms spaces into places (Paulsen, 2019). The undertaking of placemaking could be by individual members of the community (Sorensen & Funck, 2007) and in the context of this study, the undertaking of fans, idols, or the local community – the principle of which alludes somewhat to the concept of place attachment.

Placemaking is deemed to be a sustainable approach for transforming urban and public spaces to meet development goals, and it also has the potential to contribute to the happiness and overall wellbeing of the community (Sorensen & Funck, 2007). The next section reviews the sustainability and competitiveness of establishing place attachments in a destination.

2.5. Sustainability, Competitiveness and Place Attachment

As the second research question in this dissertation is a discussion on the perspective of place attachment on a destination's pop-culture tourism sustainability, this section reviews the relevant

sustainability concepts that tie back to the impact of place attachment on destination competitiveness, tourist revisit, and pro-environmental behaviour.

According to Yilmaz (2008), tourism is an ever-changing industry that requires competition in order to survive. Destination competitiveness is in part related to the attractiveness of a destination, the tourism experience it offers and its ability to provide goods and services that perform better than other destinations (Dwyer & Kim, 2003). In this sense, the concept of place attachment is critical to destination competitiveness. The higher the degree to which the destination experience promotes place attachment, the higher the level of word-of-mouth promotion of the destination by visitors, so an understanding of the determinants of place attachment can provide important input into the development of strategies to improve destination competitiveness.

Based on previous research on K-pop and tourism, a country's national image influences tourism-related attributes (Mercille, 2005; Stepchenkova & Morrison, 2008), as well as the decisions of potential tourists regarding purchase, investment, change of residence and travel (Kotler & Gertner, 2002). This implies that the K-pop fever can contribute to sustainable economic growth in the Korean cultural industry while also providing quality jobs (Kang, 2019). Specifically, under its national brand image, the overseas expansion of K-pop culture has had a spin-off effect, increasing people's goodwill towards Korean products, language, food, fashion, and industries such as healthcare and tourism (Kim et al., 2014; Seo & Kim, 2020).

Stakeholders' attachment to a place is critical to the sustainable development of their tourism system. Creating a sustainable tourism system requires maximising the economic benefits from the existing tourism system and maintaining the economic resilience of this system (Biggs et al., 2012; Dwyer, 2016, 2018; Hall, 2014). The idea of optimising existing tourism systems is to create more profitable, stable, and resilient entities for sustainable growth (Gössling et al., 2016). This further requires all stakeholders to be proactively involved in the development and operation of the system (Liu, 2003). As reviewed in section 2.4.3, this could be placemaking effort by the community or, in the context of this study, the K-pop community.

Tourist satisfaction and intention to revisit influence their decision-making of destination, which are key factors reflecting the competitiveness of destination tourism (Ramseook-Munhurrun et al., 2015). Based on Louriero's (2014) study of tourist revisit and place attachment, it is evident that tourism experience, place attachment, recommendations, and revisit intentions are related. A higher level of place attachment increases tourists' intentions to revisit and recommend the destination, as their behaviour is influenced by their satisfaction and enjoyment of the place they visited (Zeng et al., 2021).

The impact of place attachment on the sustainability of pop-culture tourism is also evidenced in terms of the preservation of cultural heritage and pro-environmental behaviour. Ramkissoon et al. (2013) show that place attachment has a positive and significant impact on the pro-environmental behavioural intentions of community park visitors. Hawke (2011) demonstrates how heritage provides local visitors with a sense of pride and self-esteem, which not only promotes a destination's unique character but also perpetuates cultural inheritance and preservation through the support of place identity. Davis et al. (2008) reveal how local communities in Taiwan view heritage and their perceptions of its importance as it reflects and builds identity, which contributes to the cultural sustainability of the community and provides a sense of place. However, this study contends that tourists like K-pop fans can also play a similar role in sustaining tourism to a place through their attachment to it.

2.6. Conceptual framework of pop-culture tourism

This dissertation builds on the above literature and considers that place attachment influences fans' leisure activities on the activities they engage in the host destinations. A conceptual framework of pop-cultural tourism is illustrated in Figure 1.

Firstly, popular culture is the research context of this dissertation, and K-pop idols are considered popular culture as they are the primary motivations for fandom to visit places and engage in tourism activities, being the emotional source of place attachment.

Then, fandom generates place attachment to destinations where these tourists engage in various tourist activities. For these tourism activities, this dissertation will mainly interpret them in terms of place dependence and place identity. Place dependence, as defined in this dissertation, is a functional attachment, meaning that the public facilities and special resources of a place meet the specific needs of the user, such as idol concert venues and pop-up shops that attract fans. These places have a direct functional connection with the idols themselves and their activities. Place identity, as defined in this dissertation, is a mental attachment, a combination of an individual's intentional or unintentional thoughts about an objective environment of the place, and a combination of attitudes, preferences, feelings, purposes, meanings, and behavioural tendencies to achieve a sense of emotional attachment and belonging to that place, such as visiting a restaurant visited by the idol.

The first research question of this dissertation examines fan activity preferences using the place attachment theory. Building on this, the second research question relates to the perspective of destination competitiveness and further discusses the impact of visitors' destination preferences on the sustainable tourism development of the same area. Since place attachment has cultural and

emotional effects on sustaining the competitiveness of tourism destinations, the significance of pop-culture tourists' behaviours and activities will be further explored from the perspective of cultural sustainability.

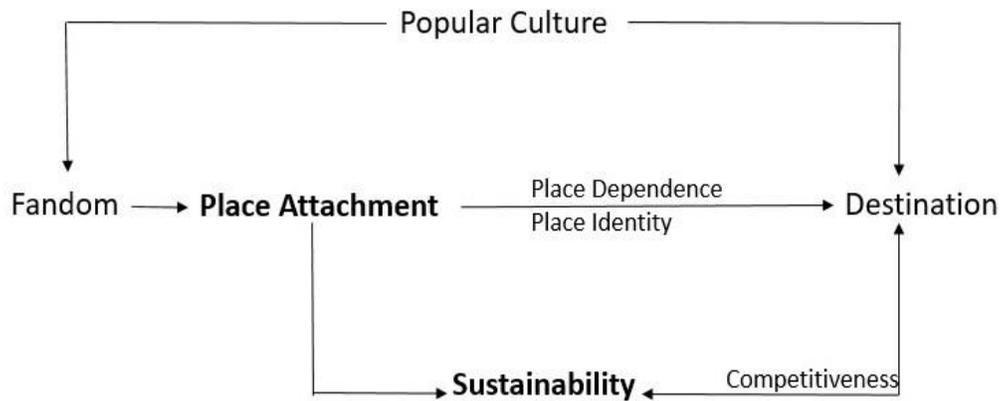


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of pop-cultural tourism dominated by place attachment

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological choices that guided this dissertation study in order to answer the two research questions on place attachment in the context of pop culture tourism presented in section 1.3:

Research question 1: How are BTS fan tourism activities influenced by their place attachment?

Research question 2: What implications does place attachment have on sustaining the competitiveness of the tourism destination?

Unlike Korean films and dramas, the main source of K-pop's continued influence is social networking services (SNS) (Yoon & Park, 2016). Global K-pop fans often make recommendations and spread information about K-pop idols on social networks, such as Facebook and Instagram (i.e. SNS citizenship behaviour), which has also led to an explosion in the number of fans (Hoang, 2020). Moreover, social media has enabled K-pop artists to connect and build relationships with their fans, resulting in a borderless and passionate fan base (Yoon, 2019). Therefore, the research

methodology adopted for this dissertation entailed utilising secondary data from social media content hosted by BTS fans.

In order to answer these two questions, this dissertation uses the research method of Netnography to collect data. Following on from section 3.2, this chapter first provides a description of the research paradigm and research methods used in this qualitative study. It then describes the process of using Netnography in this dissertation, including entering the Instagram platform to select the study sample, using the Purposive Sampling Method for data collection, and the data analysis, which consists of Content analysis, Visual analysis, and Thematic analysis.

3.2 Research paradigms

Research paradigms provide guidance on the interrelationship of research philosophy and the methods applied in research (Gray, 2021). A research paradigm is an established model, of which there are many, and these paradigms include all that is relevant to scientific research, such as a common worldview, basic scientific theories, and research methods, and provide justification for researchers to use these methods to make observations (Bryman, 2016).

The two paradigms, positivism and interpretivism, are usually the basis of research. Positivism is based on an objective stance, it advocates research that is conducted by exploring relationships between variables, and it is validated through the scientific method rather than based on personal experience and knowledge (Scotland, 2012). By contrast, the interpretivist paradigm is based on the absence of absolute objectivity, it is relatively flexible, focuses more on the perspectives of the subjects under study and emphasises the differences in knowledge of individual participants (Scotland, 2012). Interpretivism holds that there is no uniform, completely objective world, but rather that objective facts must be interpreted and reconstructed by individuals with human consciousness, and that only by doing so can human behaviour in society be understood (Goodson & Phillimore, 2004). The hermeneutic approach is primarily applicable to studies that focus on human subjects, and within the Interpretivism paradigm, the goal of understanding the subjective meanings of people in the field under study is crucial (Goldkuhl, 2012). Gray (2021) explains that research based on the positivist paradigm usually involves quantitative methods, such as surveys and questionnaires, in order to ensure reliability, whereas research based on the interpretive paradigm more often uses qualitative methods. For this dissertation, the object of research is human activity, i.e. the phenomenon of pop culture and tourism; therefore, an interpretivist paradigm is appropriate. The dissertation takes an interpretivist paradigm and explores the behaviour of K-pop fans as a result of the pop culture tourism phenomenon.

3.3 Ontology and epistemology of research

According to Gray (2021), ontology refers to the study of existence and can be understood as the way of knowing how the world exists, and it is usually divided into two categories: realism and relativism. Realist ontologies are more relevant to the social world and view the world from an external, objective standpoint; however, relativists believe that reality can be constructed in a variety of ways, depending on the views of different individuals (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Longest associated with the positivist paradigm is objectivist epistemology, which sees reality as existing outside of humans and asserts that research should be based on an extremely scientific approach and the use of scientific vocabulary (Gray, 2021). By contrast, constructivist epistemology rejects the view that truth and meaning always exist in the external world (Scotland, 2012). This epistemology represents the view that truths are constructed by the researcher rather than being discovered (Gray, 2021).

According to Scotland (2012), the ontological position of Interpretivism is relativist, which holds that reality is subjective and varies between individuals. Reality is personally constructed by consciousness and emerges when consciousness engages with objects of meaning that have not yet been discovered (Ling, 2017; Scotland, 2012). From an interpretive standpoint, epistemology refers to how knowledge is acquired subjectively based on real phenomena whose meaning exists and awaits discovery through the interaction of one's consciousness with the world (Scotland, 2012). This dissertation applies interpretivism epistemology: the phenomenon that travellers' perceptions and attitudes towards destinations are subjective, that travellers who are fans follow their idols and have attachment episodes to and visit specific places with associated meanings, and that by reviewing the literature, findings from the literature can be combined with the secondary data to explain and support inferences about the phenomenon under study.

3.4 Research methods

According to Gray (2014), research methods are a way of collecting data and include both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Quantitative research typically involves highly specialised methods, particularly those that express results mathematically and statistically, and is often used to test theories and hypotheses about the world within an objective framework (O'Dwyer & Bernauer, 2013). Qualitative studies seek depth rather than breadth; extracting data from a large sample of the entire population, they require in-depth knowledge and information about a focus group (Ambert et al., 1995). As such, they are best suited to research questions that require in-depth insight and understanding, particularly when dealing with interpretive concepts. It is therefore the behaviour in the context of the study, and arguably even the interpretation of the context, that qualitative researchers will study as the fundamental process to be studied (Heppner et al., 1999, p. 246).

Based on the Interpretivism paradigm, this dissertation takes a qualitative research approach. The object of this study is a specific group of people, and the data collected focus on the key aspects of the conceptual framework (see Figure 1 in section 2.6). This included the analysis of the different places they have visited, and the travel behaviours they demonstrate through their social media posts during and after their visit to the places of attraction. The aim of the dissertation is to analyse the content of different travel locations shared on the internet in order to understand the meaning of popular culture to the locations visited. Qualitative research focuses on a small but concentrated sample to generate information or knowledge about a specific research case (Neuendorf, 2009). In this process, the researcher tends to use empirical observation and content analysis to achieve an understanding of the subject of the study, and through this understanding, an accurate grasp of the meaning of human social life (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Therefore, the researcher needs to observe and understand these travel behaviours through information about specific places, including images and texts shared by fans on social media. Therefore, the choice of a qualitative research approach was appropriate for this dissertation.

3.4.1 Netnography

This dissertation employs Netnography, an online research method for ethnographic research on the internet that is rooted in anthropological and ethnographic analysis and is a qualitative and interpretive research method that applies traditional ethnographic techniques to social media (Kozinets, 2017). Netnography is faster, simpler, and more cost-effective than traditional ethnography (Maulana & Eckhardt, 2007). Netnography is also more descriptive than traditional ethnography because it provides information about consumers' use of the internet to share their experiences, and express their subjective reality and emotional reality, which can be used as advice and warnings to other consumers' warnings and suggestions (Heinonen & Medberg, 2018; Narayan et al., 2010). Furthermore, as travellers usually write reviews after their visit, this method is considered an appropriate way to observe customer experiences (Kozinets, 2002).

This dissertation uses the Netnography, a non-participant online observation method. In the field of hospitality and tourism web statistics, most researchers advocate the use of non-participant observation as a data collection method because it depends on the nature of online statistical research, which does not assess interactions between participants. If a researcher is investigating destination image, reputation behaviour, rating systems or data content, rather than consumer relationships, then there is no need for participatory research (Whalen, 2018). Many researchers use the vast and diverse range of consumer reviews online to analyse information already available, rather than actively participating in online communities through ethnographic principles. For example, Mkono (2012, 2013) used existing marketing information on company websites and reviews on TripAdvisor, VirtualTourist and IgoUgo to examine the authenticity of visitors' dining experiences at Victoria Falls; Woodside and his colleagues used personal online blogs as storyboard

maps to different destination brands images to tell the story of Bologna and Florence (Woodside et al., 2007).

This dissertation follows Kozinet's (2002) six steps to performing Netnography research:

- (i) entrée
- (ii) data collection
- (iii) data analysis
- (iv) data interpretation
- (v) research ethics
- (vi) research representation

The process of this research method is shown in Figure 2.

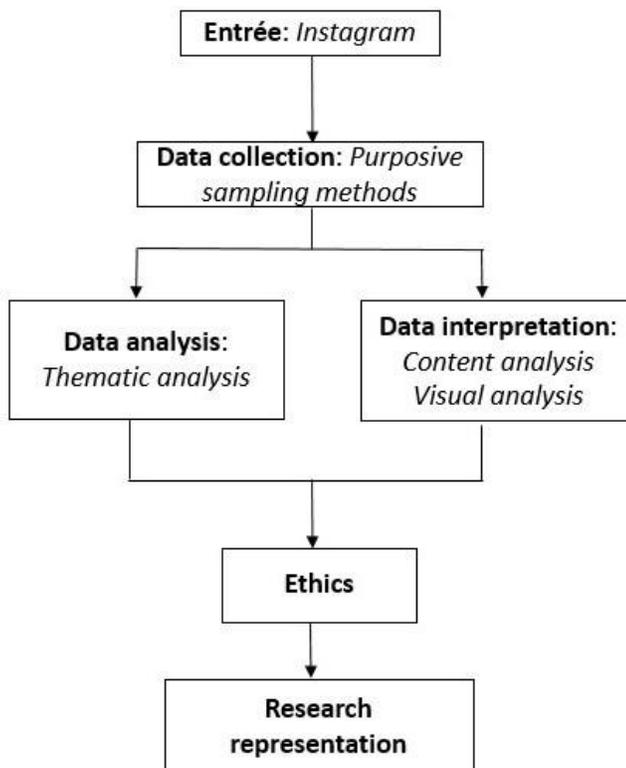


Figure 2. Research method process (illustrated by the author)

3.4.1.1 Entrée: Instagram

This step refers to the researcher's access to the data platform to clarify the objectives of the study. In this dissertation, Instagram is the main data source. For the tourism industry, the rapid development of internet technology is reshaping tourists' behavioural patterns, with social media playing an increasingly important role as a source of information for travellers (Cox et al., 2009). Similarly, online social media is a common way for fans to express their admiration and affection for celebrities. This is because in the virtual world, it is possible for people to communicate across language barriers, geographical boundaries, and physical distances (Tuttle, 2016), and therefore user-generated content (UGC) on social media reflects the emotions and travel preferences of tourists (Buhalis & Foerste, 2015; Woodside et al., 2007).

Instagram is widely considered to be the social media used by tourists to share their valuable experiences through text and visuals (Conti & Heldt Cassel, 2019; Gibbs et al., 2015; Lo & McKercher, 2015). After Facebook, Instagram is the second largest social network in the world (Abbott et al., 2013; Hu et al., 2014). Instagram users can take and upload existing photos by using the built-in camera app, and they can apply different "filters", including geotags, hashtags, tagging Instagram users or web pages, as well as adding text captions under images to make them visual. In addition, images can be shared on the user's Instagram page as well as on other platforms. Users can not only assign tags, captions and geotags to their photos to describe context, emotions and opinions that may not be stated in the photo (Abbott et al., 2013); they can also associate images with specific groups of posts with similar content (Cuomo et al., 2016; Fatanti & Suyadnya, 2015). These features make it particularly easy and engaging for users to communicate with friends and larger groups of users with similar interests (Cuomo et al., 2016; Ting et al., 2015).

This dissertation focuses on the role of place attachment, arguing that platforms like Instagram, which include features such as image text as well as geo-tagging, are appropriate and useful in helping visitors interpret, capture, and express the meaning of particular places in relation to the user's self and lifeworld, and share them in a digital environment (Pearce & Moscardo, 2015).

3.4.1.2 Data collection: Purposive Sampling Method

Data collection refers to the search and identification of online data that is relevant to this dissertation. In this dissertation, the researcher used purposive sampling in order to maximise the availability of highly relevant information. Purposive sampling methods select members based on their knowledge and relationship to the research subject (Freeman et al., 2007). According to Patton (2014), purposive sampling enables researchers to make effective use of limited resources, as it allows for the identification and selection of information-rich cases that make a unique contribution to qualitative research and is one of the key components of qualitative research.

To minimise irrelevant content being sampled, this dissertation combined elements of popular culture and place attachment vocabulary in Instagram’s hashtag search. As of May 2022, the researcher found 188 relevant posts by searching the hashtag #btsplaces on Instagram, which were posted by 35 users. The researchers needed to manually identify and filter information about the content they were sharing. These 35 users were manually identified by reading and familiarising with the data to exclude marketing ads and users with the least relevance to the research topic in order to achieve a purposeful sample and maximise the targeting of users eligible for the study. Finally, a total of 20 users were found to be eligible for the study. The researcher identified the fan identity and ethnic nationality of the users by browsing through the posting content and the profiles of the users. Table 1 presents the profile of 20 users in this dissertation.

As the users were from different countries, this dissertation used Google Translate to obtain key information in the different languages used by the users. As most of the content shared by users is a combination of images and text, and users do not use overly complex expressions in their text, the use of Google web-translated text to extract information, combined with images and geo-referenced markers, was utilised to capture data. Content analysis was conducted, combining the responses of the engaged users with visual analysis of their photos (Serafinelli, 2017).

Table 1: Profile of 20 Users

User	Fan	Nationality or Ethnicity
User A	yes	Korean
User B	no	Korean-Mexican
User C	yes	Filipino
User D	yes	English-using Asians
User E	yes	English-using Caucasians
User F	yes	Russian
User G	yes	English-using Caucasians
User H	yes	Japanese
User I	yes	Vietnamese
User J	yes	Russian
User K	yes	Indian
User L	yes	Filipino
User M	yes	Korean
User N	yes	English-using Asians
User O	yes	Vietnamese
User P	yes	Japanese
User Q	yes	English-using Asians
User R	yes	Indonesian
User S	yes	Filipino
User T	yes	Malaysian

3.4.1.3 Data analysis and interpretation

Content analysis

Content analysis is a method of analysing documents and texts that attempts to quantify content in a systematic and repeatable manner based on pre-defined categories (Bryman, 2016). Content can be text, symbols, images, and pictures, or any other communicative or informative information (Kreuger & Neuman, 2006). This dissertation used media content analysis to examine the data collected from the website. The forms of media content used in this dissertation were online photographs and comments on Instagram. Content analysis was defined by Krippendorff in 1980 as an empirically based method with an exploratory process and predictive intent (Haldrup & Larsen, 2012). By adopting this analytical approach, this dissertation aims to interpret and classify the types of textual patterns published with photographs and provide a more convincing interpretation by allowing for a systematic process of describing places, objects, people and events through text (see Bell, 2011; Haldrup & Larsen, 2012). For example, in this dissertation, the researcher analysed the purpose of the user's visit to the places based on the textual content of the user's postings, and whether the user repeated their visits.

Visual analysis

Kress and Van Leeuwen (2020) see images as a resource for reproduction and demonstrate the laws of cultural production, by which images respond to objects and their relationships in the world. Images can represent existing social relationships between the maker, the viewer, and the image, and without advancing the semiotic analysis of photographs, this interpretive filter was used in the Instagram study to enrich the data analysis with an in-depth comparison of images used in interviews and photo-sharing practices (Serafinelli, 2017). Visual content analysis, as an empirical (observational) and objective process, quantifies visual representations using reliably defined categories (Bell, 2001). It is important to emphasise that images are not the only data considered in this dissertation, as images do not necessarily reflect the meaning of that image. Key aspects of interpreting photographic images are not limited to the qualitative analysis of visual content; analysing the social behaviour to which photographs respond is also key to interpreting meaning (McCrow-Young, 2021). In this dissertation, the researcher combined images and the user's location information to analyse the environment and atmosphere of the place, for example, fans visiting the same place that BTS had visited and imitating BTS's photographic actions. The researcher also identifies the cultural experiences of fans based on visual analysis, such as the Korean hanbok experience.

Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is a method of analysing qualitative data that entails searching across the entire data set to identify, analyse and report on recurring patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is based on categorising data into specific themes and aims to capture the complex meanings of the phenomenon under study (Smith & Osborn, 2015). Thematic analysis has been used to analyse various types of qualitative data, such as those collected from interviews, focus groups, surveys, observations and secondary sources (Saldana, 2021). It is a method of describing data that elicits key characteristics from a large amount of data. The reliability of the data is often emphasised, and although subjective interpretation by the researcher can introduce bias or influence analysis and findings, subjectivity is seen as an important resource rather than a threat to reliability (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

First, the researcher begins by familiarising themselves with the data and re-reading the data. In this dissertation, the researcher had an in-depth knowledge of the popular idols under study (being a recent fan herself) and is familiar with the elements embodied in the data in different venues and what they meant to fans, which helped to identify elements of emotional attachment presented in the data.

Familiarity with the data was followed by the generation of initial codes, which could be done manually or with the help of a computer program, and an extract could be labelled with multiple codes if relevant (Braun & Clarke 2006). This dissertation was coded with the help of *NVivo 12*, and the resulting tables, in Table 2 in the Appendix, show ‘files’ as the number of users involved and ‘references’ as the number of times they were mentioned. Once the researcher coded the entire dataset, the data were inducted by using codes that were related to the themes. All the initial codes were obtained by analysing the content of the original files (see Table 2 in the Appendix). The researcher used an inductive approach to collate the initial codes to produce four initial themes (see Tables 3, 4 and 5 in section 4.2). These four initial themes were attractiveness of places, places visited by fans, fan activities, and destination.

In this dissertation, the researcher used an inductive approach to derive themes from the researcher’s data, some of which were data driven (Varpio et al. 2019). The researcher explicitly derived themes from the coded data, so the themes identified would be more closely related to the original data and reflect the entire dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher also created a ‘miscellaneous’ theme to incorporate those unmastered codes that did not fit well within the existing theme scheme (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

After the above analysis, the final thematic content required by the researcher was obtained. It is worth noting that Clarke and Braun’s (2006) thematic analysis were designed as a recursive process rather than a linear one, in which subsequent steps may prompt the researcher to backtrack to

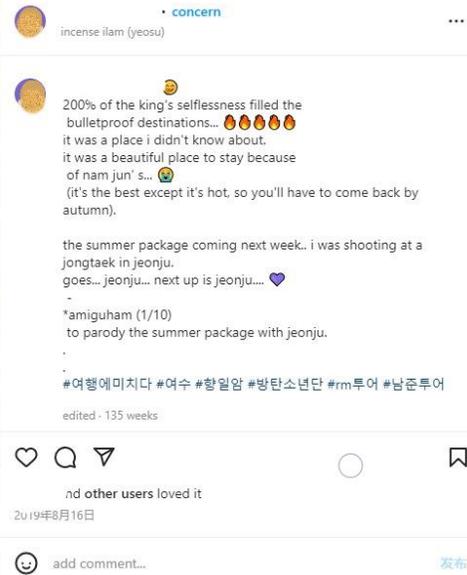
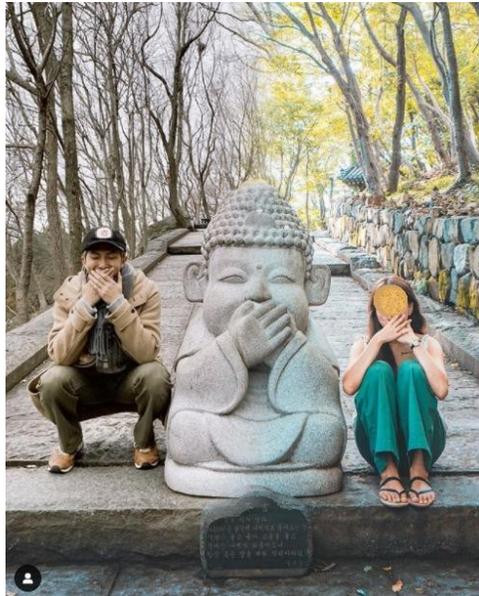
previous steps based on new data or emerging themes that merit further investigation (Kiger & Varpio, 2020).

In conjunction with the conceptual framework of this dissertation, these themes can be understood as follows: ‘Attractiveness of places’ (see Table 3 in section 4.2) indicates the motivation of fans and is a reflection of popular culture, and it is also the meaning of fans visiting these places; ‘Places visited by fans’ (see Table 4 section 4.2) are specific places visited by fans under the effect of place attachment; the theme of ‘Fan activities’ (see Table 5 in section 4.2), which is the tourist activities of fans due to place attachment and fandom psychology, will be used primarily to answer the first research question; ‘Destinations’ is used to complement and explain the geographical area of the user’s tourism activities and is divided into domestic destinations in South Korea (see Table 6 in section 4.2) and international destinations outside South Korea (see Table 7 in section 4.2).

3.4.1.4 Ethical Consideration

With the advent of internet search engines and online photographs, copyright protection is also needed to protect the ownership of material (Tresidder, 2012). This dissertation used secondary data collected from a published travel forum; all data collected are publicly available, users have full control over what is posted, and the data do not contain any personal or confidential information (Mkono, 2013; Wu & Pearce, 2014). In addition, the use of web data in this dissertation is not intended for commercial use but for academic purposes and can therefore be used in accordance with the information in the platform terms. To protect user privacy, this dissertation refers to McCrow-Young’s (2021) approach of manually anonymising images using Photoshop. As shown in Figure 3, the username is cropped out from the post.

Figure 3: An example of manually anonymising images by User A



4. FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings and results of the data analysis of 20 users' data in order to answer the research question 1: How are BTS fan tourism activities influenced by their place attachment?

Section 4.2 presents the overarching themes that emerged from the dissertation. In section 4.2.1, as per the conceptual framework, the findings are analysed and interpreted using the concept of place attachment in order to answer the first research question. Place attachment reflects the emotional connection between people and places (Chen & Phou, 2013; Morais & Lin, 2010; Wester-Herber, 2004). 'Attractiveness of place' reflects the meaning of place, and 'Fans activities' refers to the behaviour of people expressing emotions about a place. A summary of the chapter is given in section 4.3, before leading into the discussion of the second research question on the sustainability of pop culture tourism in Chapter 5.

4.2 Results of data analysis

This section first presents the results of the analysis of the four initial themes that were coded using NVivo 12, and then the final themes obtained through a recursive process (Braun & Clark, 2006) with the initial themes. These results are shown in the Tables 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7. The researcher has

retained the data values generated using Nvivo12 during the initial coding process. These numbers are displayed in the “Files” and “Reference” columns. “Files” indicates the number of users, as all users are individual files in Nvivo12. “Reference” indicates the number of times the topic has been mentioned.

The first three initial themes mentioned in section 3.4.1.3, which are related directly to the final theme, are ‘attractiveness of places’, ‘places visited by fans’ and ‘fan activities’, as shown in Tables 3, 4 and 5.

Table 3: Initial theme: Attractiveness of the place

Attractiveness of the place	Files	Reference
Attracted by fame	1	1
BTS concert	13	25
BTS hometown	4	4
Official Product Purchase	7	11
Fandom event	7	13
BTS visited	12	22
Official media material	19	40
Music consumption	1	1

Table 4: Initial theme: Places visited by fans

Places visited by fans	Files	Reference
Local café & restaurant	11	28
Concert places	13	25
Historic culture heritage	8	8
Rural & natural sites	10	13
City streets	7	15
Public leisure places	7	8
Shopping places	8	16

Table 5: Initial theme: Fans' activities

Fans' activities	Files	Reference
Attend concert	13	25
Consume at café and restaurant	11	30
Attend event	7	12
Korean cultural experience	10	16
Visit exhibition	4	4
Shopping	8	11
Imitation photo	8	16
Scenery appreciation	5	8
Revisit same places	6	14

As the majority of users were non-Korean travellers, as shown in Table 1 in section 3.4.1.2, the researcher considers it necessary to list the cities in which fans conducted their travel activities. Although Korea is primarily the destination to that, other countries and international cities were included in their travel destinations through their postings on social media. As stated in section 3.4.1.3, the initial themes of the destinations play a reference role in interpreting the two research

questions. These destination cities were subdivided into Korean tourism destinations and international tourism destinations, as shown in Tables 6 and 7.

Table 6: Initial theme of Destination in South Korea

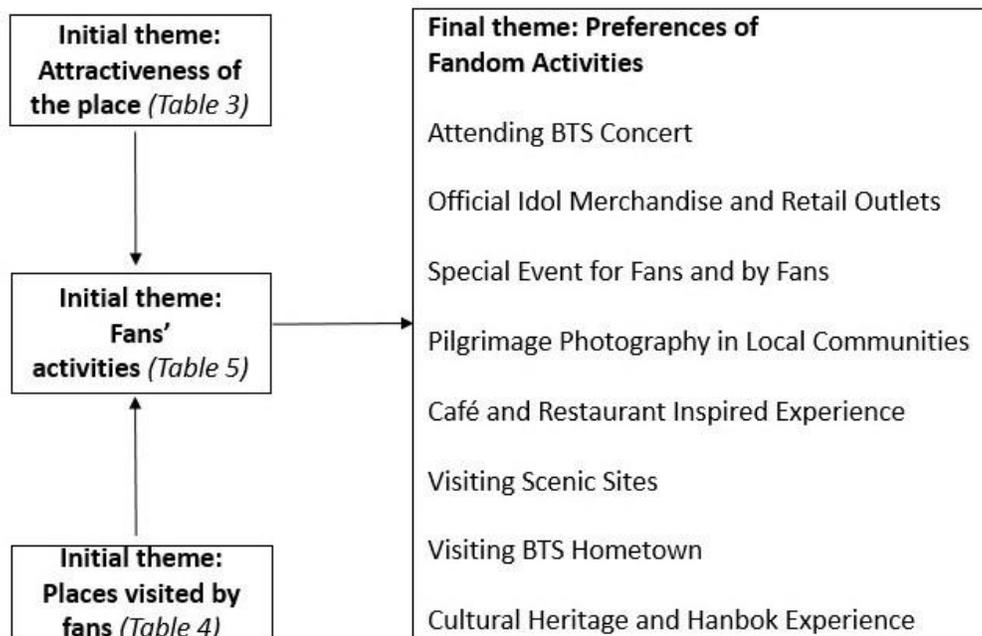
Destination in South Korea	Files	Reference
Seoul	17	36
Busan	6	9
Gangneung	5	6
Gwangju	2	3
Ilsan	2	2
Jecheon	1	1
Jeju	1	1
Yeosu	1	1

Table 7: Initial theme of International Destination

International Destination	Files	Reference
Berlin, Germany	1	1
Las Vegas, US	2	2
London, UK	1	1
Los Angeles, US	1	2
Malta	1	5
Manila, Philippines	2	5
Moscow, Russia	1	3
Singapore	4	5
Thailand	1	1
Tokyo, Japan	1	1

As the first research question was about fan tourism activities, the final theme was based on “Fans’ activities”. Combining the initial themes of ‘Attractiveness of the place’ and ‘Places visited by fans’, “Fans’ activities” produced a more refined final theme. The analysis steps for this final theme are shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: The results of the final theme



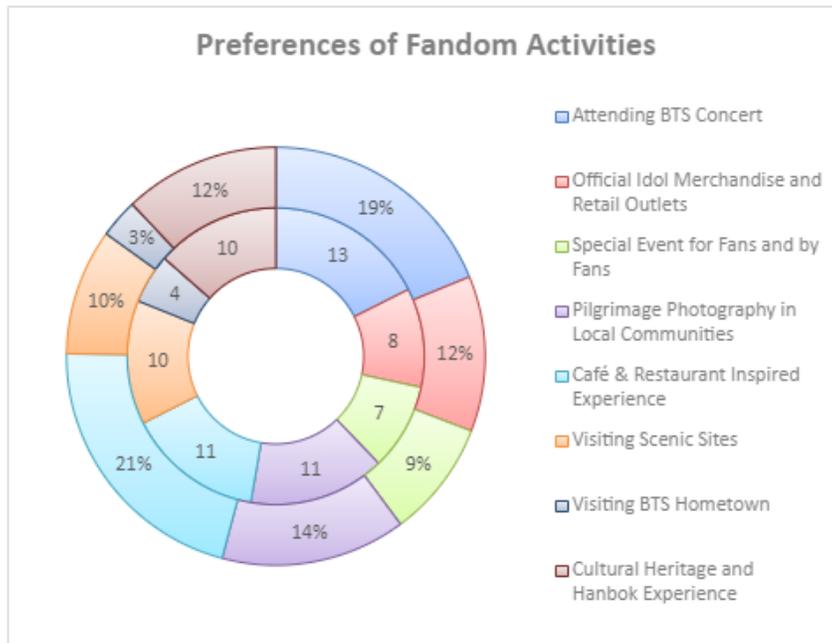
The final themes reflect not only the activities most frequently attended by these 20 users but also the locations they attend and the significance of their participation in these activities. This result is presented in Table 8. To better show the popularity of the different activities, a visualisation of Table 8 is shown in Figure 5. The “reference” represents the number of times the activity was mentioned in percentage form to give a visual representation of fan preferences.

The preferences of the 20 travellers under the influence of place attachment reflect the behavioural characteristics of this tourist market of special interest. When they visit a destination as a result of place attachment, these preferred tourist activities will occur more frequently at the destination.

Table 8: Preferences of Fandom Activities

Preferences of Fandom Activities	File	Reference
Attending BTS Concert	13	25
Official Idol Merchandise and Retail Outlets	8	16
Special Event for Fans and by Fans	7	12
Pilgrimage Photography in Local Communities	11	19
Café- and Restaurant-Inspired Experience	11	28
Visiting Scenic Sites	10	13
Visiting BTS Hometown	4	4
Cultural Heritage and Hanbok Experience	10	16

Figure 5: Visualisation of Preferences of Fandom Activities



4.2.1. Attending BTS Concert

Attending concerts is prominently represented in the fans' preferred travel activities. According to Table 8, in terms of the number of fans, the majority of the fans have attended a concert of their idol. In terms of how often the reference was made to concerts, some of the fans have attended concerts more than once. Since the main job of K-pop idols is music and stage performance (Romano, 2018), attending concerts is a way for fans to directly experience and consume K-pop products. While the appeal of concerts is immense and creates a strong intent for fans to travel, there are also constraints such as time and geographical limitations (Stone, 2009). According to the author, concerts are events that occur at specific times and in specific locations, so unlike an attraction or a place, the event is not fixed, but a temporal attraction.

Based on the representation of fan preference for concerts in the data it is clear that this is a manifestation of place dependence. Place dependence is a functional attachment that reflects the importance of a place in providing characteristics and conditions that support a particular goal or desired activity (Williams & Roggenbuck, 1989). This functional attachment is reflected in the physical characteristics of the area and may increase when the location is close enough to allow frequent visits (Williams & Vaske, 2003). Stadiums or concert venues that host concerts are functional places, and no alternative places to their function were found in the data collected for this dissertation. Fans visit these places for the purpose of enjoying and consuming pop culture experiences, so these venues are ideal places to satisfy this fan activity.

Through observation of content posted by Instagram users, the researcher found that many users take photos of these places where concerts are held and discuss the concerts with other users and express their emotional satisfaction in the comments section. It is worth mentioning that fans also express emotions of place attachment to these stadiums when no concert is happening. For example, User N saw concert-related publicity at the underground station, and although the Instagram text only expresses their idol's passion for the music, it is clear from the coordinated information and the content of the photo that this is a particular expression of emotion towards the concert venue. As shown in Figure 6, the coordinates are the General Sports Complex in Seoul, a place where BTS has held concerts many times. In addition to this, an example of User N shows place dependence in Figure 7, where the location has been verified by the researcher to be the same as in Figure 6. Here, User N expresses her satisfaction with the venue, which for User N is not only a place where her idol has held concerts many times but also a place where she and her idol have shared memories, and the place displays photos representing important memories of her idol at the entrance. While the functionality of the place reflects local dependency, the emotional expression of this User N on Instagram also demonstrates the presence of place identity, which is the emotional attachment to place in the concept of place attachment. More findings on this point are shown in section 4.2.7.

Figure 6: User N saw concert-related publicity at the underground station

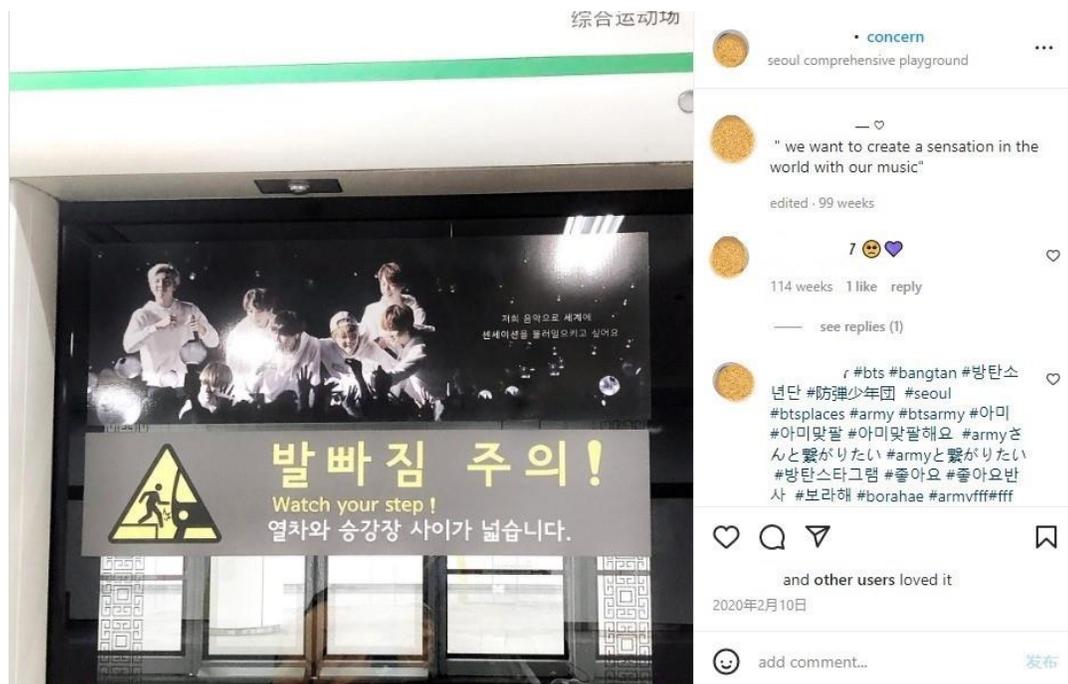


Figure 7: User N's emotions towards the concert venue



4.2.2 Special Events for Fans and by Fans

Participants in the special fandom events were not the majority of the 20 users; however, these events typify the characteristics of fan activities in pop culture. One of the similarities between this tourist activity and shopping at a pop-up store is the sense of place. Unlike commercial places where the focus is on consumption, Fandom events focus more on emotional involvement and a sense of belonging to a group or collective (Connell & Meyer, 2009; Gyimóthy et al., 2015).

For example, User E attended an event organised by HYBE, the agency of idol BTS, and expressed her love for the place. As can be seen in Figure 8, her background is a window displaying the achievements and recognition of her idol's work, and it is clear from the Instagram text that she enjoyed this sense of place. This place exhibits idol-related collectibles to fans, which are officially certified. Such an exhibition would be meaningful to fans. As discussed by Hills (2002) and Reijnders (2011), visiting such “places of the imagination”, i.e. “real” and “imagined” worlds meet, allows for an interplay between the two. From a place of fantasy and imagination, it becomes part of the reality in the life of fans.

Besides official events, events organised by the fan community highlight the participatory and social nature of fandom (Connell & Meyer, 2009), where fans share a common theme and the same experiences, thus generating a sense of emotional involvement and belonging to a group or collective (Gyimóthy et al., 2015). For example, User D participated in a cup holder-themed fan

event with a friend, as shown in Figure 9. This event was organised by the fans themselves and the venue was similar to idol-related exhibitions and pop-up stores in that they both highlight a sense of place. The difference is that the former is a community for the fans themselves, where they use various idol-related artefacts to increase their interaction with each other, without emphasising the commercial value.

Figure 8: User E in HYBE exhibition



Figure 9: User D in cup holder-themed fan event



4.2.3 Pilgrimage Photography in Local Communities

After ‘attending BTS concert’, ‘pilgrimage photography in local communities’ is next in line (see Table 3). More than half of the fans had their photos taken in public places in the community, such as street parks in the city, that were visited and photographed by the fan’s idols. For fans, visiting locations associated with the object of their fandom can be an intensely emotional experience, and this is often compared to pilgrimage in academic and popular discourse (Beeton, 2016). Beeton observes that there are considerable formal similarities between fan-related travel and traditional pilgrimages due to the sacredness of these locations and the emotional charge they carry. For example, the photos User Q uploaded on Instagram show some of the places she visited in the community and streets of Seoul to imitate RM, a BTS member. Instead of describing the places and activities in the post, User Q listed the location of the “attraction” to recommend them to other fans for their personal pilgrimage. As shown in Figure 10 and Figure 11, she not only chose the same places as RM but also imitated the same camera angle as RM.

Figure 10: Pilgrimage and place recommendation by User Q



Figure 11: User Q Pilgrimage at the place with the idol logo



User I, similar to User Q, was photographed at the pilgrimage place, shown in Figure 12, and left the location of the place in the text to recommend it to other fans. This pilgrimage observed by these K-pop fans can be explained by the concepts of place attachment and sense of place. Menin (2004) claims that people give meaning to physical phenomena through their contact with them, which means that in the absence of contact there can be no meaningful input. In the case of a sense of place, what matters is not the simple place with meaning attached to it; it is the meaning or significance itself (Malpas, 2008). In other words, places understood as simple locations are meaningless, unless some form of human engagement is present. But for the visitor as a fan, these simple geographical locations are imbued with meaning because of the involvement of their idols.

Figure 12: User I Pilgrimage at the place with the idol logo

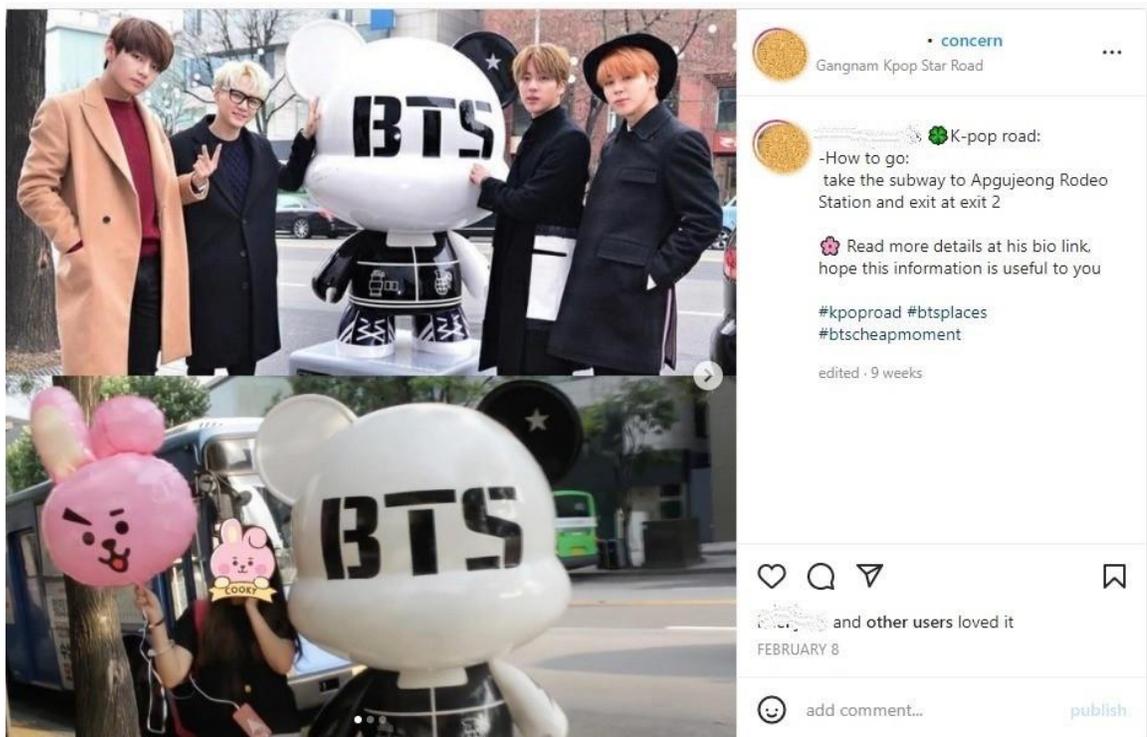
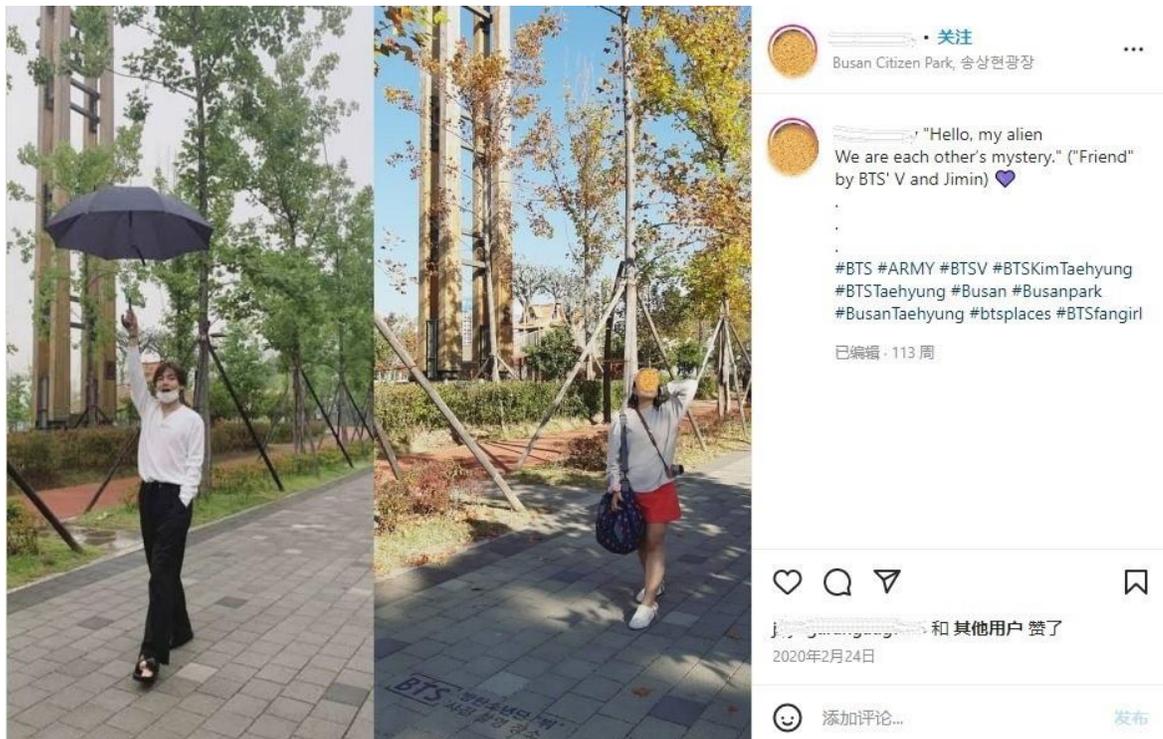


Figure 13: User C Pilgrimage in Civic Park



Some local communities have also identified with fan pilgrimage activities, creating places for fans' sense of place in the public spaces of their communities. Public places are spaces where social and cultural connections are made, and if a public place is created as a place where community members can freely gather, celebrate, and even influence the permanent content of the space, then the making of that place plays an important role in the social and cultural construction of that community (Main & Sandoval, 2015). An example of this is the Busan Civic Park, where meaning is officially conferred to a place visited by the celebrity. As can be seen through User C's Instagram upload of a photo imitating an idol, the park ground is marked with the footprint of the idol's photo shoot at the same place where the idol had taken the photo (see Figure 13). The local community here gives meaning to this particular place for the photograph.

User D is shown here in Figure 14 with a photo of the marks and footprints left on the ground by her idol. In addition, by browsing through User D's Instagram, the researcher found that she had visited this civic park more than once, as shown in Figure 15, and that she returned to Busan in 2022 and visited the site again. These idol-related places exemplify the importance of place identity, as it provides a place for social and cultural connections through which identity and belonging can be maintained, renegotiated, or claimed (Butcher, 2009; van Liempt, 2011).

Figure 14 User D in Civic Park 2021



Figure 15 User D Back to Civic Park 2022



4.2.4. Café- and restaurant-inspired experience

The third in line on the list of preferred fan activities is visiting cafés and restaurants that their idols have patronised. Fans are no less partial to cafés and restaurants than they are to concerts. As Table

3 shows, more than half of the fans studied participated in these types of activities. These places are not Official venues endorsed by the idols; they are run by residents of the local community. In contrast to pop-up shops, which target the fan market, these places also host other consumers, so they are often integrated into the life of the community. The frequency with which the reference is mentioned in Table 3 shows that this activity is highly welcome by fans and that they revisit these places. Because fans engage with the local physical environment, the connections between people and places are strengthened through the individual and group identities they communicate (Altman & Low, 1992; Hummon, 1992; Low, 1992, 2000; Main, 2012; Manzo, 2003; Mazumdar et al., 1998).

The consumption at the cafe by fans is particularly indicative of place identity. During the coding process, *&gather cafe* appears very often, it is the place where BTS filmed their variety show and where many fans have patronised. User T, for example, consumed two cups of coffee here in the same style as her idol, and she expressed her interest to revisit in the Instagram text:

I tried Jin's sweet and aromatic Rossy Latte, [Hundred Points Emoji] [Thumbs Up Emoji] [Face Savoring Food Emoji] I really wanna try all the coffee that @bts.bighitofficial made for their Run BTS Barista episode but it can't be done in one day. So I'll definitely will visit here again [Winking Face Emoji].

The *&gather café* was mentioned in Chapter 1.2.2 as a place that received attention and popularity from BTS fans, with consumers being almost exclusively fans. However, some cafes that have less fan attention and have more non-fan consumers demonstrate place identity and a sense of place as well, and fans also enjoy pilgrimage activities in these places (Beeton, 2016). Moreover, for fans who are keen on pilgrimages, fans' satisfaction with a sense of place allows them to accept the regrets of the experience. User P from Japan visited the cafe where BTS member J-Hope (Hobi) used to visit, posting in her Instagram that:

*There were three kinds of cakes two coffees [Hot Beverage Emoji] [Shortcake Emoji]
This café visited by Hobi and Bang PD and they were eating at this place (as of October 2019)
I asked my Korean peers if they wanted to eat targitiramisu [Strawberry Emoji].
The same seat was filled, so I couldn't sit down, but the pilgrimage to the holy place was fun after all ~ [smiling face with hearts emoji]*

The researcher used Instagram location sharing to learn that this cafe was less popular among BTS fans than *&gather cafe*. User P did not consider the cafe's reputation among fandom; she and her Korean friend decided to dine there because their idol had visited the place. User P was satisfied

with the pilgrimage, even though she did not have the same seats as her idol as she would have expected. Interestingly, the word pilgrimage was used in the fans' own words presenting the level of seriousness over their planned visits.

In addition, the strong identity of the fans and the importance of a sense of place override the functional nature of the cafe itself, as User C's repeat visit to Purple 7 Café in June 2021, reveals:

It is good to be back and visit this beautiful cafe. The happiest place for ARMYs in the Metro! [Purple Heart Emoji] and a great day to spend time with QC ARMY [Purple Heart Emoji].

User C's Instagram post does not recommend any of the café's merchandise to showcase the café's functional role, but rather emphasises the atmosphere, which is closer to the emotional aspect of place identity – it was described as a place where she feels happy and a sense of belonging.

The social, cultural, and physical elements of place support the place identity, which in turn creates a strong attachment to place. Restaurants are as much about place identity for fans as they are for cafes, but the functional nature of restaurants, particularly Korean ones, gives such places an additional socio-cultural significance. Because the food of a place can reflect the cultural authenticity of a place, consumer demand for food that is perceived as 'traditional' and 'local' can also be seen as related to the search for authenticity (Sims, 2009).

The post from Indonesia's User R at the Korean restaurant place documented the details of the dining experience and interactions with local restaurateurs in more detail and highlighted the keyword Korean food in her Instagram tag, as in Figure 16. The researcher tapped on User R's Instagram location share during data collection to learn that the restaurant she visited was not just an ordinary Korean food restaurant; it was one that her idol had visited regularly. The name of this restaurant is Yoojung Sikdang, and it is a restaurant that is meaningful to the fans as their idols have often visited it, from the time they were unknown trainees to the time they achieved success, and Yoojung Sikdang has seen their idols grow up (Shin, 2019). For User R and her friends, it is not only a place to experience Korean food and social interaction but also a place for emotional support.

For fans from other cultural backgrounds and nationalities, a particular place can be seen as an important aspect of what constitutes place identity (Mazumdar et al., 2000), as fans are able to connect with their idols on the one hand and with the culture of the local community on the other, which not only creates and maintains a sense of place but also promotes place identity through the experience of cultural authenticity.

Figure 16 User R in Yoojung Sikdang



4.2.5. Cultural heritage and Hanbok experience

Place attachment also extends to BTS fans through the experience of Korean heritage. Fans are willing to be influenced by personal factors in place attachment, such as the significance, knowledge, functional benefits, emotions, and satisfaction of a particular location (Wang & Chen, 2015). Heritage tourism can create different local meanings for different people (Vong, 2015), and for fans, the meaning of cultural heritage sites is given by their idols, and this form of place attachment also allows them the opportunity of engaging in an authentic experience of local Korean culture. For example, User C had more than one episode with hanbok and engaged in visits to other Korean cultural places, with each visit featuring excerpts of BTS songs in Instagram texts, and in Figure 18, the researcher identified User I in traditional Korean dress, the hanbok, hugging two BTS dolls, one representing member RM and the other representing member JK.

The Gyeongbokgung Palace has a distinct cultural element, a conceptualisation of social patterns operating on a spatial scale, and as such, cultural differences can also influence the attributes of different places, which in turn can influence place identity (Sack, 1997). Table 8 (see section 4.2) shows that half of the fans studied are involved in Korean traditional culture-related activities. A representative example is User C from the Philippines and User I from Vietnam, who both experienced the Korean traditional dress, also known as Hanbok, at Gyeongbokgung Palace, a famous cultural heritage site in South Korea, as shown in Figures 17 and 18.

Figure 17: User C expresses the Hanbok experience with lyrics from BTS



Figure 18: User I experienced Hanbok with BTS dolls in Gyeongbokgung Palace



Similar to the previous findings on fans visiting Korean food restaurants, fans are keen to interact with their idols and visit the places they have visited, in addition to being interested in the

background culture of their idols. This reflects positive attitudes towards Korean products among those who enjoy Korean pop culture (Kim et al., 2009; Yu et al., 2012).

4.2.6. Visiting Scenic Sites

It was observed that the fans' place attachment has also brought about the appreciation of rural areas and activities close to the natural environment. As shown in Table 8 (see section 4.2), half of the users are involved in visits to natural landscapes. These places neither serve the function of consuming pop culture products like concert stadiums and pop-up stores, nor do they facilitate fans' experience of the local culture as much as Korean food restaurants and cultural heritage sites. However, the connection between idols and these places leads fans to visit these places and in return, they receive emotional satisfaction, which is an emotional attachment to the place that is created by personal values and self-concept (Stokols et al., 2009). For example, User E visited the beach where BTS shot the poster and in the text, she stated that:

We had planned this trip with the whole intention of finding this spot and I'm so glad I've crossed this off on my BTS list! I will say that the experience was funny having had a whole line of people just staring at you and cars passing by every so often. We ended up going back in line like 3 times but it was worth it getting the shots we needed! I hope all ARMY can find a chance to visit this some day! [Purple Heart Emoji]

Korea is a peninsular country and there are many beaches in the country, but it is clear from User E's text message on Instagram that this beach stands out because of BTS. Although the process was not easy, User E's personal feelings towards BTS made her feel that this venue was significant and well worth visiting, and she recommended it to all her fans who share her identity.

Fans were also discovered immersing themselves in the natural environment of the destination. The finding reveals that majority of fans' travel activities took place in urban areas. However, there were also fans who explored the natural environments because of pop culture and feelings of attachment to their idols. For example, User H from Japan visited Snoopy Garden in Jeju Island, a scenic spot in South Korea; as shown in Figure 19, she shows her appreciation for the scenic location with a series of photos on the natural landscape on Instagram.

User H's text is so long that the researcher did not capture the entire text, in which User H describes her travel activities at her destination and praises the natural beauty of the area. She uses many green vegetation emojis to express her positive pro-environmental behaviour (Chen et al., 2015). She concludes with the addresses and opening hours of the places she visited and mentions that she would like to share the natural atmosphere of the destination by posting videos on YouTube.

Because BTS member Jimin was mentioned in User H's narrative, the researcher searched the internet for local news and learned that during COVID-19, the once-popular Jeju Island had become depressed, but tourism was revived during the hard times because of BTS member Jimin's visit (Yonhap, 2021). As stated in the news, it was because of Jimin that User H visited Jeju.

Figure 19 User H in Snoopy Garden



4.2.7 Official idol merchandise and retail outlets

Shopping for official merchandise of idols is also a big preference for fans (see Figure 3).

According to the chart, almost half of the users show their shopping experiences on Instagram and many revisit these shopping places. On the one hand, fans transfer the symbolism attached to their idols to idol-related goods through consumption, which satisfies the attachment fans express to their idols through consumption (McCracken, 1989); on the other hand, the sense of place in these places is designed for fans to experience, and because of this sense of place, fans are keen to stay in these places (Zhou et al., 2021).

In fans' expressions of place attachment, place attachment and place identity often complement each other, although they are not two completely separate concepts. Extensive interaction with place as a result of place attachment may lead to place identity (Moore & Graefe, 1994). From the perspective of place attachment, the commercial purpose of these places meets the fans' tangible demand to purchase official merchandise related to their idols, and, at the same time, the sense of place provided by the atmosphere of these places satisfies the fans' intangible desire for an emotional experience. This tangible function and intangible emotion remain even after they have moved away from a particular destination/attraction. User C presents an unusual example reflecting

this aspect. For example, because of COVID-19, BTS's pop-up store has opened branches outside of Seoul, and User C shared in his Instagram that he enjoyed the same shopping experience as a Seoul fan in Manila.

I just couldn't miss it. Though of course, my experience in the House of BTS in Seoul will always be remembered. I'm just glad they brought the experience to Manila since we couldn't fly out [Crying Face Emoji]

Loss of place often entails a loss of self in the sense that those who are dislocated from their former identity are disrupted from relating to place and identity emotionally. A psychological process of displacement (Fullilove, 1996) can result when place dependence and place identity are lost. User C, who took to Instagram after learning that an outlet was closing, shared his sentiments:

As LINE Friends announced the closing of its flagship store in Itaewon, let me share my memorable experience. On the 20th of September 2019, I visited the LINE friends Flagship store in Itaewon. The biggest LINE friends store in Korea! Being a hardcore BTS ARMY, I enjoyed my 3-4 hours of stay and did a lot of shopping [grinning face with sweat emoji] (made friends with fellow ARMY at the cafe too!). FYI: this is where BTS conceptualized their babies! Itaewon will never be the same without this store. Thank you for the experience, @linefriends.

User C, being a highly loyal fan, highlighted the fact that this store is the biggest and caters for her leisure consumption needs over a long period of time. In addition, because it is an official merchandise store purposely created for fans, it is filled with a sense of place related to the idol, and the people who are attracted to this kind of merchandise and atmosphere share the same fan identity, and their identities are identified with each other, just as User C has made friends with fellow pop-culture members here.

Now that the store is no longer in the usual location it is known for, Itaewon will never be the same again (User C). In the perspective of place attachment, the emotional connection between User C and the place is destroyed and her attitude is a clear manifestation of the psychology of displacement (Fullilove 1996). In addition, Itaewon is a busy commercial location in Seoul, catering to the needs of tourists for shopping and tourism, apart from the manifestation of fan activities promoting the destination economy.

4.2.8 Visiting BTS hometown

Table 8 in section 4.2 shows the phenomenon of some fans visiting the hometown of their idols.

Fans visiting their idols' hometowns due to celebrity worship reflect place attachment (Yen & Croy,

2016). Seoul, the capital of Korea, was the most visited and most mentioned place (see Table 6 in section 4.2). It is also the place where BTS is promoted as a tourism ambassador (Oh, 2018), and K-pop culture is featured. In terms of place dependence, Seoul has hosted many concerts, and it is also the city that hosts the majority of the idol-related events and idol merchandise places. For example, User E, a non-Korean, attended a BTS concert in Seoul in March 2022 and shared on Instagram that:

*It's been a long journey, but I made it~
I don't think I'll stop talking about this until the next concert honestly. It was
such an amazing experience being in their hometown. So much love from Army.
Truly a memory I'll never forget.*

As a traveller from overseas, User E highlighted the fact that Korea is the home of BTS and that this was a unique experience for her to come to a concert in Seoul, Korea. The experience gave her a deep impression and positive satisfaction with Korea as a destination, in addition to her identification as a fan. This also exemplifies the complementary nature of place dependency and place identity. Furthermore, concerts are high on the cultural spectrum, so visiting a destination and attending a local concert is an inherent experience (Park et al., 2010). Similarly, destinations that are home to BTS bring together many socio-cultural elements, especially popular Korean elements such as K-pop, which are experiences that are unique and authentic for overseas travellers (Simeon & Buonincontri, 2013).

In addition to Seoul, the idols' hometowns, such as Busan, Gangneung, Gwangju, and Ilsan, were mentioned more often by these 20 users, with a relatively high number of users visiting these cities (see Table 6 in section 4.2).

Fans are motivated to visit these places, firstly because these places host events such as concerts and fan meetings, symbolising place dependence, and secondly, the fans realise that the destination is the hometown of their idols (Thakkar, 2021), which enhances their attachment to these destinations, and thereby their place identity. For example, User I described her experience of attending a concert in Gwangju in an Instagram post:

*Uncle Hobi [BTS member J-Hope], especially misses Gwangju. We were able to
return to Gwangju and see Uncle Hobi performing in his hometown,
#gwangju2019*

Although attending the concert was the purpose of User I's visit to Gwangju, User I emphasised the role of the idol's hometown in the text, even tagging Gwangju to increase the city's visibility on the internet. This suggests, firstly, that idols helped shape the image and special meaning of destinations, and therefore fans develop special emotions towards

these destinations. Secondly, this emotional bond between fans and place is stronger when these destinations that have gained the place identity of the fans also have place dependence, for example, by hosting concerts.

4.2.9 Other findings: International travel due to place identity

Besides the statement in 4.2.8 about fans' preference for Korean destinations due to place attachment, the additional finding in this section is from the perspective of international travel, referring to Table 7 in section 4.2. In the coding process, the researcher found that most fans travel internationally to follow their idols' concert world tours. In other words, concerts motivate fans to travel internationally under the role of place attachment. For fans, visiting destinations that have the ability to host concerts is influenced by the place dependence factor in place attachment. Similar to concerts, places visited by BTS are also very attractive to fans (see Table 3 in Section 4.2). Fans will make international travel with destinations outside of South Korea as a result of place identity, that is, visiting a destination where BTS has been because of fans' emotional attachment to their idol.

User G travelled to Malta and uploaded five posts on Instagram. User G's motivation for travelling to Malta was not the concert, but the fact that BTS filmed a reality show here. As shown in Figure 20, she sought out the streets that BTS had visited and detailed her knowledge of the destination and her feelings about the place. In addition to this, she visited local dining places, such as Figure 21, she visited the bar where her idol drank in Malta, ordered the same drink as her idol, and detailed her interaction with the bar staff and her experience at the bar.

Figure 20 User G visits the streets of Malta where BTS has been



Figure 21 User G visits the bars BTS has visited in Malta



4.3 Conclusion

Tourists' activities at destinations as K-pop fans are heavily influenced by place attachment. More specifically, some activities occur because of the functional role of place dependency, and some activities are guided by the emotional bond between fans and their idols reflecting place identity.

Of the 20 users, these activities are the most favoured: attending a BTS Concert, Pilgrimage Photography in communities, and Café- and Restaurant-inspired experience. Attending a BTS concert was the most popular with these users. The activity mainly highlights place dependence, as fans visit such places in order to meet the desire to attend the concert. Based on place dependence, fans also develop a place identity for the place. Fans prefer Pilgrimage Photography in communities and café- and restaurant-inspired experience mainly because of place identity. Fans' emotions attached to their idols give these places a special meaning, and this sense of place makes fans more likely to choose these places for leisure activities, such as dining or taking photographs.

These activities are also favoured by those users: Official idol merchandise and retail outlets, Visiting Scenic Sites and Cultural heritage and Hanbok experience. The merchandise and retail outlets with place dependence satisfy the fans' demand to consume pop culture, but because of the strong sense of place in some outlets, place dependence and place identity exist together in this case. Most fan activity takes place in urban areas; however, because of place identity, the fans are willing to visit rural areas to enjoy the natural scenery. Moreover, BTS fans are also very interested in experiencing Korean culture because of place identity, especially for the non-Korean nationals.

Fans are also interested in Special Events and Visiting BTS hometown. Special Events for fans or by fans mainly focus on the sense of place. Fans visit BTS hometown due to place identity, but if the destination has the nature of place dependence, such as the hometown of BTS also having the ability to host concerts, then the place will be preferred by fans.

Overall, the activities that occur as a result of place dependence are highly attractive to fans, who are strongly motivated to satisfy this demand and have a high likelihood of revisiting. However, because of the strong purposeful nature of this activity, the form of the activity and the type of places to visit are limited. The activities that fans undertake as a result of place identity are more varied and involve a wide range of places. These activities have various attractions for fans. Under the influence of place identity, fans show positive attitudes toward accepting culture and environment. Furthermore, a sense of place needs to be valued in these activities, because destinations demonstrating a sense of place in a culture gain the preferences of fans belonging to that culture.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

Based on the findings of Chapter 4 on how fans' tourism activities are influenced by their place attachment, this chapter further discusses the influence of popular culture and place attachment on destinations' competitiveness.

The concept of place attachment is crucial in sustaining the destination competitiveness (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). As revealed in Chapter 4, the activities preferred by fans lead to revisits, and many places are favoured by fans because they highlight a sense of place. Fans are involved in local socio-cultural activities because of the place identity they have formed with the memories and impression of their idols, which has affective meaning. This chapter will elaborate on sustaining the destination competitiveness within the concepts related to place attachment and destination competitiveness by highlighting three key aspects that emerged from the study: revisiting and recommendation, sense of place, and socio-cultural sustainability.

5.2 Revisits and recommendations

The place attachment factor has a positive impact on visitors' revisits and recommendations (Walker & Ryan, 2008; Petrova et al., 2011; Lee & Scott, 2012). According to the findings in Chapter 4, fans often engage in revisiting behaviour (see Table 5 in Chapter 4.2). Fans repeatedly attend pop culture experiences, such as concerts, by recommending locations on Instagram and expressing satisfaction; for example, in Chapter 4.2.4, fans recommend locations for cafes and restaurants. Tourists' willingness to revisit and their satisfaction affects the choice of their travel destination and is a key factor in tourism competitiveness (Naidoo & Ramseook-Munhurrin, 2012).

5.2.1 Impact of concert attendance and events on destinations

The findings in Chapter 4 show that fans' revisiting of places is mostly a manifestation of place dependence. This is consistent with the existing literature of Lee et al. (2009) and Duarte et al. (2018), where fans' loyalty to their idols leads to positive emotions towards the destination as a result of place dependence (Duarte et al., 2018), and this positive emotion plays a role in increasing visitors' satisfaction and loyalty (Lee et al., 2009). In addition, the branding of the event, such as BTS, which has a large and loyal fan base, positively influences the commitment of visitors to return to the place where the event takes place, thus strengthening the loyalty element (Duarte et al., 2018). For fans, the success of concerts and fandom events confers higher awareness of the city as a geographical brand (Duarte et al., 2018; Soria et al., 2014), and BTS as a strong event brand can influence fans' commitment and engagement with the place where the concert takes place (Duarte et al., 2018).

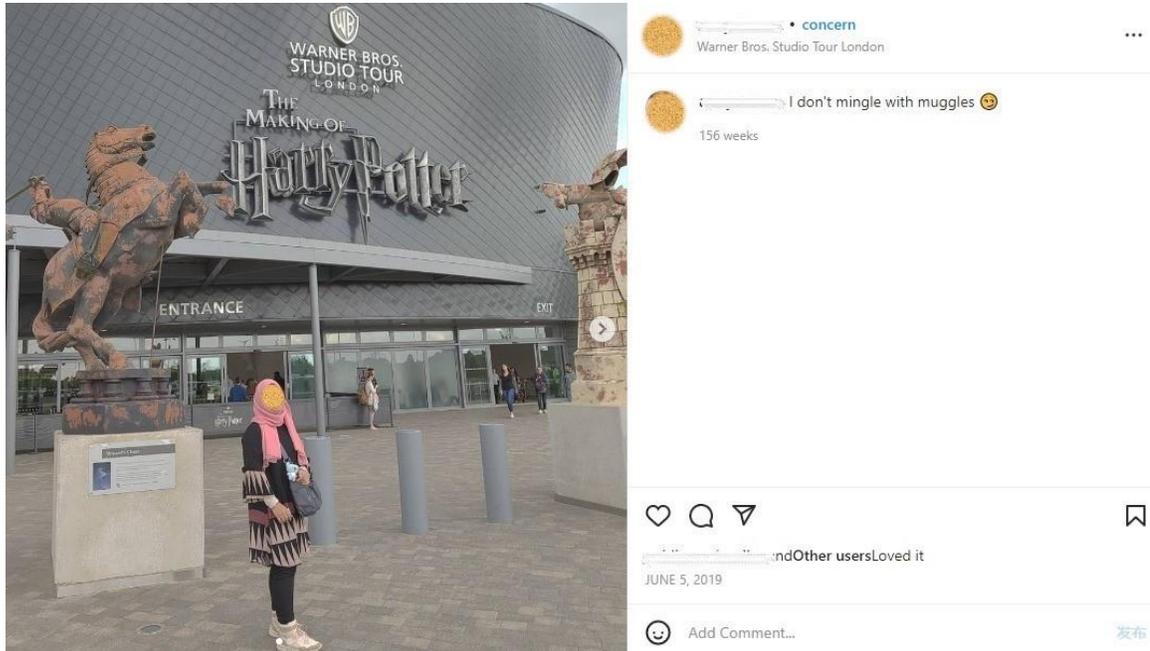
The main factors that lead fans to travel for concerts and events are the attractiveness of the destination itself, in addition to the attractiveness of the idol and its brand reputation. These attributes also influence visitors' satisfaction and consequently their willingness to revisit or recommend to others, which is consistent with the studies by Lee et al. (2009), and Yoon and Uysal (2005). This is not only true for Korea, the birthplace of K-pop pop culture, but also other international tourist destinations that host concerts. For example, Table 6 (see section 4.2) shows the international destinations involved in this tourism activity, so concerts provide a global tourism experience for fans. This is demonstrated in User T's post (see section 4.2.4). User T travelled from Malaysia and visited many international cities following the BTS global tour, attended a BTS concert in London on June 1, 2019, and, a few days later, showed herself visiting the Warner Brothers' Harry Potter exhibition during her trip, as shown in Figure 22 and Figure 23.

Fans also revisit destinations because of place identity, as their emotional experiences play an important role as a source of revisit intentions, which is consistent with Kim and Moon's (2009) study. For example, in the case of fan preferences for cafes and restaurants, User C revisited Purple 7 Café (see section 4.2.4) because the café's sense of place provided her with a sense of belonging. Also motivated by place identity was User D's experience of revisiting the Busan Civic Park, as discussed in the previous chapter (see 4.2.3).

Figure 22 User T in BTS Concert 1/6/2019



Figure 23 User T at Warner Brothers' Harry Potter exhibition after BTS concert 5/6/2019



5.2.2 Revisits and recommendations increase the competitiveness of destinations

Revisits by tourists have a positive effect on the competitiveness of a destination (Wenting et al., 2021), and in order to enhance the competitiveness of a destination, within the context of the organisation of the destination and pop culture events, increasing the satisfaction of tourists and their willingness to return to the event are key factors must be given due consideration (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). In the case of BTS fans, they are drawn to a destination by their idol's concerts and develop positive emotions towards this destination, and so are likely to engage in travel activities during this journey because of the attractiveness of the destination itself. For the competitiveness of the destination, regularly organising concerts or cultural events that attract a large number of fans increases fans' revisit to the destination. This contributes to the promotion of the destination. Fans will return to a destination when they perceive that the activities and attributes of the destination will help them achieve their travel goals.

5.3 Pop Culture Sense of Place

According to the findings of this dissertation on fan travel preferences, the common denominator in both pop-up stores and pilgrimage activities is the emphasis on the emotional and perceptual role of a sense of place and place identity. For fans, placemaking creates their symbolic connection to the destination, while for the destination as a whole, these places increase their competitiveness through the incorporation of cultural identity and innovative design. Because culture and leisure play an important role in the development of urban spaces (Lefebvre & Nicholson-Smith, 1991; Zukin,

1995), cities have had to innovate and create to diversify and differentiate their leisure and tourism spaces, with a focus on social relations and connections between spaces. ‘Placemaking’ was then also understood as ‘community building’ and often studied in the egalitarian, emancipatory, and positive context of public activity and community improvement (Huang & Roberts, 2019).

From a cultural sustainability perspective, fans and their idols are the place makers and marketers, further strengthening their attachment to the place. Celebrities symbolise destinations (McCracken, 1989), and for fans, idols turn the places they have visited into pilgrimage destinations. For destinations, the symbolism of the destination by idols (McCracken, 1989) representing popular culture leads to the creation of a sense of place. Moreover, the destination provides a sense of place in order to meet the emotional needs of pop culture fans and attract them. Combined with the nature of fan identity, sense of community and information dissemination in fandom activities (Alderman et al., 2012), on the one hand, fans organise events to express their attachment to their idols, which contributes to a sense of place in destinations with pop culture images; on the other hand, in order to experience this sense of place, such pop culture fans also play a role as participants and consumers in visiting these places.

5.3.1 K-pop as a sense of place in Seoul city

K-pop fans are both consumers and producers, and their fan activities constitute free emotional labour that creates value for the K-pop industry. Whether it is the place-making of communities by fans or the mural art on the streets of Seoul, it reflects the destination’s sense of place. As described by Oh (2018), national and local authorities in South Korea have been producing and selling ‘K-place’ to fans, while Seoul is the hub of K-pop tourism, with related venues and their advocates creating and promoting photo spots, streets, cafes, and events that market the K-pop experience to tourists. For the destination, their artistic and creative placemaking adds aesthetic, economic and spatial appeal to the Seoul community. This in turn is reflected in the competitiveness of the destination, whose market position continues to increase its potential appeal through value-added products (Dwyer & Kim, 2003; d’Hautesserre, 2000; Hassan, 2000).

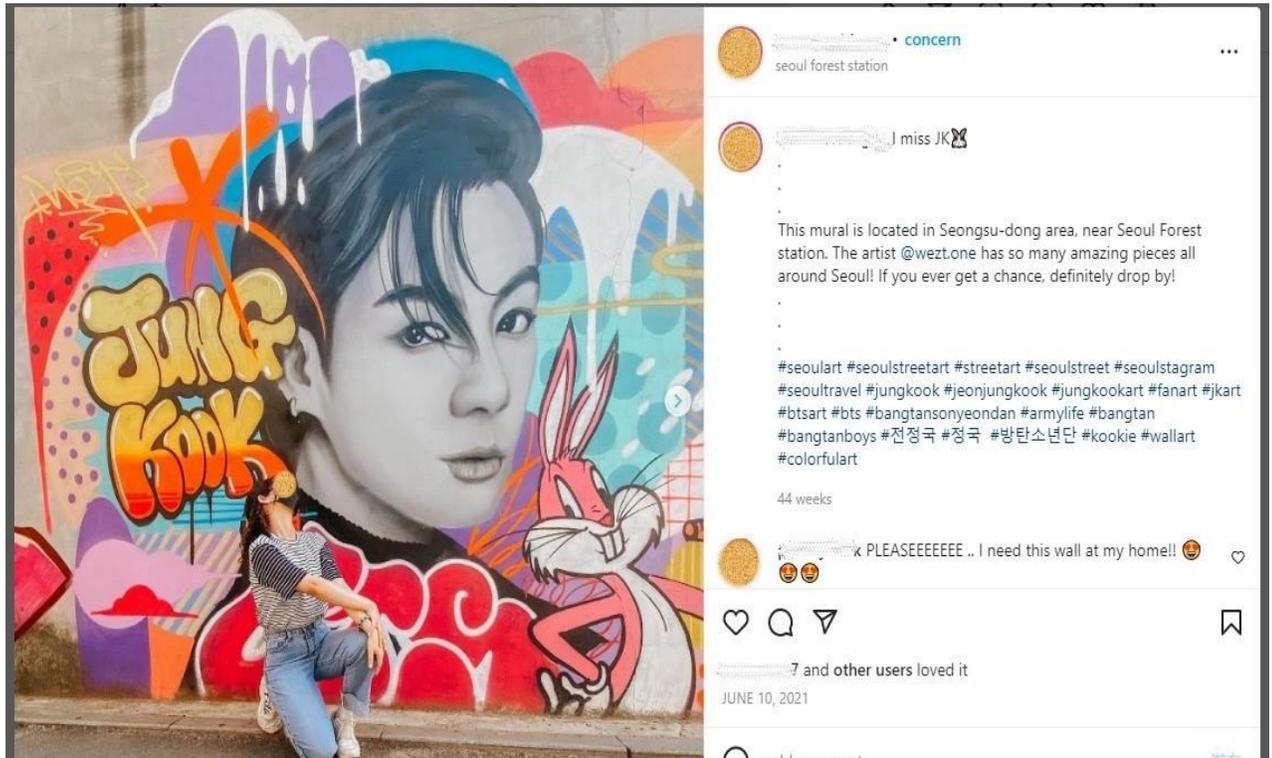
For the community, the K-pop culture seems to have generated a sense of place for other creative talents in the city. According to Paulsen (2019), there is an emotional or affective bond between people and place, incorporating the scale and routine of the community and enabling a process of meaning making that transforms space into place. An example is the creation of street views by fans in urban public spaces to celebrate the birthdays of their idols, as shown in Figure 24. Such a project needs to be created by fans and community organisations.

Another form of expression is street art. As shown in Figure 25, artists created portraits of the idol on the street walls, which User E was attracted to and promoted on social media. This not only creates a sustainable emotional bond between the fans and the place but also shows the artistic vibrancy and cultural diversity of Seoul's streets. Such murals or creative architecture make interesting and vibrant additions to the city (Markusen & Gadwa, 2010). For destinations with a popular cultural image, fandom events create a sense of place for the places of the destination in an artistically created way, and fans produce this sense of place and participate in the experience of the sense of place and the destination promotion in social media.

Figure 24 User D with birthday project



Figure 25 User E with Fandom Street Art



5.3.2 Pop culture sense of place attracts non-fan tourists

In addition to urban areas, rural areas have also become particularly attractive under the creation of the sense of place from idols. User B was not a fan identity, the researcher edited ‘Attracted by fame’ (see Table 3 in section 4.2) as a ‘miscellaneous’ code when generalising the themes of place attractiveness (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

This example took place at the Hyangho Beach BTS bus stop, which appeared several times during the data collection process, and there were many fans who took pictures there, as did the 20 users collected in this dissertation, such as User E mentioned in the previous chapter. The difference is that User B stated in her Instagram text that she was not a fan and did not even know how many members of BTS there were, but because of the fame and specialness of this venue, she took pictures of her children here and post-processed the photos to better display them in her Instagram feed, which served as a recommendation, as shown in Figure 26. User B uploaded a link to her blog on Instagram and narrated the trip in detail in her blog (Donasandra, 2020). In addition to fans, these idol-related placemaking is also attractive to non-fan tourists, who mention BTS on their own social media because of its fame and influence, thus increasing the exposure of the place and acting as a recommendation.

Figure 26 User B visited Hyangho Beach BTS bus stop



However, destinations need to be wary of creating a sense of place and local identity to increase destination competitiveness, as well as attracting non-fan tourists. As mass tourism becomes more accepting of popular culture, this sense of place can easily lack diversity.

5.4 Culture and destination competitiveness

Among the tourism preferences of fans, the experience of Korean culture is noteworthy. Fans' place attachment to the destination makes them friendly towards the local culture and willing to participate and experience it, and these cultural experiences are reflected in the sustainability of destination tourism (Kim et al., 2009; Yu et al., 2012). What can be seen in the data is that fans' experiences of Korean culture, in addition to the pop culture elements of K-pop, are mainly in the areas of food and cultural heritage sites.

5.4.1 Place identity and cultural authenticity

Local food can add value to a destination and in this way increase competitiveness (Crouch & Ritchie, 1999). In this sense, dining out and trying local and regional cuisine is an essential element for most tourists (Nam & Lee, 2011). Food is part of the local culture, and it can be used as a tourist attraction, as a tourist product and as a tourist experience (Cheng & Huang, 2015). Korean food

restaurants visited by idols have become tourist attractions for fans, such as User R and User I (see section 4.2.4). Consumers can engage and interact while enjoying and gaining knowledge. Importantly, these experiences are rooted in place identity and provide memorable moments to satisfy multiple senses: smell, sight, cognition, taste, and touch, so that food is a cultural identity (Hillel et al., 2013). The authenticity of local cuisine is used as a symbol of identity (Yeoman & McMahan-Bette, 2016).

This is also true of cultural heritage. There is a very close relationship between heritage and food; they are a mixture of tangible and intangible elements (Timothy & Ron, 2013). In addition to User C and User I, who had a hanbok experience in the previous chapter, another example is User E, who visited the Gyeonghuigung Palace (in Figure 27). User E, who is not from an Asian background, was attracted to the traditional architecture while visiting Seoul. User E said that the building reminded her of one of her idol's songs, "Daechwita", and the music video shows traditional Korean architecture and costumes, which for international fans needs to be understood in the context of Korean culture (Lyons, 2020).

This is where pop meets traditional Korean culture, and K-pop idols can also spread local culture to their fans through pop culture channels, making such destinations with unique culture more competitive for fans than other places. This is also the role of place identity, rooted in the tangible and intangible heritage of a destination, an aspect coveted and valued by tourists (Edensor, 2008), because it reveals the uniqueness of a place, thus distinguishing it from other places in a globalised, homogenised world (Wearing et al., 2009; Modlin et al., 2011).

Figure 27 User E visited the Gyeonghuigung Palace



5.4.2 Cultural sustainability of the destination

Most of the users in this dissertation who preferred Korean cultural experiences were international fans, yet local Koreans also had culture-related tourism activities. Two of the 20 users in the data collection were both Korean, and each of them visited places with their own cultural backgrounds. For example, User A visited the Korean House because her idol had a poster taken at the same place, and posted multiple photos of her trip on Instagram, detailing her trip in a text, as shown in Figure 28. User A displayed her culture on social media and recommended to other fans how to apply for this tourist activity.

Figure 28 User A in Korean House



Addressed in terms of place attachment, which complements the sense of community (Manzo & Perkins, 2006), a sense of place is essential to understanding ourselves, defining our identity and creating a sense of belonging to a place and community. A sense of place is an important factor in stimulating a sense of belonging. When local people have a sense of community, it awakens their sense of place (Manzo & Perkins, 2006). A sense of belonging develops when people have lived in a place for a long time and have an ongoing emotional connection to a place (Belanche et al., 2017; Hay, 1998).

In terms of the cultural sustainability of a destination, the cultural features of a destination can influence visitor satisfaction (Beerli & Martín, 2004; Chi & Qu, 2008; Wu, 2016). Cultural brand assets, such as cultural and historical attractions, festivals, arts, and traditions, are important determinants of a destination's brand image (Beerli & Martín, 2004; Kladou & Kehagias, 2014). While tourism activities can have a positive impact on the culture of a destination, such as the preservation of cultural and historical heritage, they can also have a negative impact, such as the loss of community identity (Choi & Murray, 2010; Fong, 2017). Therefore, while attracting and retaining tourists, the cultural image of the destination should be well protected for the long-term development of community identity and values.

However, for pop culture tourism, the widely accepted modern culture of K-pop does not overshadow traditional culture. From a cultural sustaining perspective, globalisation has enabled people to share information and communicate in an instant, but it has also begun to erase cultural identity, with different places becoming more homogenised and pervasive in the pursuit of maximising profit. Destinations are popular for their pop culture, while protecting cultural heritage sites, customs and infrastructure from outside influences, and cultural tourism and cultural facilities promote and reuse heritage buildings (Duxbury et al., 2007).

5.5 Summary of the discussion

This chapter discusses the sustainability of destinations for pop-culture tourism, building on the findings of Chapter 4, in order to answer the second research question: How are pop-culture fandom and place attachment a reflection of sustainable tourism destinations?

Firstly, fans have revisited and recommended destinations because of place attachment, which is a competitiveness indication for the tourism development of the destination. Moreover, besides visiting K-pop-related places, fans are potentially interested in visiting other pop culture places in the destination.

The sense of place in a destination is important to both local and foreign fans. Foreign fans have a positive attitude towards local culture because of place attachment, and local people will inherit, preserve and promote it because of their identity with their own culture and sense of place. Fans are the producers as well as the experiences and participants of a destination's sense of place. A destination's sense of place in popular culture enhances the diversity of a city. When a destination's unique sense of place is celebrated, the destination not only gains a market of visitors who are fans but also increases the likelihood of non-fans visiting. This increases a destination's competitiveness.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Introduction

The aim of this dissertation is to understand the phenomenon of K-pop culture tourism from the perspective of BTS fans. This chapter brings together the purpose of this dissertation, presents the theoretical and practical implications of this dissertation point out its limitations, and provides conclusions and recommendations for future research to further expand on this and similar topics.

6.2. Aims and objectives revisited

The aim of this dissertation is to understand the phenomenon of K-pop tourism, and to discuss the significance of this phenomenon for Korea as a tourism destination. To achieve this objective, this dissertation used qualitative research and interpretive methods, by employing a non-participatory Netnography approach, to analyse open access written and visual content of 20 BTS fans on Instagram. The two research questions are:

Research question 1: How are BTS fan tourism activities influenced by their place attachment?

From the perspective of place dependence, which emphasises the functional attraction to the destination in place attachment, attending concerts is undoubtedly the most popular activity for fans. This is the main motivation for international fans to visit Korea, which generates international travel (see section 4.2.1). BTS fans are also drawn to attractions that their idols have created as part of their official and unofficial visits. The intangible aspect of place attachment is demonstrated in their place identity through their fan rituals. For example, fans following their idols to visit places where they have been to take photographs is a very popular activity, and in addition to urban areas, fans also travel to the countryside, and in addition to Seoul, fans also travel to smaller cities in the idol's hometown (see sections 4.2.3 and 4.2.8). During these activities, fans become interested and involved in the dining culture and history of the destination because of their attachment to their idols. Place attachment and place identity are present at the same time; whether fans are attending a fandom event, visiting a café, or shopping at an official merchandise outlet, they become attached to the place because of its functionality and sense of place, and repeat visits can be expected. These places not only satisfy the social needs of fans but also give them a sense of belonging.

Research question 2: What implications does place attachment have on sustaining the competitiveness of the tourism destination?

Firstly, BTS fans' revisitation and recommended destinations to visit while in Korea were evident in their place attachment, which manifests itself in the form of concerts and fandom events. At the same time, these events add to the attractiveness of the destination. Secondly, making the sense of

place that manifests pop culture's sense of place provides its fans with a place for engaging in a pilgrimage and adds cultural diversity to the urban landscape, increasing the vitality and competitiveness of the destination. Finally, fans' preferences regarding cultural experience activities play a role in cultural promotion for international fans in the context of place identity and have a sustainable impact on the cultural identity of a place and destination.

6.3. Implications and recommendations

This dissertation focuses on the role of pop culture tourism on the sustainability of tourism destinations' competitiveness, by using BTS as a case study to expand our existing knowledge and close gaps in K-pop culture tourism. It has practical implications for destination marketers developing pop culture tourism projects to improve their competitiveness. The dissertation also contributes to pop culture tourism theory, as there is little information found in existing research that informs the sustainability of tourism destinations through the study of pop culture tourism and place attachment theory – the latter is more in the foreground, but few studies examine the sustainability of pop culture tourism to the idols' home country.

Through the role of place attachment and the sense of place, we learn that K-pop culture fans generate their travel behaviour to sustain or satisfy their social presence within their pop culture community, and that their behavioural patterns are attached with a specific place. Under the role of place attachment, places meet people's basic needs and support the development of individuals and the establishment of social relationships. Places provide opportunities to connect individuals and their social groups, thereby sustaining relationships with likeminded community in their social worlds, through which people exchange knowledge, acquire competencies, achieve a sense of identity and belonging, and are spiritually uplifted, thus sustaining and enriching human life.

Looking at the preferences of international fans in this dissertation, it may make more sense to simply promote Korean culture overseas so that people around the world will appreciate it. However, this ignores how it works from the receiver's perspective. This presupposes that there is a high level of interest in Korean culture around the world, for example, from the majority of BTS fans. It is important to note, however, that BTS and K-pop have not achieved global success because they are from Korea or feature Korean content, but because their songs and performances appeal to audiences all over the world.

But in Korea, cultural tourism, which has received worldwide attention because of K-pop, is developed by a mixture of established and emerging cultures produced by their fans, idols, and local businesses. Thus, the culture here is not just inherited but also manufactured from time to time.

6.4. Limitations and future research

The global fan base of BTS is large, the demographic profile of fans is much richer, and the associated travel activities are more diverse. Therefore, a comparison of fan categories is not presented. Secondly, the data was collected from only one platform and did not consider other users who do not use Instagram. Future relevant research could expand the number of data collected from different platforms to study this tourism phenomenon with reference to the demographic characteristics of fans, which would be useful for destinations to refine their tourism market. Lastly, sustainability is a multifaceted topic and there are limitations to the discussion of sustainability in this study. The dissertation did not address the relevant stakeholders represented by the local residents, although there was an attempt to do so with the role of placemaking that emerged as a potential concept to explore in future studies to imagine fans, idols and local residents as place-makers. It is, however, not within the scope of this dissertation. Future research could also focus on topics such as the attitudes of local residents toward K-pop cultural tourism and the sustainability of placemaking in K-pop for further research.

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Appendix:

Table 2: All Initial Codes exported from NVivo 12

Activities on places	File (20)	Reference (136)
Attending concert	13	25
Attending fan-organised event	6	7
Attending official event	6	5
Spending in the Official café	2	2
Spending in the local café	11	20
Spending in the local restaurant	8	8
Hanbok experience	4	4
Imitation photo taking	8	16
Learn Korean language	4	4
Revisit same places	6	14
Scenery appreciation	5	8
Shopping	8	11
Visit local exhibition	1	1
Visit official exhibition	3	3
Visit Korean cultural sites	8	8

Place	File (20)	Reference (113)
&gathercafe	8	8
Hyangiram temple	1	1
Cafe Confio	1	1
Asiaworld-Expo	1	1
Beakinje house museum	1	1
BT21 cafe & store	2	3
Bukchon Hanbok village	1	1
Busan Asiad Main Stadium	3	4
Busan citizen park	3	3
Deao Seojeom café	4	4
Deux Amis café	1	1
Eat Whiskey Bar, Malta	1	1
Everland amusement park	2	3
Gwangalli Beach, Busan	2	2
Gwangju World Cup Stadium	2	2
Gyeongchun Street	3	3

Gyeonghuigung Palace	4	4
Hyangho Beach BTS bus stop	6	7
Hybe	1	1
ILLY café	1	1
Iryeong station	2	2
Jamsil Stadium	8	12
Jecheon airport	1	1
Jeju Snoopy Garden	1	1
Korea House	1	1
K-Star Road	4	4
Laundry Pizza	3	3
Maxfield Gallery	1	1
MBC culture garden	1	1
Min's coffee	1	1
National Stadium	2	2
Pop-up store	7	11
Purple 7 Cafe	2	3
Red Square	1	2
Restaurant Cockney Malta	1	1
Sinchon Street	2	3
Skydome Stadium	1	1
St. Marks Street, Malta	1	1
Seofuri forest	1	1
TENN Coffee Beer	1	1
The House restaurant	1	1
Water & snow park	1	1
Wembley Stadium	1	1
Yoojung Sikdang restaurant	2	2
Allegiant Stadium	2	2
TOWER RECORDS	1	1

Place attraction	file (20)	Reference (116)
Attracted by fame	1	1
BTS concert	13	25
BTS hometown	4	4
BTS official activity	2	3
BTS pop-up store	7	11
BTS visited	12	22
Fandom event	6	9
Music consumption	1	1
MV filming place	5	7

Poster shooting place	6	12
SNS photo place	5	8
Variety show filming place	8	13

Place destination	File (20)	Reference (85)
Berlin, Germany	1	1
Busan, South Korea	6	9
Gangneung, South Korea	5	6
Gwangju, South Korea	2	2
Hong Kong, China	1	1
Ilsan, South Korea	2	2
Jecheon, South Korea	1	1
Jeju, South Korea	1	1
Las Vegas, US	2	2
London, UK	1	1
Los Angeles, US	1	2
Malta	1	5
Manila, Philippines	2	5
Moscow, Russia	1	3
Seoul, South Korea	11	36
Singapore	4	5
Thailand	1	1
Tokyo, Japan	1	1
Yeosu, South Korea	1	1