

Korean K-Pop Band BTS and the Iranians: An Online Exploration

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Funding: No specific funding was received for this work.

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Abstract

The meteoric ascent of the Korean music ensemble BTS has captured the attention of audiences worldwide with their distinctive fusion of pop, hip-hop, and R&B. Their ability to weave religious elements into their music has propelled their success far beyond mere musical band, breaking through cultural and linguistic confines. Their impact reshapes the music industry and presents an intriguing case of cultural exchange within the global entertainment scene. This data-mining study explores BTS's remarkable ability to cultivate a vast fanbase in Iran. However, the findings indicate a waning influence in the region, as evidenced by a decrease in tweets about BTS from 39,237 to 23,697, and finally to 9,215 over three consecutive years leading up to 2024. Despite this decline, the core group of BTS enthusiasts in Iran, predominantly loyal teenage girls, continues to actively support the group.

Keywords: BTS; Bangtan Boys; Army; Iranian Fans; K-Pop.

Introduction

The internet has dramatically transformed our lives; one of the areas that have experienced profound changes as a result of the emergence and expansion of the internet is online life on social networks (Shahghasemi, 2020; Sabbar & Matson, 2019; Aris et al., 2023). Following these transformations, the culture of fame has also undergone significant changes, and today most celebrities are forced to search for new followers on social networks (Shahghasemi, 2020; Strumska-Cylwik & Olivier, 2018)).

The Korean group BTS has been gaining strength continuously since its inception in 2010. The group's first project was released three years after its establishment with the support of Big Hit Entertainment and from the very beginning, this band and its supporters decided to employ new methods of success in the global celebrity industry. BTS became successful at the very early stages and now this group has a substantial following among young Iranian girls. According to DataK Company, daily analysis of Persian Twitter Big Data alongside hashtags related to events, occasions, and societal incidents shows that K-pop related hashtags such as #EXO, #BTS, and #MAMAVOTE are generally among the top

hashtags in Persian X. Datak says that on Twitter (now X), K-pop was the second most frequent topic on this social network in 2021 (Shahghasemi, 2023).

BTS employs the most effective methods, using religion to its advantage. BTS compels its fans to view and discuss BTS collectively, both virtually and in reality. In these online and offline gatherings, the pressure of the crowd is so high that practically most teenagers are forced to worship BTS. The literature that science has produced on the effect of group pressure reveals astonishing dimensions of the group's ability to exert pressure on us. In 1936, the Muzafer Sherif brought his subjects one by one into a dark room and asked them to say how far and in what direction a ray of light that had been cast into the room went. The evaluations were extremely different. When the subjects were brought back into the room as a group, their evaluations converged, and this finding by Sherif clearly demonstrated that individuals tended to align with the group evaluation regardless of their personal perceptions (Platow et al., 2017). Later in 1955, Solomon Asch showed his subjects several lines drawn next to each other and asked which one was longer. Although the correct answer was obvious, Asch deliberately included subjects who claimed all the lines were the same length. When some of the main subjects accepted the incorrect evaluation, Asch concluded that the forces for conformity to the group overpowered an individual's ability to make even the most obvious judgments. People felt less anxious when they were in conformity with group norms because challenging the majority's view is difficult and imposes significant psychological pressure (Asch, 1951). Stanley Milgram's study titled *Obedience to Authority* published in 1974, had even more terrifying findings. In this research, subjects were told they would participate in a teacher-learner experiment: "Learners" were tied to chairs with electronic wiring and electrodes were attached to their bodies. Subjects were told to ask the learners questions and if they answered incorrectly, to administer an electric shock to them. In reality, the learners were part of the experiment and no shock was administered; they just reacted theatrically to convince the subjects (i.e., the teachers) that the experiment was real. Subjects were prepared to continue administering electric shocks even when it appeared that the learners were experiencing severe pain. If a teacher protested and said they were no longer willing to shock the learner, a researcher would admonish: "Please continue," or "You must continue." Milgram (1974) found that 65% of the subjects complied and continued the task up to the maximum voltage of 450 degrees. The subjects had surrendered their autonomy to the experiment, believing it was being conducted for the sake of science (Milgram, 1974). Fast forward to our time, managers working for Big Hit are well aware of the results of these studies and guide the communities in a direction where the debate is less about liking BTS or not, rather, it is about how much BTS members are worthy of being loved: "How could one not admire and praise these seven holy boys?"

BTS offers a paradigm that not only addresses the spiritual needs of adolescents, who feel alienated from traditional religions, but also validates their constructed needs within the modern world. Indeed, the gods of BTS, unlike the saints of old, are portrayed as charismatic and sexually attractive figures. They utilize elements of Christianity for their sanctification and purification. Despite their glamorous portrayal and the sensual nature of their songs, very little information about their personal lives, particularly their sexual lives, is disclosed to the public. Moreover, there are numerous narratives about their struggles to attain their exalted status, often implicitly likening their hardships to the sufferings of Christ. This sanctification sets the stage for an inversion of relationships: fans see their support and devotion to the celebrity as a duty to the celebrity; however, they perceive any attention and support from the celebrity to themselves as a favor.

BTS strives to project a religious image of themselves, and like many religions that possess strong in-group versus out-group dynamics, one of the primary concerns of their fans is opposition from others. Often, fans have to stand against various "others" to continue their support. Additionally, by joining the celebrity's fan community, fans automatically compare themselves not only with other celebrities but also with other fans. In these ongoing conflicts with "others," fans often delineate and emphasize their boundaries, further entrenching themselves in a quasi-sectarian group identity. The more intense these otherization processes become and the greater the distance between groups, the more deeply fans immerse themselves into their group, isolating from others, considering the rest as enemies, and intensifying their confrontations. BTS uses religion to construct a strong in-group versus out-group structure, and the success of this group in attracting tens of millions of fans shows that they have been highly successful with this strategy. Just as ISIS divides the world into Muslims and infidels, where anyone labeled as an infidel is automatically doomed to a painful death, BTS divides the world into ARMYs and haters. BTS fans call their opponents "haters," as if being a hater makes one an infidel deserving of any unethical actions against them.

Statement of the Problem

Iran is located in the Middle East, one of the world's most tension-filled regions (for instance, see Shahghasemi and Prosser, 2019). In this tumultuous geopolitics, survival requires a robust understanding of space and time. Historically and intuitively, Iranians have learned that they must love their country and take pride in their cultural and literary figures. Consequently, Iranian history, culture, and literature are replete with names and figures celebrated and passed down to succeeding generations. On this basis, for the past few decades, Iranian celebrities have generally held a higher status among the Iranian people compared to foreign celebrities, who have always faced barriers -like language- that their Iranian counterparts did not even consider.

However, recent years seem to indicate a slow change in this scenario. Although Iranian attitudes towards the American popular culture and people are more positive compared to other Muslim countries (Shahghasemi and Heisey, 2009; Ameli and Shahghasemi, 2018; Shahghasemi, 2017; Nye, 2016), in recent years, Korean celebrities have managed to carve out a significant position within Iranian popular culture. As explained in the first section of this article, data indicate that Korean groups, especially BTS, hold the top position among popular celebrities in Iran. Initial reviews show that BTS has millions of fans in Iran, yet to date, no research has specifically been conducted on the extent of BTS's popularity in Iran. Since the primary duty of the humanities is to solve human problems, the first step is a precise understanding of the issue and its dimensions. Therefore, this study specifically seeks to answer the following two research questions:

- Research Question 1: How active are BTS fans in the Iranian virtual space?
- Research Question 2: What changes have occurred over time in the virtual activities of BTS fans in Iran?

Methodology

This article utilizes three sources to analyze the perspectives of Iranian Twitter users towards the Korean music group BTS.

1. **Google Trends:** The first tool is Google Trends, which publishes data on user searches on the Google search engine based on their geographic location. This popular website analyzes the popularity of top searches on Google across different regions and languages. The website uses graphs to compare the search volume of various queries over time. Google Trends helps researchers study online public opinion and track emerging topics and cultural shifts, providing valuable insights into the dynamics of internet search behavior (Aguilera et al., 2021).
2. **Pageviews Analysis:** The second source is the Pageviews Analysis website, which analyzes the number of Wikipedia page views. This tool allows social researchers to measure social trends and the focus of public attention over time, acting as an "attention thermometer" to indicate what the society is paying attention to and with what intensity (Guedes-Santos et al., 2021). The number of page views of Persian Wikipedia page of BTS has been analyzed over various time periods and compared to similar topics, providing a quantitative measure of interest and engagement.
3. **Twitter Data:** The third source comprises tweets posted by Iranian users mentioning the band. These data were collected using a Twitter crawler from the beginning of 2021 to near the end of 2023. Subsequently, the collected data were analyzed using various content analysis tools to understand the sentiments, frequency, and nature of the mentions. This analysis provides insights into the discussions and engagements of the Iranian audience with BTS on social media, highlighting trends, fan activities, and the general sentiment towards the group.

These three sources provide a comprehensive view of the digital footprint of BTS in Iran. This methodology facilitates an in-depth understanding of both the quantitative aspects of BTS's popularity (such as search trends and page views) and the qualitative aspects (such as public sentiment and discourse analysis on social media).

Findings

Analysis of Google Trends results

One of the main techniques used by Internet users for finding things they require is to search on Google. In Google Trends, there are two primary ways to explore search data: term search and topic search. Term search involves entering specific keywords or phrases into Google Trends to analyze their search interest over time and across different geographic locations. When conducting a term search, users input specific terms that they want to track. Google Trends then provides data on the search interest for those exact terms, showing how their popularity has changed over time. Term search allows for precise analysis of individual keywords or phrases, making it useful for tracking the popularity of specific products, events, or topics. Topic search, on the other hand, involves exploring broader subjects or themes rather than specific keywords or phrases. Instead of inputting individual terms, users enter general topics of interest. Google Trends then aggregates search data related to those topics, including various related keywords and search queries that fall within the chosen topic. Topic search provides a more comprehensive view of search interest surrounding a particular

subject, encompassing a wider range of related terms and queries. This approach is beneficial for analyzing broader trends, understanding the overall popularity of a topic, or identifying related search terms and queries within a specific category.

Since the music group BTS has been identified by Google as a topic, we have also studied the topic related to this music group in this article. It should be noted that the search comparison of a topic based on geographical regions in this tool does not mean the comparison of the number of searches, but the ratio of the search of a topic from the total searches of one country or province with another country and province.

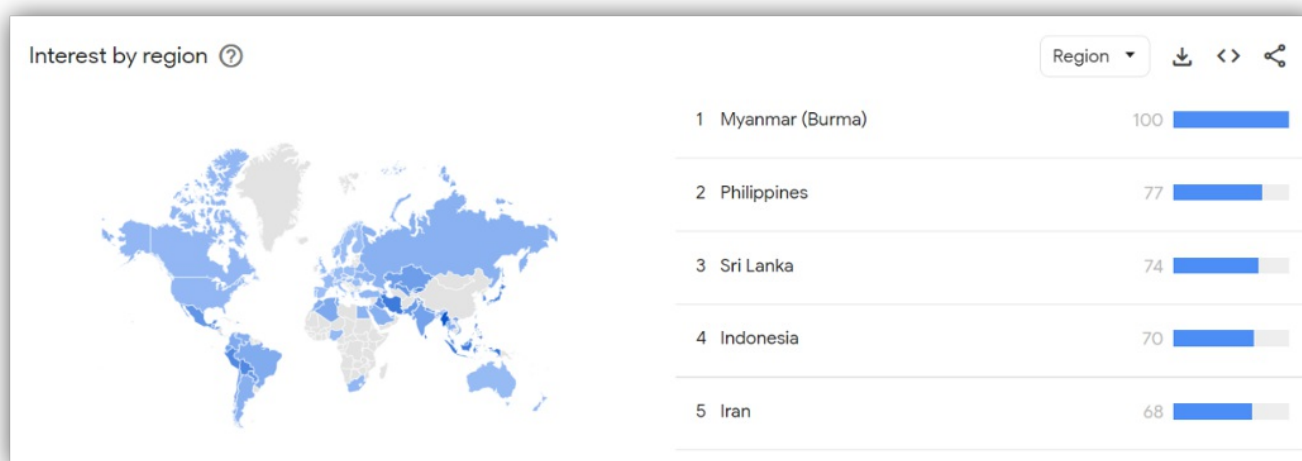


Figure 1. The countries from which Google users searched for BTS

The countries from which Google users searched for BTS are displayed in the chart below. The last five years are covered by this data.

These statistics show that Iran is the fifth-most searching country for this music group, after Myanmar, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia. It is interesting that South Korea itself is behind these countries.

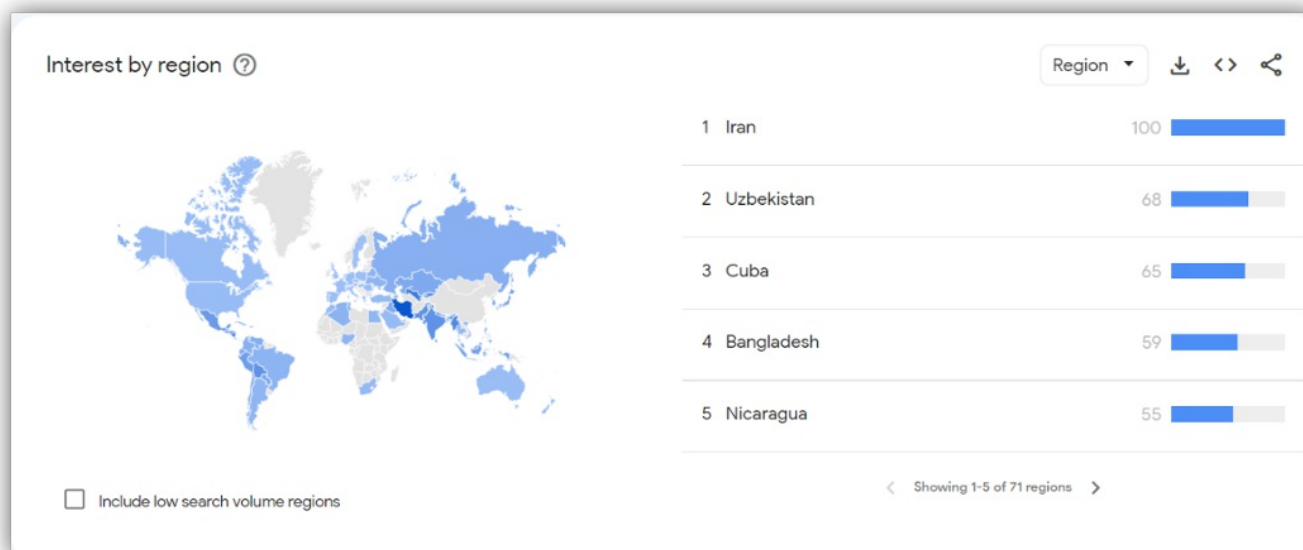


Figure 2. In 2022, Iran held the top position globally for Google searches related to BTS

The data for the previous year is displayed in Figure 2. Iran is the first nation to look for this musical Band during this time.

The graph in Figure 3 shows the weekly search volume about this music group from Iran in the last 5 years.

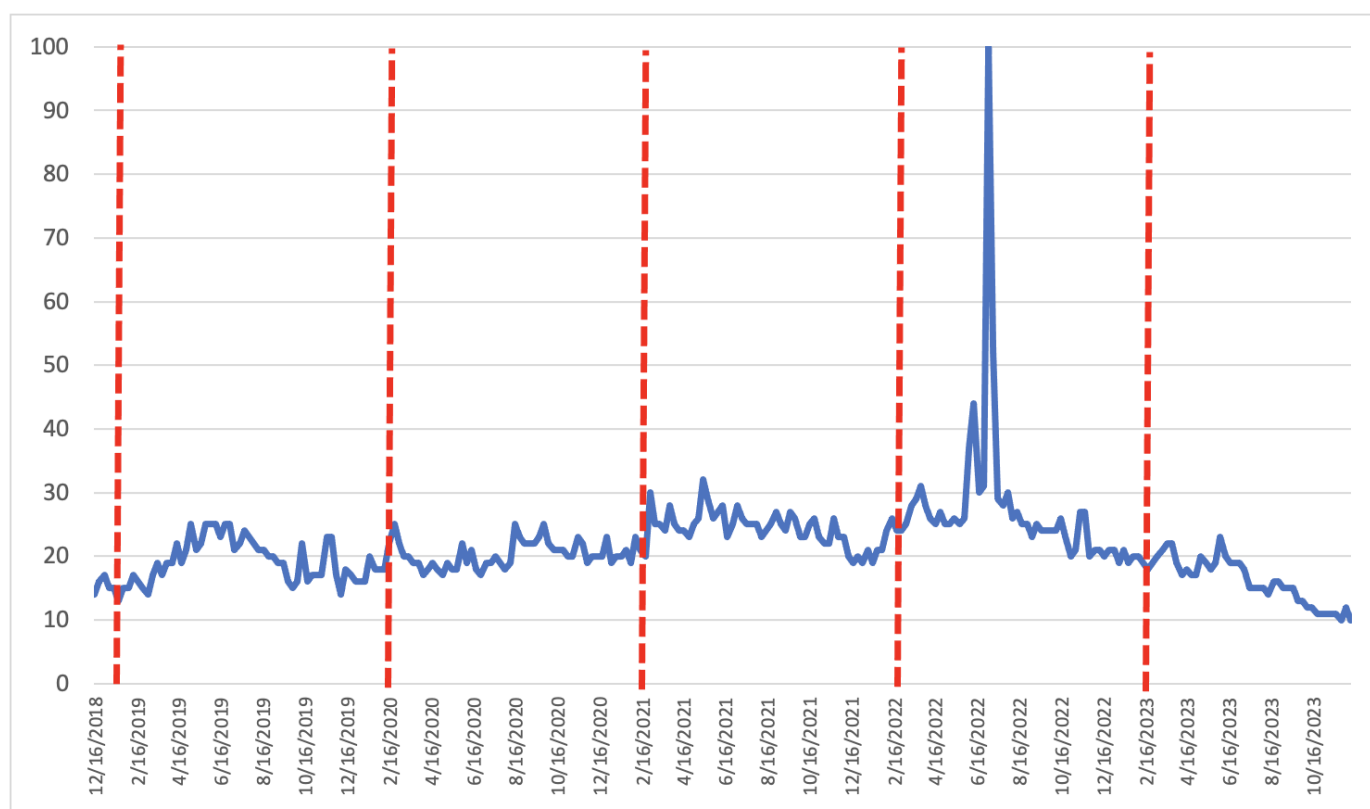


Figure 3. The weekly search volume about BTS from Iran in the last 5 years

Figure 3 shows that during 2019, 2020 and 2021, searches for BTS have been increasing with a gentle slope, but during 2022, there was a significant increase. After that, in 2023, this amount of search has decreased and reached the lowest amount in the last 5 years.

Google Trends offers another tool that can help us understand why this increase has occurred. Google Trends allows us to see the most popular searches that people conducted over a specific time period. The most popular general searches (top) and two search categories with rapid growth (rising) are shown in this data. The most popular searches from Iran are broken down by year in the table 1 to table 5.

Table 1. *The most popular searches from Iran in 2019*

year	type	search term
2019	top	بی تی اس
		bts
		آهنگ بی تی اس
		موزیک ویدیو
		آهنگ بی تی اس
		bts آهنگ
		بی تی اس ران
		bts آهنگ
		گروه بی تی اس
		موزیک ویدیو بی تی اس
	raising	bts boy with luv
		هالزی
		هالزی و بی تی اس
		bts از boy with luv آهنگ
		txt
		بی تی اس در عربستان
		از بی تی اس boy with luv آهنگ
		ری تی
		ی تی اس در عربستان
		نظر گروه بی تی اس درباره ایران

Table 2. *The most popular searches from Iran in 2020*

year	type	search term
2020	top	بی تی اس
		bts
		آهنگ بی تی اس
		آهنگ بی تی اس
		بی تی اس ران
		موزییدیو
		ی تی اس
		ی
		گروه بی تی اس
		موزییدیو بی تی اس
	raising	دینامیت بی تی اس
		آهنگ بی تی اس دینامیت
		dynamite bts
		آهنگ دینامیت بی تی اس
		black swan bts
		موزییدیو دینامیت بی تی اس
		آهنگ جدید بی تی اس 2020
		تستچی
		bts.hyperstariran.come
		دانلود آهنگ دینامیت از بی تی اس

Table 3. *The most popular searches from Iran in 2021*

year	type	search term
2021	top	بی تی اس
		bts
		اهنگ بی تی اس
		آهنگ بی تی اس
		بی تی اس ران
		ی تی اس
		ی
		موزیڈیو
		دانلود اهنگ بی تی اس
		ی تی اس
	raising	butter
		butter bts
		آهنگ باٹر بی تی اس
		ری تی اس تستچی
		ی تی اس تستچی
		اهنگ باٹر
		bts permission to dance
		دانلود اهنگ باٹر بی تی اس
		بی تی اس بدترین است
		باٹر بی تی اس

Table 4. *The most popular searches from Iran in 2022*

year	type	search term
2022	top	بی تی اس
		bts
		بی تی اس آهنگ
		آهنگ بی تی اس
		ران بی تی اس
		ی تی اس
		ی
		گروه بی تی اس
		ی تی اس
		فیلم بی تی اس
	raising	اجرای بی تی اس در جام جهانی
		بی تیید
		run bts بیتاس
		فیلم سبی بی تی اس دوبله فارسی بدون سانسور اپارات
		bts suga psy
		فیلم سبی بی تی اس دوبله فارسی
		دختر علی دابی و بی تی اس
		آهنگ جدید بی تی اس 2022
		فیلم سبی بی تی اس
		ی تی اس پیترست

Table 5. *The most popular searches from Iran in 2023*

year	type	search term
2023	top	بی تی اس
		bts
		آهنگ بی تی اس
		آهنگ بی تی اس
		ران بی تی اس
		ی تی اس
		ی
		فیلم بی تی اس
		گروه بی تی اس
		ی تی اس
	raising	دوست دخترای گروه بی تی اس
		سناریو بی تی اس ویسگون
		فیی تی اس و ا/ت
		ی تی اس صوتی
		فیی تی اس ویسگون
		وانشاد صوتی بی تی اس
		پیتترست
		ی بی تی اس ویسگون
		دانلود آهنگ های خفن بی تی اس
		سناریو بی تی اس
		بی تی اس ویسگون

Table 1 reveals that some of the searches made by Iranian Google users in 2019 included the collaborative song by BTS and American artist Halsey, a BTS concert in Saudi Arabia, and the comments of members of this group about Iran.

According to the information provided by Google in 2020, Dynamite's song and music video and the Iranian site "Testchi" have been the two most popular topics this year. Testchi site (testchi.ir) is an Iranian entertainment website. This site organizes online competitions about recognizing celebrities, including Korean music groups, which is also popular with BTS fans.

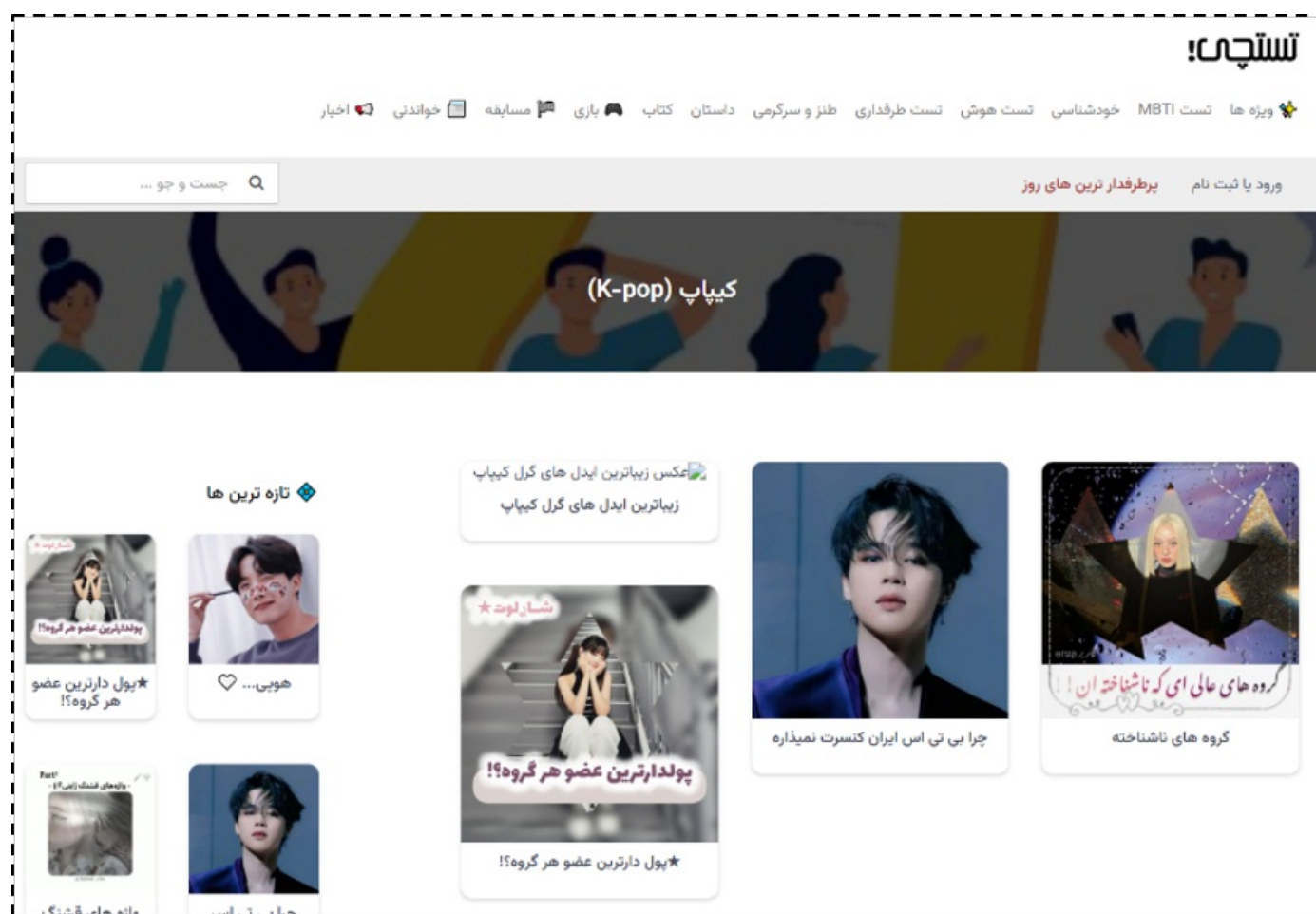


Figure 4. Screenshot from Testchi

The songs "permission to dance" and "butter" and the search about Testchi site in 2021 are also of interest. In 2022 we see the peak of searches about this group. Iranian users searched on Google for a variety of reasons, including news about the BTS group's performance at the World Cup opening, the group's performance at the White House, details about the members' personal life, and the news that the daughter of famous Iranian former soccer player and hero Ali Daei was a BTS fan.

In 2023, when the search for this music group decreased compared to the past, the news about the personal life of BTS members became more important to BTS fans in Iran. This year, the search for the term BTS one-shots increased. In comics, a one-shot is a work composed of a single standalone issue or chapter, contrasting a limited series or ongoing series, which are composed of multiple issues or chapters. What has become popular about BTS's one-shots are fictionalized stories of a personal, usually sexual, relationship with the band members, written from the mouth of a fan in love. This is a strong example of how BTS is using parasocial relationships in a strategic form.

The concept of parasocial interactions and relationships was first introduced by Horton and Wohl in 1956. According to them, these interactions appear as an illusion of face-to-face relationship with performers in mass media, particularly television. Viewers come to consider the media characters as friends, despite having limited interactions with them (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Over time, this repetitive exposure and perceived interaction can evolve into a parasocial

relationship, where the viewer develops deeper feelings and a sense of commitment to these media figures. Research shows that parasocial relationships can have significant psychological implications. For many, these relationships can provide a sense of friendship and companionship that is lacking in their real lives. Tukachinsky et al. (2020) found that parasocial relationships can influence social reality, where individuals might adopt attitudes, beliefs, and norms presented by media figures as part of their own reality perception.

On the flip side, there can be negative impacts as well. Bond (2016) discusses how intense parasocial relationships -like what BTS fans in Iran seem to experience- may lead to distress when, for example, a favorite character is written out of a series or a celebrity they follow encounters public controversy. The emotional dependence on such relationships can also lead to feelings of loneliness and dissatisfaction with real-life social interactions (Bond, 2016).

As I mentioned earlier, the rise of social media has transformed the dynamics of parasocial relationships. Platforms like Instagram, X, and YouTube allow for a more interactive experience between celebrities and their fans. Moyer-Gusé and Nabi (2010) argue that this interaction, while still fundamentally parasocial, is intensified by the direct and personal communication style of social media. Fans are able to comment and sometimes receive responses directly from their admired figures, enhancing the illusion of a real relationship. Understanding parasocial relationships is crucial for comprehending how media influences society. As Rubin and Perse (1987) note, individuals with stronger parasocial relationships tend to consume more media, which can further influence their social perceptions and expectations.

Wikipedia Page Analysis

Wikipedia pageviews tool publishes the statistics of users based on the number of times they a page is viewed. In this section, we will review and compare the Persian Wikipedia page about BTS. The average monthly visits to this group's Persian page since the start of 2019 are displayed in the Figure 5.



Figure 5. The average monthly visits to this group's Persian page since the start of 2019

This graph demonstrates a significant rise in traffic to the BTS group's Persian Wikipedia page from 2019 to 2021, followed by a gradual decline in visits thereafter. Typically, individuals visit such Wikipedia pages to gain an understanding of the subject and to provide foundational knowledge to those unfamiliar with it. This trend suggests that the BTS phenomenon was relatively unknown in Iran up until 2021. Consequently, there has been a reduction in the number of new visitors seeking information about BTS since then. Presumably, those who are already familiar with the topic feel no need to revisit the page. The number of visits to the BTS group's page has been compared with the ten most popular music-related Persian pages in the following tables to determine the group's standing among Iranians.

Table 6. *BTS's place among the most visited Wikipedia Persian pages in 2019*

year	page title	Description	number of visits	Rank
2019	آریا عظیم‌نژاد	Iranian musician and composer who became famous in an Iranian talent show	1,028,622	6
	گوگوش	Iranian singer and former actor	737,411	22
	ابی	Iranian pop music singer	430,264	92
	جنیفر لویز	American singer, actor and dancer	351,254	147
	حمیرا	Iranian singer	329,042	180
	ساسی	Iranian pop and rap music composer and songwriter	313,411	203
	مای	American singer, songwriter and dancer	277,587	266
	سیاوش قمیشی	Iranian musician, composer, singer and songwriter	269,300	296
	معین	Iranian pop and traditional music singer	262,688	318
	بی‌تی‌اس	Korean band	161853	-

Table 7. *BTS's place among the most visited Wikipedia Pasian pages in 2020*

year	page title	Description	number of visits	Rank
2020	محمدرضا شجریان	Iranian traditional musician and singer who died this year	1,959,557	5
	امیر تلو	Iranian singer and songwriter who works in the genre of rap, pop and arandebi	1,385,181	9
	ابی	Iranian pop music singer	729,538	43
	گوگوش	Iranian singer and former actor	717,172	44
	هایده	One of the most prominent Iranian female singers	641,485	55
	همایون شجریان	Singer, composer and musician of Iranian traditional music and fusion music and the son of Mohammad Reza Shajarian	622,840	63
	بیلی آیلیش	American singer and songwriter who won numerous international awards this year	587,951	72
	شادمهر عقیلی	Iranian singer, composer, arranger, musician, songwriter, music producer and actor	523,915	98
	مهستی	Iranian traditional and pop music singer	478,572	113
	بی‌تی‌اس	Korean band	324480	-

Table 8. *BTS's place among the most visited Wikipedia Pasian pages in 2021*

year	page title	Description	number of visits	Rank
2021	امیر تلو	Iranian singer and songwriter who works in the genre of rap, pop and arandebi	1,053,214	34
	بی‌تی‌اس	Korean band	768,582	60
	گوگوش	Iranian singer and former actor	733,903	69
	هایده	One of the most prominent Iranian female singers	674,294	87
	بیلی آیلش	American singer and songwriter	535,851	123
	حمیرا	Iranian singer	461,597	188
	شادمهر عقیلی	Iranian singer, composer, arranger, musician, songwriter, music producer and actor	413,899	238
	ابی	Iranian pop music singer	405,030	246
	لیلا فروهر	Iranian singer and actor	403,230	249
	محمدرضا شجریان	Musician and singer of Iranian traditional music	401,513	251

Table 9. BTS's place among the most visited Wikipedia Pasian pages in 2022

year	page title	Description	number of visits	Rank
2022	امیر تلو	Iranian singer and songwriter who works in the genre of rap, pop and arandebi	1,074,828	28
	گوگوش	Iranian singer and former actor	882,003	64
	مریلین مونرو	American actress, singer and model who was made a movie about her this year	662,995	116
	هایده	One of the most prominent Iranian female singers	660,535	118
	بی‌تی‌اس	Korean band	653,253	124
	ینتون	American musician	504,830	216
	شادمهر عقیلی	Iranian singer, composer, arranger, musician, songwriter, music producer and actor	504,811	217
	مارتین لی	English singer	491,086	238
	شاهین نجفی	He is an Iranian singer, musician, composer, songwriter, music producer, poet and writer who had significant political activity this year.	469,676	251
	مهستی	Iranian traditional and pop music singer	460,826	261

These tables illustrate that while visits to the BTS group's page have increased in 2020, there has generally been a broader surge in interest among Iranians in music this year. This uptick is likely influenced by the increased leisure time available during the COVID-19 quarantine. Despite this, the BTS group's page does not rank among the top thousand pages on Persian Wikipedia this year. However, in 2021, the group garnered significant attention, ranking as the 60th most visited page on Persian Wikipedia and the second most visited page related to music.

The data also indicates that few non-Iranian music personalities or groups have consistently captured the interest of users over the years. Remarkably, BTS is the sole international act among these entries to sustain notable visibility for several consecutive years, and in 2021, it was the second most visited among the music-related pages on Persian Wikipedia.

Twitter Data Analysis

To gather Twitter data from Persian users about the BTS group, tweets containing the group's name in Persian were collected. While it was anticipated that many Iranian users might use the group's name or hashtag in English letters, technical constraints in distinguishing this data from that of other countries necessitated limiting the query to Persian text. The table below displays the volume of Persian-language data generated about the group during the Persian calendar years 2021, 2022, 2023.

Table 10. Number of tweets posted each year				
year	Original tweets	Retweets	users	average likes
2021	39237	193389	28590	31.5
2022	23697	204491	51072	42
2023	9215	73867	14635	33.6

This table, along with data from Google Trends and Wikipedia, indicates a peak in attention towards this group during 2021 and 2022, followed by a decline in 2023. By the end of 2023, the total number of users tweeting about this group or retweeting posts related to it may not even reach half of what it was a year ago. Subsequently, we will analyze the content produced and examine the network of active users.

Content Analysis

The tables below show the most frequent words in tweets published each year.

Table 11. The most frequently used words in tweets published in 2021

2021	
Word	General topic
vote	Support BTS in various polls
اهنگ	A reference to a song or part of it
یپاپ	-
فن	Referring to the BTS fan group
artistofthesummer	Support BTS in various polls
رایگیری	Support BTS in various polls
مراسم	Speaking of the events and celebrations in which the band has taken part
ارمیا	Refer to a member of the BTS band
پسرا	-
	Speaking of the events and celebrations in which the band has taken part
	-
جایزه	Speaking of the events and celebrations in which the band has taken part
	Comparison and challenge with fans of Exo music group
	Support BTS in various polls
تاریخ	Referring to the successes of the BTS group
دنیا	Referring to the successes of the BTS group
نامجون	Refer to a member of the BTS band
بیلیورد	Referring to the successes of the BTS group
موسیقی	-
تهیونگ	Refer to a member of the BTS band
البوم	A reference to a song or part of it
ایران	-
نامزد	Referring to the successes of the BTS group
گرمی	Referring to the successes of the BTS group
پسر	-
جین	Refer to a member of the BTS band
ریپ	Refer to a member of the BTS band
دسانگ	Refer to a member of the BTS band
ی	-
یوتیوب	A reference to a song or part of it

Table 12. *The most frequently used words in tweets published in 2022*

2022	
Word	General topic
مهسا امینی	BTS fans support the protests in Iran
فن	Referring to the BTS fan group
آهنگ	A reference to a song or part of it
نی	BTS fans support the protests in Iran
	Speaking of the events and celebrations in which the band has taken part
mahsaamini	BTS fans support the protests in Iran
یپاپ	-
اعتصابات سراسری	BTS fans support the protests in Iran
وطن	BTS fans support the protests in Iran
بچه	-
پسرا	-
ارمیا	Refer to a member of the BTS band
ترند	Support and favor of BTS group
طرفدار	Support and favor of BTS group
	-
ایران	-
	Comparison and challenge with fans of Exo music group
اسم	-
زدبازی	Support of BTS fans for protests in Iran (criticism of an Iranian singer)
فندوم	Referring to the BTS fan group
صدا	A reference to a song or part of it
حمایت	Support BTS in various polls , Support of BTS fans for protests in Iran
وطن فروش	BTS fans support the protests in Iran
	Referring to the successes of the BTS group
نامجون	Refer to a member of the BTS band
بنگتن	Refer to a member of the BTS band
مراسم	Speaking of the events and celebrations in which the band has taken part
تلاش	Referring to the successes of the BTS group
جهانی	Referring to the successes of the BTS group
جیمین	Refer to a member of the BTS band

Table 13. The most frequently used words in tweets published in 2023

2023	
Word	General topic
ارم	Referring to the group's logo in decorative items or other spaces
اهنگ	A reference to a song or part of it
گوشی	Ways to access BTS songs or news
عضو	Referring to the new and old members of the group
گروه	Referring to the new and old members of the group
همراه	-
جیمین	Refer to a member of the group
	Support and favor of BTS group
اسپاتیفای	Ways to access BTS songs or news
فن	Referring to the BTS fan group
البوم	A reference to a song or part of it
تهیونگ	Refer to a member of the group
یونگ	Refer to a member of the group
پسرا	Support and favor of BTS group
امنیت	Getting a sense of security from the images of group members
	Broadcasting BTS documentary from different TV channels
ارشیبو	Refers to the creation of an access path to the archive of music and images of the BTS group
نامجون	Refer to a member of the group
بنگتن	Refer to a member of the group
تویینر	Activities of fans and group members on Twitter
	Refer to a member of the group
	Referring to the successes of the BTS group
سولو	Favoring or criticizing the performance of a member
رایگیری	Supporting BTS in various polls
بیلورد	Referring to the successes of the BTS group
سالگرد	The 10th anniversary of BTS
اینستاگرام	Referring to the content produced around the group on Instagram

Based on the most frequent words, tweets containing these words were studied and the most frequent topics were obtained by tagging about 420 original posts.

Supporting the group in polls: Many tweets from users interested in this group are aimed at participating in online polls. Fans often encourage others to vote in these polls to help the group achieve success.

Reference to the BTS fan group: The focus of this genre of tweets is the BTS fan base. These tweets display a range of tones: they are both friendly and enthusiastic in encouraging support, as well as critical and unfavorable at times.

BTS's successes: honors, breaking records, and the group's jubilant receptions are all portrayed in this collection of

tweets. These tweets offer a favorable and appraising perspective on the accomplishments of this musical band.

Mentions of band members: This category of tweets includes affirmations, critiques, tidbits of news, praise, and showing interest in a group member. More often than not, Taehyung, Jimin, and Namjoon's names are mentioned.

Support of BTS fans for protests in Iran: In 1401, following the allegation of Mahsa Amini's death by Iranian police, protests erupted across the country. The majority of BTS fans supported these protests. Numerous articles have been written about the group members' perceived support for the protests. However, the members of BTS have not officially expressed any support.

Challenging fans of other bands: Some tweets are specifically aimed at supporting BTS in their rivalry with other bands. Notably, the confrontation with the EXO group, which also has a substantial Iranian fanbase on Twitter, constitutes a significant portion of the tweets on this topic.

Criticism and ridicule directed against the BTS group: Internet users have long mocked the appearance, makeup, and fashion sense of Korean singers. The primary target of such mockery among Iranian users is the appearance of K-pop male artists, often perceived as feminine. This type of commentary is also commonly encountered by English-speaking users.

Analysis of the Network of Users Who Publish Tweets

A retweet network is a directed weighted graph where nodes represent Twitter users and edges represent retweet relationships. The direction of an edge corresponds to the direction of information propagation or penetration. Edge weight is the number of times a user retweets another user. The retweet network is a collection of tweets related to this project:

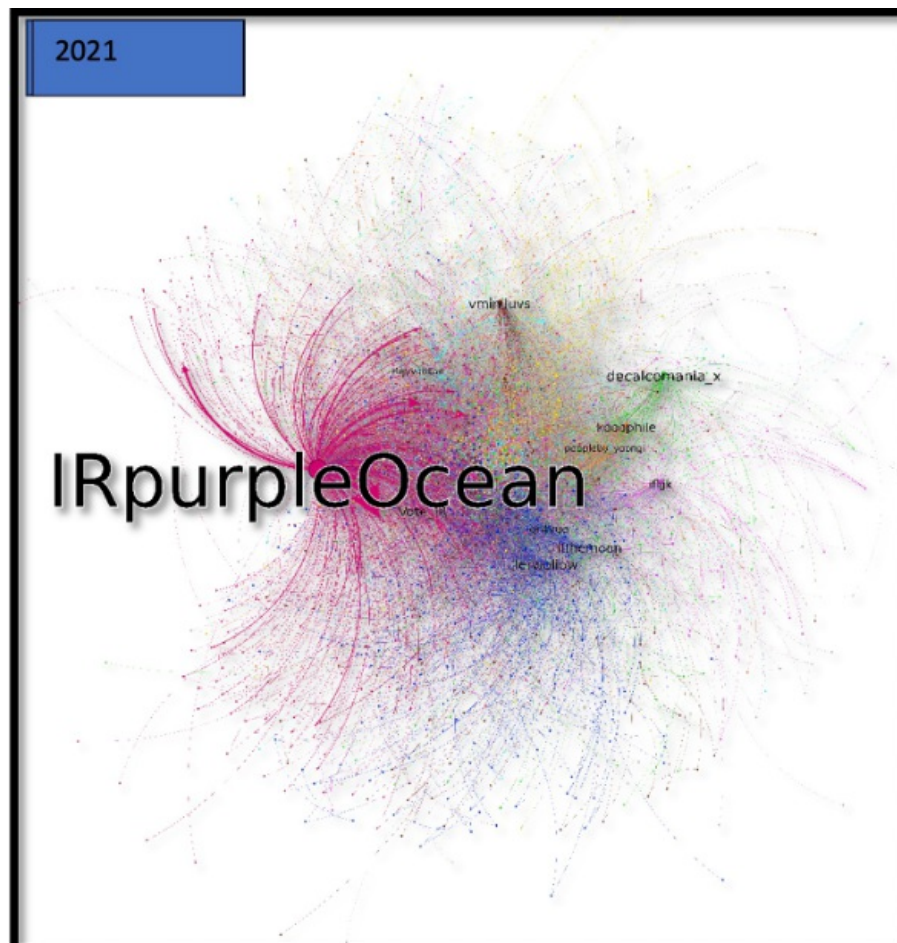


Figure 6. Retweet network of tweets related to BTS in 2021

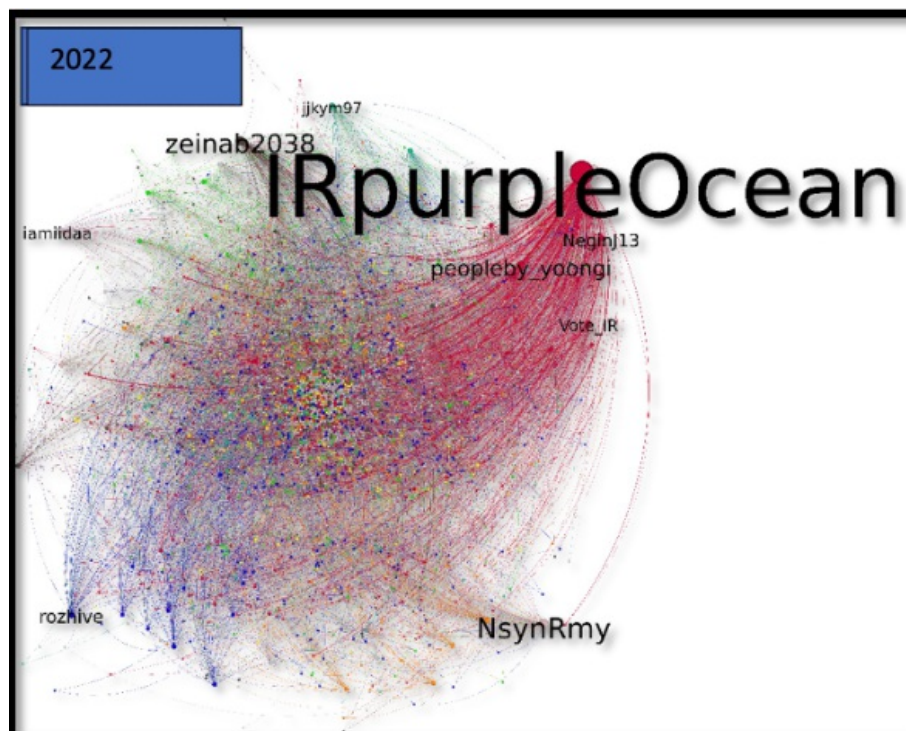


Figure 7. Retweet network of tweets related to BTS in 2022

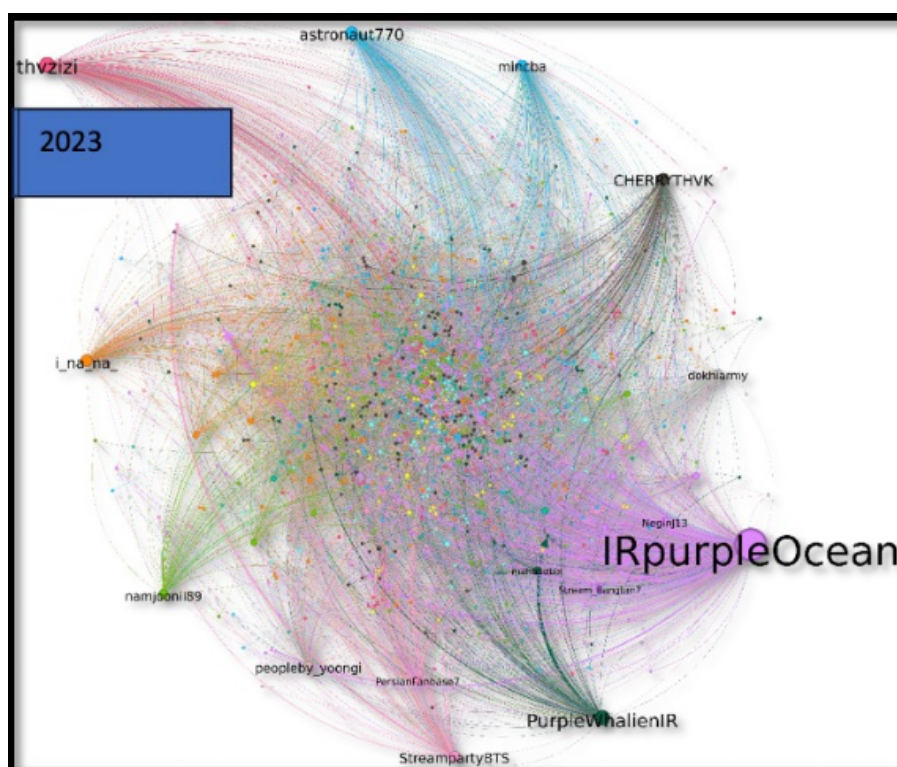


Figure 8. Retweet network of tweets related to BTS in 2023

Almost all the primary users of this network are devoted fans of this Korean music group. The identity of these Twitter users appears to be deeply intertwined with their fandom, and they seldom discuss topics unrelated to the group. Another notable aspect of this network is the relative stability of its core users over the past three years. A consistent group of users remains active and influential within this network.

Conclusion

The Korean group BTS has garnered tens of millions of fans not only in Sought Korea but around the world, by adopting effective strategies and incorporating elements of religion such as ritualism, collectivism, worship, self-otherization, the myth of sacrifice, etc. It appears that Iranian teenagers, primarily girls, constitute a significant portion of this fan base. This group has successfully utilized the cycle of success and these younger, less experienced fans often cite this cycle as a distinguishing and superior characteristic of BTS: BTS is an elite and superior global group and because of this, it has achieved global recognition, visited the White House, performed at the Qatar World Cup, and because it has achieved these milestones, it is regarded as an elite and superior global group.

Moreover, as seen in the findings of this research, political issues and teenage opposition to formally instructed values in Iran have also played a role in BTS's popularity. Intense political propaganda against Iran in recent years on one hand, and the perceived inefficacy and lack of compassion by some political officials in the country on the other, have caused a segment of Iranian teenagers to subconsciously welcome any narrative that challenges the preferred lifestyle in the country.

Some findings of this research, such as Iranian fan's achievement in ranking first in the world in searching about BTS on Internet, are quite astonishing. This surprise increases when considering that Iran is not the origin of this Korean group and that the total population of Iran is only slightly more than eighty million. Over the past decade, Iran's government has spent millions of dollars on media literacy projects, and the failure of this project is specifically evident in the voluntary and unpaid work of millions of Iranian children and teenagers for the Korean group BTS.

However, as clearly identified in this research, due to factors such as cycles of celebrity and the efforts of celebrity researchers in Iran, it seems that BTS's popularity in Iran is waning, and in the coming years, we should expect the popularity of other groups among Iranian teenagers.

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