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A CYBERCULTURE STUDY: K-POP AND THE NEW MEDIA - BTS AND TWITTER

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Abstract:
This paper intends to describe, analyze, and reflect on the presence of K-Pop in the cybernetic environment, as a cultural and artistic manifestation of the XXI century, as well as to study and evaluate the participation of the band BTS (and its fan community) in the social network Twitter, looking for an understanding of its identity and contribution to the cyberculture universe. The importance of "Korean Pop" for the global music industry is, in present times, an undeniable fact, because of the success of several artists and groups of Korean heritage and/or managed by labels from South Korea that have been occupying the top places in charts previously dominated by Anglo-Saxon performers. The band Bangtan Sonyeondan, known worldwide as BTS, formed by Big Hit Entertainment in 2010, is pointed by the critics and specialists as one of the most successful and mediatic groups of the last years. The comparisons between the Beatlemania from the 60s and the behaviour of its fan base (self-proclaimed Army) are quite common. In this context, we intend to study this cultural phenomenon as a new form of culture and interaction between artists and admirers, using social media and new socialization techniques created and adapted to cyberspace.

Keywords: cyberculture, cyberspace, Twitter, K-Pop, BTS

1. Introduction

The advent of cyberculture, defined by Pierre Levy as the set of techniques and practices that develop and amplify due to the communities present in cyberspace, marks a violent change in the way societies consume (cultural) content. Its passive position is replaced by the possibility of participating and issuing feedback, turning online communication

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channels into two-way and interactive platforms, which are currently part of the daily routines of billions of individuals around the globe. (Lima, 2009, p.5).

The globalization process, driven by the existence of democratic cyberspace, provided an increase in exposure and consequent export of various expressions and cultural matters associated with different countries/nations/communities: among them, K-Pop. Being a genre deeply marked by strong visual elements and influenced by North American pop and hip-hop, it was born in the early nineties and became extremely popular when the first social networks emerged, around the 2000s. seen by the South Korean government as a soft power device – an instrument of influence of a state on the behaviour, values, or interests of members of other political bodies – with great success abroad (Souza & Domingos, 2016, p.6). Founded in 2010 by Big Hit Entertainment, the band BTS is made up of seven members – Jin, SUGA, J-Hope, RM, Jimin, V and Jungkook – and is arguably one of the most successful groups in the world today – including being classified by Time magazine, in 2018, as the "leader of the new generation" and later in 2020 as the "entertainer of the year". Its community of fans and admirers, commonly dubbed ARMY, is often compared to the Beatles fan base during the 1960s due to their involvement and engagement with artists and their platforms. This powerful cybernetic «army» has already guaranteed the BTS the achievement of the Top Social Artist award (attributed by Billboard) for three consecutive years, as well as the presence of three of their albums in the Top 200 of the same platform (Cavalcanti et al, 2020, p.8).

The issue of this article is the analysis of the BTS band's account on the Twitter platform, as well as the evaluation of its success and interaction with its fan community, through the study and observation of statistics obtained with official hashtags and presence in «subjects of time". A contextualization will be made regarding the concepts of Cyberculture and Cyberspace, both fundamental in the dynamization and popularity of the art form and expression under study. Subsequently, a brief overview of the artistic genre itself and of the community that makes up the object of study (BTS fans and followers) will be elaborated. The methodology used refers to the observation and consultation of the musical group's official accounts and survey of the data obtained from them - using digital tools that allow this study and evaluation - as well as the success and evolution of hashtags and official campaigns promoted on behalf of the BTS. Thus, it seeks to establish a connection between the object of study and cybernetic space: what are the common characteristics? What are the advantages that the band derives from its presence in digital? Is cyberspace essential in promoting and managing K-Pop.

2. Cyberculture and Cyberspace

Cyberculture is about a space that allows co-presence and interaction, without the physical, geographic, social, informational and democratic restrictions to which we are subject in the "three-dimensional" world. According to Pierre Lévy (1993), the creation of a computerized society corresponds to a natural stage in the human being's evolution process – followed by orality and writing.

The emergence of the personal computer, and consequently of private access to the network, transformed computing into a product aimed at the masses, who quickly joined the trend and adapted their lives to the technological format – which transformed cyberculture, previously a phenomenon of rebellion and exclusivity. , in a mainstream custom. In this way, transferring their values, behavioural patterns, beliefs, interests and all sorts of personal data and algorithms to digital, the first cultural manifestations began to appear in cyberspace. During the eighties, the space for multimedia and the plurality of languages and media emerged in the public sphere, accompanied by new technologies that allowed the existence of a more ephemeral, fast and available culture (such as photocopiers, VCRs, Walkmans, etc. …), also music videos, the video game industry and the massive distribution of the film industry ended up giving rise to cable television. All these developments, with a view to individualized consumption, prepared societies and communities for the necessary sensitivity in the use of digital media – which gained hegemony in the following decade (Santaella, 2003, p.27). In this way, it is possible to classify the internet as the source for new forms of knowledge, distribution and manipulation. As cyberculture is a term that refers to the set of techniques, practices, habits, attitudes and values that come to life in cyberspace, for Lévy (2000) it represents the epitome of freedom in human existence, being a space where minorities are for the first time. rather freed from the social constraints that oppress them.

The beginnings of cyberculture (1950-1970) are intrinsically linked to the micro-communities of digital pirates in the United States of America – countercultural movements made up of students, programmers and researchers in the field of computer science. During this period, hypertext was formed, the language of the digital, and the concept of "cyborg" (a figure that challenges the barriers between humanity and technology, later used as a symbol of the cyberpunk movement) and the first emerged. groups of hackers who intended to act as an integral part of a computing revolution.

The second stage (1970-1980) marks the transition of cyberculture from an academic/institutional context to a phase of greater democratization of computers and gadgets. Greater accessibility to sophisticated instruments and the invention of digital pirates and computer adepts. Several groups and clubs of people interested in the cyber world quickly formed – where several important figures were present in the formation of Silicon Valley as a capital of technology. Several prominent companies and companies were also founded – such as Apple, which brought to market the invention of the century: the personal computer (PC).

The third phase of cyberculture (the late 1980s), not referring to a specific extended period, but to a particular moment, is related to the implementation of microcomputers as work and leisure tools in American and European societies. The cyberpunk literary movement was formed and consolidated, which accelerated the popularity of information technology and forced the movement to be divided into "pirates" (who previously monopolized the community) and "users".

The last period (1990) is linked to the adoption of cyberculture as the current social paradigm around the planet. It refers to the normalization of cyberspace as a place for discussion and sharing of a clear majority of diverse communities – a process accentuated

with the creation of applications and social networks that facilitate access to the network and encourage its infiltration into citizens' routines. For many theorists, this democratization and universalization of computers, smartphones and other technologies marked the death of the cyberpunk movement (since the term "punk" presupposes something that opposes mainstream currents), a movement that has flourished in cyberspace.

The term "cyberspace" was first used in 1982 in the science fiction short story "Burning Chrome", written by William Gibson and published in Omni magazine, which specializes in science and fantasy. In this work, the concept referred to a consensual collective hallucination experienced by computer users. However, Kellner (2001) states that this definition is not adequate to the notion of cyberspace, as the phenomena that happen in this environment are real, current and true - thus, it is impossible to call them "hallucination" -, being documented in the database systems, electronic communications, satellite television, video games, etc… Cyberspace is therefore an existing place on the network, integrated into a technologically evolved society (Monteiro, 2007, p.5).

As space where there is a constant exchange of information, made possible by the worldwide connection of devices, cyberspace is characterized by its fluid, precise, plastic, hypertextual, dynamic, interactive and virtual character. It has the ability to digitize the communication and recording processes, which gives it the status of the main existing communication channel and humanity's greatest memory support. However, it is also possible to state that it has a physical form, which is composed of all its components – software, processors, computers, etc… (Monteiro, 2007, p.6).

3. Culture in Cyberspace

The culture housed and expressed through technology is, as a rule, the property of the younger layers of society, due to its restless, unyielding and rebellious character (which acts in harmony with the malleable and unstable identity of cyberculture - which is always changing and it is always new (Alves & Almeida, 2015, p.154). In cyberspace, it is possible to have networks and communities where different members share interests and, for this reason, come together to consolidate knowledge and debate topics that they consider relevant. The creation of these groups entails, as a consequence, the formation of a collective memory, which in turn builds a unique identity for the community in question.

This constant exchange of messages defines the importance of cyberspace in cultural manifestations, as the existence of environments where information travels uninterruptedly is necessary for the dissemination of cultural practices and maintenance of the values of community networks. Currently, cultural and civic manifestations cannot escape global digital trends, as the process of globalization – made possible by the existence of a democratic cyberspace – ensures that information is accessible in all corners of the world, allowing people to form opinions and take positions on matters of culture.
As for art and its manifestations in the digital medium, the internet opens a new door of possibilities in terms of aesthetics, sound and even distribution. In this way, artistic

expressions, when transmitted on the network, become multi-territorial and penetrate our imagination using different languages and meanings. Several artistic currents break spatial barriers and avoid extinction through cyberspace, others end up suffering mutations and influences from this new medium, like K-pop. K-pop is considered to be the biggest soft power movement in contemporary society. Its explosion and export to the world cultural industry, in addition to serving as a driver of Korean identity, was also responsible for the economic growth of many companies and record labels in the country. Analyzing the success of the genre, it is possible to say that this is something unprecedented, due to the fact that Korean culture was previously unpopular even within Asia. However, as a result of the strong differentiating aesthetic marks of art and the political democratization of Korea (marked by the end of several censorships), a strong cosmopolitan, diverse and creative presence was built that marked by difference and easily managed to guarantee an expansion into Japan (in a first phase). Several entertainment corporations began to emerge from the second half of the 1990s, training young singers and dancers and launching innovative themes that addressed social issues and encouraged individuality and self-expression. On a musical level, K-Pop operates through a more severe and restricted market store than the Western market, having meticulously structured schedules and routines that guide the entire process of creation, distribution and dissemination of the product (Souza & Domingos, 2016, p .9).

2012 marks the worldwide achievement of K-Pop, through the success of "Gangnam Style", the first music video so far to reach the milestone of one billion views on the Youtube platform. Currently, the BTS band is recognized worldwide for having one of the largest fan communities in contemporary society. Being present on various social networks – albeit only as a group, as none of the seven members has an individual account on any platform – the group has eighteen million Facebook followers, forty-four million Instagram followers and seventy-eight million Twitter followers. In terms of Youtube, all the official videos of the band are hosted on the channel of its producer, Hybe Labels (former Big Hit Entertainment). All video clips have more than one hundred million views, three of which: Dynamite, DNA and Boy with Luv reached the billion mark – the first is the current holder of the record for most views in twenty-four hours.
In its statistics, the BTS has two hundred and eighty-three awards won (and five hundred nominations), being one of the only two collectives that managed to sell more than half a million copies of an album in the United States of America (Map of The Soul: 7). According to the Hyundai Research Institute, the band's popularity and influence bring in about three and a half billion dollars a year for the South Korean economy. Every day, there are about 900,000 mentions of the group on social media (not counting the mentions made to the names of members) and, according to a study by the organization Hallyu, the community of BTS admirers, self-proclaimed by ARMY, would be composed of about ninety million members, in the year 2018 (Flor, 2020, p .114). Concerning the Twitter platform, the band is present through three distinct accounts (whose sum of followers resides in the seventy-eight million users), namely: @BTS_twt (account that group members use to communicate with fans – and the most popular), @bts_bighit (dedicated to the dissemination and promotion of content and clipping) and @BTS_jp_official

(dedicated to the band's presence in Japan). All the content shared in the different profiles is in harmony, being consensual in terms of aesthetics, use of hashtags, updating (daily) and general posture. None of the accounts has a habit of answering questions, or messages left by other users and their followers are not verified for the presence of members of the ARMY community – as the band only follows other artists, producers and/or verified accounts.

Analyzing, through Google Trends, the popularity of the term #bts_twt – hashtag built exclusively for fans of the Korean group on the Twitter platform, we were able to observe that, in the last twelve months, it reached the peak of success (translated by the tool through value 100) in the period between December 27, 2020 and January 2, 2021. However, and despite the balance is positive, from January 24, 2021 to the 30th of the same month, the lowest value was found, indicated at 16. During the twelve months under analysis, it is possible to contemplate a greater use of the tag in the Asian continent (Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Bangladesh and the Philippines), although all continents reveal the use of #bts_twt and that it is even very popular in Russia, United States of America, Brazil and Australia. After a search for the same hashtag on the GetDayTrends website, the hashtag's tendency to become extremely popular (very often) and hit the "Agents of the Moment" in countries like Mexico, Colombia, India, Korea was observed. from the South, Argentina, Vietnam, among others… With the hashtags.org application, it is estimated that around twenty thousand tweets per hour are made daily that include the hashtags #bts, or #bts_twt – there is also a strong possibility that those who use these terms will follow them with multimedia content, or tags dedicated and addressed to specific singers. Using the OneMillionTweetMap tool and analyzing the statistics presented, for the BTS theme, relating to the last twenty-four hours, we came to the conclusion that the community is highly international, being present and very active in the five continents. The countries that show the greatest volume of creation and sharing of content related to the band, on the Twitter platform, are Egypt, the United States of America, the Republic of the Philippines and Russia. Alexandria (Egypt) and Dhaka (Bangladesh) are two important cities where the exchange of messages about BTS takes place in quite high numbers.

As for the languages used by the ARMY community, it turns out that – although an overwhelming majority of tweets are published in English – there is a variety of dialects that fans resort to express their support. In the list of the most prominent languages is Korean (mother tongue of all members of the group), Spanish and Russian. As for the most used hashtags (obviously related to the research term), these were: #bts, #taehyung (name of one of the singers), #kimtaehyung, #v (pseudonym of member Taehyung) and #bts_twt (hashtag created specifically for the platform under review). The most popular profile belonging to the Korean group, @BTS_twt, has thirty-six million followers and follows only one hundred and thirty users, most of whom are other performers and celebrities. As the only account that contains messages from BTS members, which may justify its superior popularity, it has a total of twelve thousand and six hundred tweets published since its creation in 2011. With an A+ (maximum level) rating by the Social Blade tool, it reveals a steady evolution in the number of followers –

reaching its peak in May 2021, with the sum of one million and thirty-three thousand new subscribers. However, and contrary to what would be expected, the profile reveals less and less frequency in the publication and sharing of content, has been decreasing steadily since the year 2016 (contrary to the band's popularity).

In terms of content, the month of June 2021 is marked by daily use of the Twitter application, with most members sharing exclusive photos with their fans. Most of the messages that accompany the audiovisual content are in Korean, although the presence of English is a strong characteristic of the account under study. Within this sample, it is possible to see that, on average, each publication reaches half a million retweets, exceeds a million and a half likes and gets around one hundred and fifty thousand responses.

4. Conclusion

We thus see that the evolution in the concept of organizational communication has also been influencing the public sector in this sense. To this end, the dissemination of social communication has contributed to a great extent, which has increased exponentially with technological democratization, changing the forms and time of distribution of information, expanding access to it for citizens (Matos, 2000). As a consequence, the public became more aware of their rights and began to demand more often that they must be respected. The liberalization of markets, the prosperity that was experienced in Europe at the end of the 20th century, and privatizations in the public sector led to an increase in the supply of services, many of which were previously exclusive to the State. This reality has therefore transformed the behaviour of consumers: they have become more enlightened and consequently more demanding, they have started to compare the offers made available, and, when justified, to defend their interests. These behavioural changes forced organizations to renew and recycle their communication strategies, intending to improve the quality of services and meeting objectives. Matos (2000) and Tenera (1998) consider that planning techniques based on Total Quality can be useful in this aspect, substantially facilitating the design of the company's communicative action. Strategic planning will allow determining the orientation of the organization's communication plan, clearly defining who the audiences are and their needs, developing products and processes that respond to those needs and transferring the resulting plans to the operational forces (Matos, 2000 : 3). In the scope of internal communication, all these changes would generate a greater demand for information on the part of employees, greater participation when requested to do so and, consequently, their co-responsibility concerning the efficiency and image of the institution (Garrido, sd). In Corrado's opinion (apud Matos, 2000), the collaborators' aspirations when it comes to communication are easily understandable. They intend to know exactly the situation of the organization at each moment, the problems it faces, the ways to solve them and what is the role of each worker in this context. If communication does not answer these questions, there is room for rumours, so strategic communication planning is vital to fill these gaps and, above all, to aggregate the different organizational levels around common languages, practices and objectives, on the path to creating an organizational identity. This need for a

communicative practice for the different segments of audiences in organizations is also addressed by Nogueira (s.d.), who highlights the impact of changes in organizational administrative models, traditionally oriented towards efficiency. Gaino (apud Nogueira, sd.; 2) says: "*we have to look for effectiveness, which is adult and collective, and which requires sharing responsibly, integrating information*". The author also proposes that public agencies adopt management practices in their communicative processes. Communicators need to know deeply the organization in which they work; with the support of communication techniques and instruments, it is possible to detect the current management model (which influences the entire organizational culture) and, from there, develop an appropriate communication plan, with a view to behavioural changes and the improvement of relationships among employees - whose participation in decision-making processes has visibly increased. As Viana (apud Garrido, s.d.) reinforces, "*when a company makes a communication plan it is willing to look at itself, its competitors and the context in which it operates. Over time, under the pressure of competitors and the demands of the public, it becomes another company for itself. This is what will determine your renewal or ageing.*" Since information can considerably change the perception of quality on the part of citizens, public organizations must produce and provide adequate and reliable information to their citizen-customers, using the appropriate channels. Currently, electronic communications are of particular importance. The good use of information and communication technologies by the public organization must serve not only the computerization of internal processes but also accessibility and transparency for citizens, whenever they need to find information, to dialogue with someone in the organization or to trigger some administrative procedure. For this to happen, it is essential that the organization has a website and that mechanisms are made available that allow and promote interaction with the citizen (Sousa, 2004). As mentioned in the Guide to Good Practices in Building Web Sites of the State's Direct and Indirect Administration, released by the Innovation and Knowledge Mission Unit (Oliveira, Santos and Amaral, 2003), Internet's power is, alongside publishing content, the ease with which it is possible to establish communication or interaction between people. The Guide recommends that any public organization use the Internet and its website, as a vehicle for information, so that citizens can consult the content, but also as a tool for interaction between citizens and their services. To this extent, the Guide recommends that several services should exist, included or referenced on the website: newsletter; e-mail; forum; online chat; telephone lines dedicated to supporting users; suggestion and complaint books. In this orientation for the citizen-client that technologies also allow, in a line of modernization (which goes beyond mere computerization), electronic mail plays a fundamental role. The use of electronic mail in the organization can effectively serve two modernization objectives: to make public services more accessible and transparent to citizens; and, consequently, improve its internal functioning. However, it is necessary to understand that its implementation as a privileged means of communication with citizens, requires a complete integration in the administrative functioning of the organization and this may even imply changes in the processes (Carapeto & Fonseca, 2005). It is, therefore, and currently, the issue of the use of electronic resources that an organization has to

communicate with its stakeholders. For this reason, and inevitably, we approached the theme and the respective instruments within the scope of our case study, which was - as explained above, in "Analytical model and methodological strategy" - in the analysis of the information conveyed in reference journals in the also on corporate websites. The conclusions will allow us to understand that especially everything that the Good Practice Guides and the recent literature on the subject recommend, in times of tension, very little use of the potential of the internet is verified.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interests.

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