

## Fan Journalism on YouTube: The Case of BTS Fandom

Şule YÜKSEL ÖZMEN<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Prof. Dr., Trabzon University, syozmen@trabzon.edu.tr

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the phenomenon of fan journalism as an alternative form of cultural production within digital media ecosystems. Drawing on theoretical perspectives from cultural studies, media convergence, and participatory culture, the article conceptualizes fan journalism as a hybrid practice that combines amateur creativity with professional journalistic norms. The research framework is grounded in Henry Jenkins' notions of participatory culture and remix practices, emphasizing how fans negotiate identity, belonging, and legitimacy through their journalistic activities. The study employs a qualitative research design based on textual and discourse analysis of fan-produced media content, with a sample consisting of online fan communities, digital platforms, and selected case studies of K-pop and Western pop fandoms. Data collection focuses on fan blogs, online magazines, and social media-based fan accounts, analyzing both the textual strategies and the communicative practices used to frame news-like narratives. Findings indicate that fan journalism reshapes traditional boundaries between media producers and consumers by blurring lines between information and entertainment. The analysis demonstrates that fans not only rearticulate mainstream media content but also create alternative narratives that challenge hegemonic discourses in global popular culture. Furthermore, fan journalists display a high degree of affective investment and community-driven legitimacy, which provides them with credibility within their networks, even in the absence of professional institutional recognition. In conclusion, the article argues that fan journalism exemplifies the democratization of media production in digital culture, while simultaneously raising questions about authority, authenticity, and sustainability of such practices. The implications suggest that fan-driven journalism is likely to play an increasingly significant role in shaping the future of cultural communication.

**Keyword:** K-Pop, BTS, Fan Journalism, Fan Studies

## YouTube'da Hayran Gazeteciliği: BTS Hayranları Örneği

### ÖZET

Bu çalışma, dijital medya ekosistemlerinde kültürel üretimin alternatif bir biçim olarak fan gazeteciliği olusunu incelemektedir. Kültürel çalışmalar, medya yakınsaması ve katılımcı kültür kuramsal yaklaşımına dayanan araştırma, fan gazeteciliğini amatör yaratıcılıkla profesyonel gazetecilik normlarını birleştiren hibrit bir pratik olarak kavramsallaştırmaktadır. Çalışmanın kuramsal çerçevesi Henry Jenkins'in katılımcı kültür ve yeniden üretim (remix) kavramları üzerine kurulmuş olup, fanların kimlik, aidiyet ve meşruiyeti gazetecilik faaliyetleri aracılığıyla nasıl müzakere ettiklerini ortaya koymaktadır. Araştırma, nitel bir tasarımla yürütülmüş olup, örnök çevrimiçi fan toplulukları, dijital platformlar ve K-pop ile Batı pop müziği fandomlarından seçilmiş örnek olayları kapsamaktadır. Veri toplama süreci, fan blogları, çevrimiçi dergiler ve sosyal medya tabanlı fan hesaplarından elde edilen içeriklerin metinsel ve söylemsel analizine dayanmaktadır. İnceleme, haber benzeri anlatıların kurgulanmasında kullanılan metinsel stratejileri ve iletişim pratiklerini değerlendirmektedir. Elde edilen bulgular, fan gazeteciliğinin medya üreticileri ve tüketicileri arasındaki geleneksel sınırları yeniden şekillendirdiğini ve bilgi ile eğlence arasındaki çizgileri bulanıklaştırdığını göstermektedir. Analizler, fanların yalnızca ana akım medya içeriklerini yeniden dolaşma somkasma kalmadığını, aynı zamanda küresel popüler kültürdeki hegemonik söylemlere alternatif anlatılar ürettiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Ayrıca, fan gazeteciler yüksek düzeyde duygusal yarım ve topluluk temelli meşruiyet sergilemeye, bu da kurumsal tanımlı olmasa bile onlara kendi ağları içinde güvenilirlik kazandırmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, makale fan gazeteciliğinin dijital kültürde medya üretiminin demokratikleşmesini önekledeğini, ancak aynı zamanda otorite, özgünlük ve sürdürilebilirlik gibi tartışmaları da gündeme getirdiğini savunmaktadır. Bulgular, fan odaklı gazeteciliğin kültürel iletişimini geleceğinde giderek daha önemli bir rol oynayacağını göstermektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** K-Pop, BTS, Hayran Gazeteciliği, Hayran Çalışmaları

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## Introduction

In today's world, the widespread use of the internet has accelerated as a result of advances in communication technologies, and the use of digital tools and digital media platforms has increased. With digitalization, the one-way communication process has been left behind. The transition to a two-way communication process has transformed media consumers into producers of media content as well. The inherently interactive nature of digital technologies has turned media consumers into active content creators (Sönmez & Büyükbaykal, 2024).

Numerous digital media platforms have been introduced to meet users' diverse expectations. YouTube, the online video-sharing platform, allows its users to produce content according to their interests. Users can watch any type of video depending on their preferences, and YouTube attracts attention with the diversity of its content.

YouTube has become a medium where fandoms—groups of devoted fans of artists or athletes—can obtain news about those they admire. It is possible to find a wide range of content related to various fan communities on YouTube. Fans use online platforms to access news about their idols quickly and easily, stay informed about concerts and events, and obtain news and information from accurate and reliable sources. The abundance of content and information leaves fans facing the question of how to reach accurate information in this vast sea of content. Since the news and information shared on online platforms are not always accurate, fans and even the admired individuals themselves can sometimes be misrepresented. In order to prevent misleading news and disinformation, and to access reliable information, fans look for channels that produce accurate content. Some fans even dedicate themselves to this task. These individuals, through their practices of news production, use of news values, and presentation techniques, resemble journalists rather than ordinary content creators. These activities can be conceptualized as *fan journalism*.

This study addresses the concept of fan journalism. It examines the practices of fan journalism, the production of news, and the motivations of those who prepare such content. Fan activities that can be defined as fan journalism are carried out by individuals who have not received professional journalism training. The study aims to discuss whether the work performed by these fans—who lack formal training in journalism and do not identify themselves as journalists—can nevertheless be described as journalism, both in terms of the content they produce and their own perspectives. The research highlights both the processes involved and the similarities and differences between the concept of fan journalism and

that of citizen journalism. Within this framework, the study analyzes the processes through which fan journalists access, verify, and prepare news for dissemination, as well as how they continue content production by considering feedback from their audiences. The study also explores their motivations for starting and maintaining this activity and aims to reveal the similarities and differences between fan journalism and the practice of citizen journalism.

### **Definition and Development of Fan Culture**

Fans are individuals who show intense interest and admiration for a particular film, cinema, television program, artist, or celebrity. One of their distinctive features is their extensive knowledge about the people and products they admire. Fans attract attention through their alternative interpretations of media texts. Contrary to common assumptions, fans are not people who live outside of society or remain distant from social activities. On the contrary, it is possible to observe them actively participating in social life (Hills, 2002).

In fan communities, the feedback provided by members after content sharing enables content creators to reflect on and evaluate what they have shared. Feedback not only contributes to the improvement of content but also strengthens the sense of belonging within the community. When content is liked and receives positive comments, it increases the motivation for further content production and supports the growth of the community.

With the advent of digital communication tools, social media platforms, and platforms for content creation and sharing, it has become easier to produce and disseminate culture. These tools, which have entered into daily life, have fostered both participatory culture and fan culture, as people voluntarily create and share content (Jenkins, 2018).

Fan communities constitute one of the online communities that have developed within the framework of participatory culture. This has brought together people who might never have encountered one another in daily life. Individuals participating in these communities are encouraged to showcase their skills. Today, people widely produce media content through the opportunities provided by participatory culture. Yet, if such communities had not been formed, it would not be possible to speak of an audience to view, like, or provide feedback on the produced content (Jenkins, 2018).

In communication processes, feedback ensures that the sender can verify whether the intended emotions and thoughts have been evoked in the receiver. Feedback also indicates that communication has taken place between the sender and the recipient (Fiske,

2003, p. 40–41). Fan communities bring together individuals with shared understandings and common cultural tastes (Jenkins, 1992). Today, fan culture evolves largely on online media platforms, and in order to join and establish a place within these communities, fans are required to employ their specific knowledge (Sagardia, 2017, p. 69).

Before fan culture took its shape on online platforms, early forms included fanzines, fan songs and videos, fan-designed costumes, and fan fiction. These fan productions exemplify fans' creativity and their emotional attachment to popular culture (Jenkins, 1992).

Initially, fan productions appeared in the form of small bulletins or fanzines. With the widespread use of the internet in daily life, these productions moved into online spaces. Fan content, once seen in blogs, wikis, and online dictionaries, shifted to social media platforms with the development of social media. The migration of fan culture into digital media environments led to the growth of practices such as *fan comments, fan fiction, fan art*, and meme culture (*caps*) in these spaces (Çapkin, 2023, p. 31).

## Research Model

### Aim of the Study

This study addresses the concept of *fan journalism*. It aims to reveal the practices of fan journalism, the processes of news production, and the motivations of those who prepare such content. What can be described as fan journalism is carried out by individuals without professional training in journalism. The study conceptualizes this phenomenon as *fan journalism* due to the overlap between the practices of these fans—who identify themselves as part of a fandom and not as journalists—and traditional journalism practices.

The study explores the production processes of content created by fans and identifies their intersections with journalistic practices. Individuals without journalistic education but who produce news through digital media with the rise of new media are generally referred to as *citizen journalists*. Another aim of this study, therefore, is to examine the similarities and differences between the concept of fan journalism and that of citizen journalism.

In this context, the sub-questions of the research are as follows:

1. *What are the points of intersection between fan-produced news content and journalistic practices?*
2. *Can fan journalism be considered a subfield of citizen journalism?*
3. *What are the similarities and differences between fan journalism and citizen journalism?*

4. *How do fans' processes of gathering, writing, presenting, and verifying news function?*
5. *What motivates fans in their production of news content?*

### Method

The study employed the grounded theory method. Grounded theory, as a qualitative research approach, aims to develop new theoretical insights based on the data collected. The term “grounded” signifies that the theory to be developed is based on the data, while “theory” indicates that the systematic analysis of these data will yield a conceptual framework. Thus, grounded theory is an inductive qualitative research method (Punch, 2005).

In studies using grounded theory, data analysis is carried out in three stages:

*First stage:* The similarities and differences in the collected data are analyzed, and conceptual categories are formed.

*Second stage:* The relationships between these conceptual categories are analyzed.

*Third stage:* The relationships between the categories are conceptualized (Punch, 2005).

While the study seeks to understand fan news production within the framework of journalistic practices, it also examines its similarities and differences with citizen journalism. Fan news production takes place through the opportunities offered by digital and social media platforms and, with its unique dynamics, has been defined within journalistic practices. Grounded theory was therefore used to conceptualize fan news production as “fan journalism.”

Based on data collected through in-depth interviews, the three stages of grounded theory were followed as outlined below:

### Stage 1

The YouTube channels *İyikiBTS* and *btslijelibon*, which provide updates on news about the Korean music group BTS, were examined to determine whether their content can be considered news and whether their processes of preparation and presentation reflect journalistic practices.

The analysis revealed that the channels' content included elements of newsworthiness such as *importance, prominence, timeliness, proximity, accuracy, relevance, and locality*. Furthermore, the news content was generally prepared in accordance with the *5W1H rule* (who, what, where, when, how, why). While the presentation of news content on these channels resembled news bulletins, the difference lay in their style of address. For instance, unlike the neutral language typically used in news bulletins, these

channels often employ more personal and intimate expressions, such as “my dear,” reflecting everyday conversational tone.

From the YouTube channel analysis and interview data, the following categories were identified:

- *Motivation category: community interaction, BTS, economic and emotional ties, identity, and belonging.*
- *News practices category: news gathering, writing, presentation, and verification/editing processes.*

### **Stage 2**

This stage covers the data collection process. The news-gathering, writing, presenting, and verification processes of the YouTube channels were analyzed and compared with the practices of professional journalists. The motivations behind the channels' news content production were also examined.

The data obtained from the YouTube channel analysis and the in-depth interviews were discussed within the created categories. In order to conceptualize fan journalism, the channels İyikiBTS and btslijelibon were studied. Since the study included channel analysis as part of the data collection process, the research was supported by the netnography method, which covers online data collection processes. In the content of fan channels, elements of journalistic practices and news values were identified. The findings from the channel analysis were used to prepare in-depth interview questions.

In netnographic studies, researchers are required to determine the specific research questions and identify online spaces that may provide answers to these questions. These spaces may include websites, blogs, boards (news boards), or email groups created for shared interests. Once the virtual groups and environments for the study are determined, one of the communities is selected according to the following criteria:

- *The group must be suitable for the research problem.*
- *The group must have a high level of traffic and communication.*
- *The group must contain a large number of individual and distinct messages.*
- *The data must be rich and detailed.*
- *There must be a high level of interaction within the group suitable for the research questions (Kozinets, 2002).*

For this research, in-depth interviews were used as the primary data collection tool. An interview is an interactive process designed to obtain responses to questions prepared for a predetermined purpose. Among in-depth interview types, the study employed semi-structured interviews. In semi-structured interviews, open-ended questions are used to explore the participant's perspective and gather rich data.

While the predetermined questions guide the interview process, additional questions may be asked during the conversation to obtain more detailed data. Interviews may be conducted face-to-face, over the internet, or by phone. In this study, semi-structured interviews with the YouTube channels İyikiBTS and btslijelibon were conducted via telephone.

### **Semi-Structured Interview Questions**

- *What are the sources you use during the news-gathering process?*
- *How do your news writing and presentation processes work?*
- *What are your motivations for producing news content?*
- *Why did you decide to open the channel?*
- *How is the verification of news ensured?*

### **Stage 3**

In the final stage of the study, the concept of fan journalism was articulated. Both fan journalists and citizen journalists do not have formal education in journalism. These individuals share news through digital media with the development of new media. Unlike fan journalism, citizen journalism primarily focuses on public issues and produces texts that contain political discourse. For this reason, the conclusion was reached that fan journalism cannot be classified within the scope of citizen journalism.

### **Sample**

The sample of the study consists of the YouTube channels İyikiBTS and btslijelibon, which were established by fans of the South Korean music group BTS. These channels were created with the aim of providing accurate news about BTS.

Debuting under the BigHit company in 2013, BTS has achieved global success and fame. The group is known for its international fan base and record-breaking music career. BTS fans are referred to as ARMY. The reason behind the group's popularity and devoted following lies in the sense of closeness that it fosters with its fans. Through strong communication and interaction with ARMY, BTS continues to reinforce its popularity. The group effectively uses social media platforms to maintain active engagement with ARMY. During events, concerts, live streams, and messages, BTS consistently thanks its fan base and expresses love for them. This ongoing interaction strengthens the emotional bond between the group and its fans.

Studies on K-pop have shown that K-pop groups help fans cope with depression. The information sharing and communication with fans, the solidarity among group members, their styles, and uplifting lyrics contribute to fans feeling better and strengthen their emotional connection with the group (Trzcinska, 2018).

BTS also represents South Korea in the international arena as one of the prominent K-pop groups symbolizing Korean cultural diplomacy. For example, during UNICEF's Generation Unlimited campaign, the group addressed the United Nations with the message "love yourself and speak yourself," which was widely shared by ARMY and became a trending topic on Twitter. In 2020, during the pandemic, the group participated online in a UNICEF General Assembly meeting and gave a speech on staying hopeful and avoiding loneliness during the pandemic (Binark, 2018). During the pandemic, BTS's online concert Bang Bang Con—broadcast live on WeVerse—attracted approximately 756,000 viewers, demonstrating the group's continued engagement with fans. The company BigHit increased its profits by 27% through online concerts and merchandise sales during the pandemic (Binark, 2018).

The group's song Dynamite was streamed 548,171 times on December 22, 610,173 times on December 23, and 570,138 times on December 24. On December 25 it reached 520,778 streams, 653,479 on December 26, and 708,246 on December 27. In total, Dynamite has been streamed 1,983,927,115 times (Keskin, 2022).

After its release, BTS's song Butter quickly broke multiple records: it became the most-streamed song on Spotify within 24 hours, the YouTube music video with the highest number of premiere viewers, the most-watched YouTube music video for a K-pop group, and the most-viewed YouTube music video within 24 hours overall. BTS also holds the title of the most-followed group on Instagram. Member Kim Taehyung broke two Instagram records: fastest to reach 1 million followers (43 minutes) and fastest to reach 10 million followers (4 hours and 53 minutes) (Jiangipeun, 2021).

In 2021, BTS attended the United Nations General Assembly together with South Korean President Moon Jae-in and delivered a speech before all world leaders. BTS was introduced by Moon Jae-in as 'special presidential envoys for future generations and culture,' and their address at the General Assembly attracted significant attention (Keskin, 2022).

## Findings and Discussion

In this section, the categories established in the research have been analyzed.

### 1. Findings on the *İyikiBTS* Fan Channel

The channel *İyikiBTS* was launched on November 22, 2020. Its owner, Ms. Ayşe, a sociologist born in 1990, stated that she did not have any social media accounts before encountering BTS. After being introduced to the group by her sister in 2014, she opened a Twitter (X) account to follow news about them. Although she

does not know Korean, she has advanced proficiency in English. After listening to more of BTS's songs, she realized that the members' personalities and worldview had a positive effect on her, and she began to identify herself as part of the ARMY.

The channel's description states:

*"Hello, here we only gossip about Bangtan, who we are grateful to have in our lives. On this channel, I only talk about BTS. I do not cover other groups or artists, no matter how successful they are; I only briefly mention their interactions with BTS. Please follow with this in mind. This channel was opened to provide accurate news; I am not seeking publicity. If BTS is also your source of happiness, then this channel is exactly for you. Welcome, my 'İyikim' ❤️."*

This description emphasizes that the channel is dedicated to BTS, while fostering a sense of belonging among ARMY by addressing them with the phrase *İyikim* ❤️ (meaning "my precious" in Turkish). On the "About" section, the channel includes links to the owner's Instagram account and her second YouTube channel, *MoreOfBts*.

Currently, the channel has 44,200 subscribers. Across 1,234 videos, it has accumulated a total of 14,153,749 views. Its most-watched video, titled "Psy tricked Yoongi. Plans during the production of the new song..." has received 58,000 views.

The channel's banner features a purple ribbon with the text **İYİKİBTS**. Above this text is the phrase **Love Your With BTS** in black and pink, surrounded by the names of the group members written in smaller font.

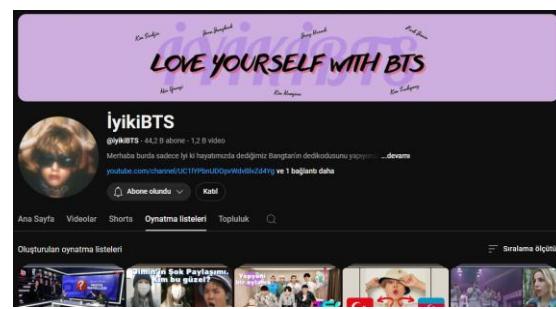


Image 1. Video Categories on the *İyikiBTS* Channel

### 2. Findings on the *btsljelibon* Fan Channel

The YouTube channel *btsljelibon* was launched on May 8, 2020, coinciding with the pandemic period. The channel's owner, a woman in her early thirties working in a public institution, had prior experience with YouTube through her earlier handicrafts channel *minnoş şeyler* ("cute things"), opened in 2018. She became an ARMY that same year. Although she does not speak Korean or English, she first encountered BTS when she clicked on YouTube Trends in Türkiye and came across the group's song *Idol*, which was ranked number one. After enjoying *Idol*, she listened to *Fake Love*, and gradually went back through the group's discography to their debut in 2013. By the end

of this process, she had embraced their philosophy and identified herself as an ARMY.

In the channel description, she writes:

“BTS makes me very happy. If their videos make you happy too, this is the place for you. Welcome to your channel, my jellybean ❤️BTS ❤️Jellybean ❤️ ARMY.”

This statement highlights her emotional bond with the group and emphasizes that the channel is dedicated to ARMY. The phrase *BTS ❤️Jelibon ❤️ ARMY* reflects the sense of belonging she has developed with BTS and fellow fans.

In the “About” section, she provides links to her Instagram account and another YouTube channel, *jeljin*. The channel currently has 124,000 subscribers and has published 1,088 videos, which have collectively reached 43,181,681 views. The most viewed video is titled ‘Nihat Hatipoğlu talked about BTS’ with 388,000 views.

The channel banner features a black background with an image of BTS members, overlaid with the white text *BTSLİJELİBON*.

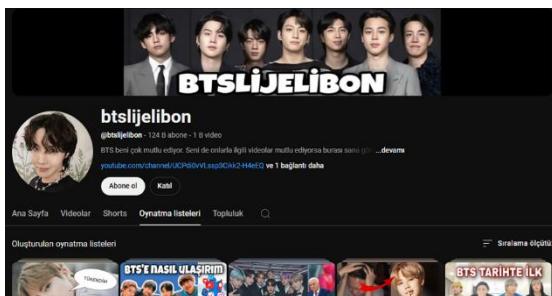


Image 2. Video Categories on the *btssljelibon* Channel

### News Practices

#### News-Gathering Process

The news sources of the YouTube channels *İyikiBTS* and *btssljelibon* primarily consist of secondary sources. Social media platforms are actively used to access news. These include the social media accounts of Korean media outlets such as Nielsen and JTBC, as well as large foreign fan pages created by BTS fans. Additionally, BTS’s official company account, interviews, the members’ personal social media accounts (Instagram and X), and applications such as WeLife and Weverse are regularly monitored.

One of the channel owners explained:

“Nielsen or JTBC have Twitter accounts. I follow them. There are also large fan pages dedicated to BTS, very well-established ones that I find reliable. I follow them and then filter the information through my reasoning process to create videos” (*İyikiBTS*).

#### News Values

The videos of both *İyikiBTS* and *btssljelibon* channels reflect news values such as importance, timeliness, accuracy, relevance, locality, and prominence.

- *Timeliness*: For an event to be newsworthy, it must be recent. Both channels follow news about BTS regularly and share it on their platforms without much delay.
- *Prominence*: Famous individuals recognized nationally and internationally carry news value. BTS, being an internationally successful group with a global fan base, naturally embodies this value.
- *Importance*: News that affects large segments of society or provokes significant emotions is considered important. BTS’s achievements are widely celebrated by ARMY, which reflects collective joy and significance.
- *Relevance*: News may not interest everyone, but for ARMY, BTS-related news in mainstream or social media is highly significant.
- *Locality*: The proximity of a news item to its audience increases its value. For example, BTS responding to Turkish fans’ questions during a live broadcast demonstrates this dimension.

One example is the video “Bangtan answered the questions of 4 Turkish ARMYs! Exploring every corner of Türkiye. A golden day for T-ARMY” on the *İyikiBTS* channel, which highlights this local connection.

#### Verification and Fact-Checking Process

Verification is essential for ensuring the reliability of news and preventing the spread of false or misleading information. Both channels emphasize that they verify the news they share through multiple sources.

As one explained:

“I confirm it with the original broadcast source. Other than that, I have a few sources I really trust. For instance, three of them provide translations, and I cross-check those translations before preparing my video” (*btssljelibon*).

An example is the 2024 video titled “FAKE NEWS about SUGA! Investigation and Apology Issued” on the *btssljelibon* channel, where a false report about Suga allegedly exceeding the speed limit on a scooter was corrected following a police investigation and the release of CCTV footage by the company. The channel reported that the original outlet later issued an apology.

#### News Presentation and Archiving

Both channels collect and archive visual materials related to the news topics. They highlight that gathering suitable visual materials requires extra effort

and time. The creators regularly scan various news sources to obtain high-quality visuals, which are then archived on devices such as computers, tablets, and external storage (USB drives).

For example, one of the channel owners stated:

*"I have USB drives entirely filled with BTS content. I actually have a 1TB archive, overflowing with BTS materials" (iyikiBTS).*

Both channels also stressed that they avoid using sensationalist headlines. Instead, they choose titles and visuals that reflect the actual content, prioritizing honesty and trust with their followers.

As one explained:

*"If followers already know the news, they won't click on the video, and I'm okay with that. I don't want them to be disappointed or feel misled. Deceiving people makes me feel guilty, so I avoid misleading titles at all costs" (iyikiBTS).*

By contrast, btslijelidon noted that sometimes they deliberately omit one element of the news in the title to spark curiosity, while still ensuring factual accuracy.

### Motivations

#### Interaction

Both *iyikiBTS* and *btslijelidon* sustain their content production by maintaining constant interaction with their followers. Feedback from viewers—whether through comments on videos, participation in polls, or reactions on other platforms—serves as an incentive for them to continue producing news content. Both channels actively use YouTube's Community tab to share text, images, links, and polls, not only to announce updates about BTS and the channel itself but also to celebrate holidays, birthdays, and other special occasions.

They also opened Instagram accounts to communicate more directly with followers, thereby strengthening interaction. This has allowed them to move beyond being merely news providers; they have assumed roles similar to friends, confidants, or older sisters who listen to their followers' personal concerns. Although most followers are women, there are also male fans (fanboys) among their audiences, and the age range extends beyond just teenagers.

One of the channel owners explained:

*"I even see comments like 'Sister, I'm a fanboy, will you include me too?' Yes, I do have male followers. For example, just recently, a 20-year-old fanboy wrote to me very politely. Of course, the majority are women" (iyikiBTS).*

Another shared:

*"What makes me happiest are the relationships I've built. Some followers are university students, some are preparing for high school exams, and others are adults with children. For instance, on Instagram, I've developed close friendships—even*

*someone from Adana who writes me a poem every day. These bonds have become meaningful, like family" (btslijelidon).*

Additionally, the culture of gift-giving has been transferred to digital platforms. For example, both channels occasionally share unofficial concert links with their followers on Instagram. In return, followers "reciprocate" these gifts by liking, commenting on, or resharing content. Such reciprocal practices strengthen the status of these channels within the fandom.

One creator described the effort involved in this process:

*"Concert link-sharing really tires me. Often, I follow fan pages that attend concerts in Korea. They stream them, and I share the link on my channel. But sometimes the link gets shut down, and I need to find a new one immediately. This happens while the concert is live, so it's stressful. Sometimes I even miss parts of the concert while trying to provide my followers with the correct link" (iyikiBTS).*

Interestingly, *btslijelidon* also reported having a non-Turkish audience, including viewers from Turkic republics, the Arab world, and even Europe. Some followers even expressed that they started learning Turkish thanks to BTS fandom content.

*"I have many followers from Turkic republics and the Arab region, especially those who already watch Turkish TV dramas. Once, a foreign woman contacted me and offered to translate my videos into English. I didn't accept, since I felt my English wasn't strong enough to take it international. But many followers told me, 'I love Turkish; I'm learning it thanks to you'" (btslijelidon).*

#### Competition

Competition is another motivation factor observed in these channels. Since both channels share similar content, disputes often arise regarding "who copied from whom." This competitive environment mirrors the struggle for exclusivity seen in professional journalism.

*"When I first entered YouTube, I realized there was a lot of competition—something I'd never experienced before. It was like the rivalries celebrities face, with smear campaigns. For instance, if I corrected false information from another channel, my followers would tell that channel, 'No, Jelidon said this,' and then those channels would attack me. I went through such a period" (btslijelidon).*

Similarly, *iyikiBTS* described frustrations about being copied:

*"There's another channel that produces content by copying me entirely—cover design, wording, everything. People think it's me, and it affects the trust I worked hard to build. It feels like when a rival company steals your brand identity" (iyikiBTS).*

Moreover, when *btslijelidon* posted news about other K-pop groups such as *Blackpink*, some followers reacted negatively, insisting that they only wanted BTS-related news. This shows that competition and

rivalry exist not only between content creators but also among fandoms.

### BTS

The creators' emotional closeness to BTS is a central motivation. After discovering the group, both channel owners explored BTS's past albums, researched lyrics, and watched interviews. They described this experience as a kind of parasocial relationship, where fans perceive celebrities as friends, family members, or role models.

The CEO of BigHit Entertainment, Bang Shi Hyuk, once explained that BTS was designed not as "false heroes" but as relatable figures who could be seen as close friends. This approach helps explain why ARMY feel a deep emotional connection to BTS.

As one creator put it:

*"BTS has been so good for me psychologically, and that's why they're good for people in general. Many fans said they gave up on suicide because of BTS. So, my channel wasn't just about providing information—it was also about helping people feel better through BTS"* (ŷikiBTS).

Another said:

*"What makes me happiest is when people tell me, 'Sister, thanks to you, I feel much better. I was crying, but then I saw your video notification and now I'm smiling. Your voice gives me peace.' That's priceless"* (ŷikiBTS).

### Access to Accurate News

The interviews conducted with the owners of ũikiBTS and btslijelibon revealed that they were disturbed by the presence of false or misleading information in news shared about BTS on both social media and professional news outlets. They expressed particular discomfort with:

- *The neglect of individual and collective achievements of BTS members,*
- *Negative portrayals of the emotional bond and admiration between BTS and their fans,*
- *Sensational rumors that associated members' names with untrue stories.*

Noticing the lack of reliable news sources about BTS, and encouraged by their close circles, both channel owners were motivated to open YouTube channels in order to provide verified and trustworthy news. They emphasized the responsibility they felt toward their followers, making sure to share content regularly to prevent fans from being exposed to inaccurate reports from unreliable sources.

In this sense, their sense of responsibility parallels that of professional journalists, who feel obligated to provide accurate and timely news so that their audiences do not miss out on important developments.

One creator described this sense of duty as follows:

*"On YouTube and Instagram, people ask each other about the news. Sometimes there are rumors like 'one member was abused by his father,' which are completely false. When I explain this, people ask, 'How would you know better than others?' That used to make me angry. My family listens to BTS too, and my sister told me, 'Why don't you open your own channel? You're more knowledgeable.' At first, I doubted myself, but eventually I started. Even when I was hospitalized for two months, I kept going. Now, if I don't share the news, my followers might hear it from unreliable sources. So I feel responsible for updating them every day. Over time, they stopped following any other sources and rely solely on me. That sense of responsibility keeps me going"* (ŷikiBTS).

### Economy

The YouTube channels ũikiBTS and btslijelibon gather, prepare, and share news independently, without affiliation to any media institution. Their decision to open channels focused on BTS news and updates within the ARMY fandom was not primarily motivated by economic concerns. Both creators emphasized that they do not earn significant financial returns from YouTube.

For example, the owner of btslijelibon stated that any income generated is saved specifically for the purpose of attending a BTS concert:

*"I want to attend at least one BTS concert and see them live. Since it is very difficult in Türkiye I decided to save my YouTube income for this. I don't touch it for anything else—it's only for this special dream"* (btslijelibon).

Similarly, the owner of ũikiBTS confirmed that while there is some financial gain, it is limited:

*"Yes, there is economic return, but it's a small amount. The highest I've earned so far is around two and a half [units]"* (ŷikiBTS).

Thus, unlike professional journalism, the primary motivation of these fan channels is not economic profit but rather community belonging, emotional connection, and dedication to accurate news dissemination.

### Conclusion

Fan journalism is carried out by individuals who are members of fandoms and who, despite lacking professional journalistic training, demonstrate striking similarities with professional journalism in terms of news-gathering, writing, presentation, and verification processes. This study revealed that while these practices overlap with journalism, there are also important differences.

One major difference lies in the objectivity principle. Professional journalism is guided by the principle of impartiality, whereas fan journalism is grounded in emotional attachment and devotion to the admired

figure. The relationship between fan journalists and their subjects is not neutral; it is based on admiration and loyalty.

Both fan journalists and citizen journalists share the feature of having no formal journalistic education. However, they differ in terms of subject matter. While citizen journalism is often associated with political discourse and social issues, fan journalism revolves around cultural production, admiration, and entertainment content. For this reason, the study concludes that fan journalism cannot be fully categorized as a subfield of citizen journalism.

In addition, the findings indicate that fan journalism is driven by motivations such as:

- Ensuring accurate and reliable information reaches the fandom,
- Maintaining a strong sense of community interaction and belonging,
- Emotional closeness to the admired figures (BTS in this case),
- Competition within the fan community and among content creators,
- Limited but symbolic economic incentives.

Through their YouTube channels, İyikiBTS and btslijelibon have assumed the role of alternative news sources for the ARMY fandom in Türkiye. By verifying, archiving, and disseminating content responsibly, they exemplify how fans transform into active news producers in the digital age.

Although YouTube was initially met with disapproval and heavy criticism by professionals, it gradually attracted the attention of mainstream media and transformed into a “star-hunting” platform. While users at first did not intend to pursue fame, over time YouTube was fueled by mainstream media in search of new celebrities; thus, even without being fully aware of it, users began to compete with professionals through the content they produced (Erdal, 2021). Fan journalism can be regarded as an integral component of citizen journalism, as it similarly emphasizes participatory practices and audience-driven content production. In this context, YouTube emerges as a particularly significant platform, providing fans with the technological infrastructure and visibility to transform their cultural engagement into journalistic practices. The platform enables fans not only to produce and distribute media texts but also to construct alternative narratives that may challenge or complement mainstream journalism. Consequently, YouTube functions as a critical site where fan journalism both intersects with and extends the broader field of citizen journalism.

This study demonstrates that fan journalism represents a unique form of participatory culture, blending fandom practices with journalistic processes. It underscores the need for further academic research to better understand the boundaries, potentials, and limitations of this emerging field in the broader landscape of journalism and media studies.

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