



## THE IMPACT OF BTS'S VICTORY AT THE BILLBOARD MUSIC AWARDS AS THE FIRST K-POP SINGER IN INCREASING SOUTH KOREA'S GLOBAL SOFT POWER

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**Abstrak:** *Bangtan Seonyeondan atau yang kita kenal sebagai BTS adalah boy group asal Korea Selatan yang telah menjadi fenomena global yang telah berkontribusi secara signifikan dalam penyebaran budaya Korea Selatan melalui musik mereka, mereka menjangkau penonton di seluruh dunia. Penelitian ini melihat komponen diplomasi budaya dan soft power serta bagaimana popularitas global BTS sesuai dengan ide-ide tersebut. Melalui pemeriksaan liputan media, tanggapan media sosial, dan statistik ekonomi, penelitian ini menunjukkan bagaimana pencapaian BTS telah meningkatkan posisi Korea Selatan sebagai pemimpin budaya di dunia internasional. Menurut analisis, kesuksesan BTS di Billboard Music Awards dan tangga lagu Billboard tidak hanya meningkatkan citra Korea Selatan di luar negeri, tetapi juga meningkatkan minat terhadap bahasa, budaya, dan perjalanan Korea. Selain itu, penelitian ini juga meneliti bagaimana pemerintah Korea Selatan dan sektor hiburan secara strategis memanfaatkan popularitas BTS untuk memajukan tujuan nasional dan memperkuat hubungan diplomatik. Berdasarkan hasil penelitian ini, kesuksesan BTS menunjukkan kemampuan produk budaya untuk meningkatkan soft power suatu negara dan menawarkan informasi yang mendalam tentang penerapan budaya pop dalam hubungan internasional. Selain memberikan saran untuk penggunaan diplomasi budaya di masa depan, penelitian ini juga memajukan pengetahuan kita tentang hubungan antara citra nasional dan hiburan di seluruh dunia.*

**Kata Kunci:** *BTS, Korea Selatan, Soft Power, Billboard*

**Abstract:** *Bangtan Seonyeondan or we know as BTS is a South Korean boy group that has become a global phenomenon that has contributed significantly to the spread of South Korean culture through their music, they reach audiences around the world. This study looks at the components of cultural diplomacy and soft power and how BTS's global popularity fits into these ideas. Through an examination of media coverage, social media responses, and*

economic statistics, the study demonstrates how BTS's accomplishments have improved South Korea's standing as a cultural leader internationally. According to the analysis, BTS's success on Billboard Music Awards and chart Billboard not only improves the image of South Korea abroad but also increases interest in Korean language, culture, and travel. Furthermore, the study examines how the South Korean government and entertainment sector strategically leverage the popularity of BTS to advance national objectives and fortify diplomatic ties. According to these results, BTS's success demonstrates the ability of cultural products to boost a nation's soft power and offers insightful information on the application of pop culture in international relations. In addition to making suggestions for future uses of cultural diplomacy, the research advances our knowledge of the relationships between national image and worldwide entertainment.

**Keywords:** BTS, South Korea, Soft Power, Billboard

## *INTRODUCTION*

The K-Pop group BTS has always been in the spotlight since their first appearance at the Billboard Music Awards in 2017. They have also broken over cultural barriers to become worldwide celebrities and revolutionized the entertainment industry. They are a cultural phenomenon whose amazing songs with strong messages and their persistent commitment to the music industry have profoundly touched people all over the world (Yanni Wang 2020). BTS followers, also known as ARMYs, identify with the songs' themes of self-love, zeal for pursuing one's goals, and disregard for the inconsequential individuals in life. Naturally, this has a lot to do with Gen Z and Millennials wanting to start having real lives. Their ever-changing repertoire of musical styles, powerful choreography, and adaptable talent win them admirers from all over the world.

BTS has soared to prominence on a global scale, topping numerous charts. One of these occurred when the album *Map of the Soul:7* was published in the first part of 2020 and shot to the top of the US charts. In less than two years, this is their fourth album to debut at number one on the Billboard 200. Additionally, they have received numerous prestigious honors both domestically and abroad. Their extraordinary success disproves the notion that bands with English language lyrics should not be successful abroad. BTS primarily releases songs in Korean that is

cross-linguistically and culturally inclusive. But BTS released "Dynamite," their debut English-language song, in August 2020. Within a day of its release, the music video had over 101 million views on YouTube (Yanni Wang 2020). It was followed by the song "Butter" in May 2021 which broke the YouTube viewing record with 111 million views in the first 24 hours, making it the first and only K-Pop music video with the most views. Butter also became the first K-Pop song to occupy the Billboard Hot #100 Chart for the longest time with 5 consecutive weeks and a total of 11 weeks.

Their albums are number one on the Billboard charts, and stadium concert tickets are selling out all over the world. This presents a problem to the study and comprehension of K-pop since it both demands and reinforces pre-existing viewpoints. Beyond simply purchasing albums and promoting their idols, ARMY fans have paved the way for new dialogue topics and innovative BTS derivative works, which have contributed to the group's global popularity (Kim S-Y 2023). BTS's great success began when they won the prestigious American award "Billboard Music Billboard" in 2017. They became the first K-Pop singers to be invited and won an award at this event. BTS beat Justin Bieber's record of winning in this category for 6 consecutive years. One of the most significant media outlets in the international music industry nowadays is Billboard. Indeed, a musician might consider himself to have accomplished something in his career if he has received honors and made it onto the Billboard charts. Musicians from all backgrounds and genres may find a home on Billboard. As a result, Billboard's recognition and exposure of different international performers has a significant impact on the current dynamics of the music business. Therefore, it makes sense that Billboard is considered to be among the most significant publications in the music business (Anastasya Lavenia 2022). The purpose of this paper is to examine how BTS's victory at the Billboard Music Awards contributes to South Korea's soft power.

## ***METHODS***

The researcher used the qualitative descriptive approach to gather information about facts, events, and real-world issues. They also use it to examine material that has already been collected and develop fresh insights into the issues at

hand (Latifah Uswatun Khasanah 2021). One technique in qualitative research that emphasizes the observation of phenomena is descriptive qualitative, which calls for keen intuition on the part of the researcher. Qualitative descriptive techniques make use of information gathered via field observations, interviews, or pre-existing documentation. Particularly for this study, secondary data from written materials such as books, periodicals, news stories, and articles about the topic were employed in the data collection method. In research, qualitative methods produce descriptive data in the form of words, written or spoken language of people, and actions of people who can be observed to explain international perceptions of South Korea in relation to Parasite.

## ***RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS***

### **Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy in International Relations**

Soft power is a concept initiated by Joseph Nye who is a political scientist from Harvard University. According to Joseph Nye, soft power is a nation's capacity to sway opinion and achieve its goals without resorting to force (hard power) like economic or military might. Joseph Nye stated that there are components to soft power, and that these components originate from three primary sources. The first is Culture, cultural attributes that pique the curiosity of other nations and draw them there. This culture might manifest itself in works of literature, music, cinema, art, or even as a way of life. K-pop is one instance of how popular culture may be employed as a soft power instrument. Millions of followers worldwide have been enthralled with groups like BTS, which has raised awareness of South Korean culture overall. The second is the Political Values of a country, Human rights, democratic principles, political systems, and freedoms that other nations can emulate. Similar to nations that support press and opinion freedom, they are frequently regarded and revered by other nations. The last is Foreign Policy, a foreign policy here that is seen by the world community as morally sound and legitimate. Numerous nations allocate resources towards cultural diplomacy through the organization of cultural festivals, art exhibitions, and exchanges (Maxime Gomichon 2013).

The use of cultural elements—such as music, cinema, art, education, and language—to foster improved international relations and understanding is known as cultural diplomacy. Building links amongst peoples, introducing and enhancing a nation's positive image abroad, and fostering an environment that is favorable to international cooperation are all goals of cultural diplomacy. Building more peaceful and advantageous international relations is largely dependent on cultural diplomacy. Cultural diplomacy plays a unique role in international relations, serving to improve a nation's standing in the eyes of the world, foster greater understanding and appreciation of other cultures, promote cooperation in spheres such as politics, the economy, and education, and fortify bilateral and multilateral ties with other nations via educational initiatives, cultural exchanges, and other cooperative projects.

In this modern era, there are already several countries that use this soft power (cultural diplomacy) to build a better image of the country. One of the countries with good soft power branding through its cultural diplomacy is South Korea. South Korea has been in the news a lot lately due to the growth of its television business and its popularity among overseas viewers. The proliferation of K-Pop, Korean dramas, and Korean films are only a few examples of this phenomena, which is also known as the Korean Wave (Hallyu). The popularity of K-Pop like BTS has always been in the spotlight of the world with its works, not only that BTS has also won many prestigious international awards, and become the country's envoy to be a speaker at the United Nations. For Korean dramas themselves, there are *Crash Landing on You* and *Squid Game* which are always talked about because of their popularity. These two dramas have always received high ratings in their airing, and have been watched by people in various foreign countries. Not only that, the film *Parasite* has increased global interest in South Korean culture. The film became the first South Korean film to win an Oscar in 2020.

#### **BTS's career journey and BigHit Music's marketing strategy (HYBE Labels)**

BTS debuted in 2013 under the company "BigHit Entertainment" which is now BigHit Music under the auspices of HYBE LABELS. After ten years, the group has become well-known across the world for their music and talks for young people.

BTS won three rookies of the year honors in their first year of competition. 2014 was the group's formal international debut at the 2014 KCON Festival in Los Angeles, California. BTS didn't succeed in the early going of their debut; instead, they just worked nonstop as if there was no tomorrow. In the hopes of a brighter future, they train day and night. They torment their wits by writing song after lyric and wear themselves out rehearsing.

With the "Artist of the Year title in 2016," they achieved their first significant triumph. With this prize, BTS is kicking off a future where their wonderful music will someday wow the entire globe. They received a BBMA invitation in 2017 and won for Best Social Artist. The group's win marked a significant turning point in their history in the west, as they beat Justin Beiber's record of six consecutive victories. This was their initial attempt to introduce kpop to the western audience. Seokjin, a member of BTS, stated during his address at the MAMA 2018 event that the group had disbanded. They were too tired to go on; this hall was too exhausting for them. Additionally, Seokjin once stated in Suchwita that they thought about breaking up because of how horrible their mental and physical health were. In addition, BTS received an invitation to speak at the UN, making them the first K-pop group to address the UN assembly.

"Love Yourself: Tear," BTS's third studio album, was nominated for a Grammy Award for Best Recording Package in 2019. BTS have received their first formal Grammy Award nomination for 2021. Dynamite, their August 2020 release and first English-language single, was nominated for Best Pop Duo/Group Performance. With this accomplishment, BTS becomes the first K-pop group to get a Grammy nomination. That year, BTS also created Grammy history by being the first Korean act to perform at the ceremony. BTS received a second nomination for Best Pop Duo/Group Performance at the 2022 Grammy Awards (Kim S-Y 2023). BTS became the first K-Pop artist to play a song of his own at the Grammy Awards when he performed Butter in front of an audience. They have won various other national and international awards, and the brand's songs have always topped the Billboard charts with the highest number of streams on Youtube and Spotify.



BTS's great success is not spared from their hard work, support from BTS fans (ARMY), and of course the right agency marketing. The K-pop group BTS's popularity was boosted by a variety of marketing and management techniques employed by Big Hit Entertainment, which is currently known as HYBE LABELS. Big Hit Entertainment sets itself out from competitors with a unique theme for its products. Songs by BTS include a wide range of topics, including politics, mental health, and women's empowerment, in addition to love, partying, and strife. During their career and now in their 11th year, ARMY has had a lot of positive impacts from their works that are very relatable to dream fighters. BTS and UNICEF run the Love Myself effort, a worldwide social effort that can improve fan connections. Furthermore, BigHit makes extensive and intelligent use of social media to engage with followers and establish more continuous connection (Ni Made. Luh Putu 2019). Their primary social media platform for disseminating information about BTS's activities and doing promotions is Twitter. For now, HYBE already has its own application to communicate with fans, BTS and ARMY are connected through Weverse.

### **The spread of BTS's popularity in various countries and analysis of album sales, streaming, and international concerts**

BTS, also known as Bangtan Sonyeondan, has achieved immense global popularity, reaching out to different countries and cultures. Their appeal extends beyond South Korea to the rest of the world, encompassing the US, Europe, Latin America, and of course, Asia. There are a lot of fans of this boy group both overseas and in other circles. The 2022 ARMY census indicates that BTS has supporters in more than 100 nations worldwide. With 104,420 admirers, Mexico leads all other countries in the globe in BTS fan count. Peru has 39,821 fans, Indonesia has 38,453 fans, and the US has 27,030 fans (Monavia Ayu Rizaty 2022). In addition to helping BTS break records on the charts, ARMYs are well-known for participating in a range of social initiatives, such as giving out contributions. With a great deal of fan support, BTS has expanded its reach even more. Since winning the BBMAs, BTS has been a regular presence at US events and has participated in a number of interviews with the media during award ceremonies, global tour concerts, and comebacks. Without a doubt, BTS consistently sets new marks for album sales each

year. After making their last group appearance in June 2022, the album "Proof" became the best-selling physical album in South Korea, selling almost to 3.5 million copies in total (Yuki Kristina Lase 2024).

It is impossible to separate the rise in record sales for BTS from the worldwide tours (global concerts) they performed before the COVID-19 outbreak. They have given several concerts in the United States, Europe, Asia, and Australia. Indonesia was among the nations targeted by the Wings Tour 2017 concert, and naturally, ARMY Indonesia was thrilled to welcome them and the event. With the conclusion of the Wings Tour, BTS resumed their "love yourself concert world tour" in 2018 with the release of Love Yourself: Answer, their comeback album. Then, in 2019, "Love Yourself: Speak Yourself Stadium Tour" was released in response to the reissue of Map of the Soul: Persona, which became the fastest-selling album in South Korea with over 4 million copies sold worldwide. The second-biggest stadium in Europe and the largest in the United Kingdom is Wembley. The Beatles and Queen performed at the stadium in the past. Of course, this invited many spectators from all over the world to watch BTS's concerts. Not only from Europe, there were many spectators from America and Asia at the BTS concert in Wembley Stadium. Ticket sales in the Love Yourself: Speak Yourself Stadium Tour concert series always sell out quickly in various countries, especially at Wembley Stadium.

### **Awards won by BTS at the Billboard Music Awards as well as International Media and Community Reactions**

Billboard is one of the most important media in the global music industry. Indeed, a musician might consider himself to have accomplished something in his career if he has received honors and made it onto the Billboard charts. The benchmark for musicians hoping to get recognition for their work is the Billboard Top 100 chart. Musicians from all backgrounds and genres may find a home on Billboard. Fans vote to choose the winning system at the Billboard Music Awards. As a result, music lovers have a direct say in whether or not their favorite artists receive recognition. As a result, Billboard's recognition and exposure of different international performers has a significant impact on the current dynamics of the



music business. Therefore, it makes sense that Billboard is considered to be among the most significant publications in the music business (Anastasya Lavenia 2022).

In its first year at BBMAs, BTS won the "Top Social Artist" award, breaking the record of Justin Bieber who has won this category for 6 consecutive years. Following the triumph, social media reported that several people who were unaware of BTS's identity started to show interest in this Asian musician. The world's media and public took great interest in BTS's historic first win at the 2017 Billboard Music Awards (BBMAs), which was a major milestone for the Korean music industry. Being the first K-pop group to take home the trophy, BTS gained international acclaim for their ability to transcend cultural barriers in addition to their rapidly increasing popularity. Numerous prominent media publications, including CNN, BBC, and The New York Times, included extensive coverage of BTS, highlighting not just their musical accomplishments but also their commitment to their fan base and influence on the international music industry. Furthermore, good social media responses from well-known worldwide stars like Lady Gaga, Katy Perry, and Taylor Swift cemented BTS's standing as a major force in the music industry.

This victory not only had an impact on BTS as a group, but also had a huge impact on the music industry as a whole as a trailblazer in winning significant accolades in America, BTS has encouraged other K-pop groups to aim for global recognition. The increased global fan interaction, particularly from BTS's devoted fan base, ARMY, demonstrates the close relationship that exists between the group and its supporters. All things considered, this triumph indicates the K-pop genre's increasing worldwide influence and provides hope for the Korean music industry's future in the global arena (Christopher Mosley 2019). Not only did BTS win the same prize in their second year, but they also made their debut as a Fake Love comeback at this award presentation. BTS won Top Social Artist for 5 consecutive years until 2021. Here's a list of BTS's wins at the Billboard Music Awards:

2017-Top Social Artist

2018-Top Social Artist

2019-Top Social Artist, Top Duo/Group(Joe Lynch 2019)

2020-Top Social Artist

2021-Top Social Artist, Top Duo/Group, Top Song Sales Artist, Top Selling Song(Denise Warner 2021)

2022-Top Duo/Group, Top Song Sales Artist, Top Selling Song(2022 Winners)

2023-Top Global K-Pop Song (Jungkook ft Latto-Seven)(2023 Winners)

The Top Social Artist category was removed by BBMAs in 2022, BTS also did not attend this award ceremony that year due to preparations for their comeback. This has an impact on the number of viewers that has decreased drastically, even Billboard has lowered ticket prices in order to get more viewers.

### **The Effect of BTS's Billboard Music Awards Victory on South Korea's Soft Power**

BTS's historic victory at the Billboard Music Awards (BBMAs) not only marked a pivotal moment for global recognition of K-pop, but also had a big influence on South Korea's constantly changing cultural identity and image abroad. Being the first Korean group to do this, BTS's triumph highlights K-pop's worldwide influence by demonstrating how the genre has crossed boundaries and found a home with fans all over the world. This acknowledgement establishes South Korea as a major force in the world music industry and is a tribute to the country's cultural excellence and capacity to create content that is relevant to a global audience (Valina Zahra 2023).

Furthermore, BTS's triumph at the BBM Awards underscores the efficacy of South Korea's cultural diplomacy endeavors, which leverage the group's songs and live performances to advance the nation's soft power internationally. In addition to becoming a global musical phenomenon, BTS has served as a cultural mediator, promoting mutual understanding and bridging the divide between South Korea and other nations. Estimates indicate that they have a significant impact on South Korea's economy and tourist sector, in addition to their importance on the music business (Benediktus 2023).

Furthermore, BTS's ascent to fame has had a tremendous impact on the development of South Korea's contemporary cultural identity, with their songs and live performances acting as icons of Korean values and culture. The group's success highlights the potential of K-pop as a soft power instrument, boosting South Korea's

profile internationally and enlisting official backing to further the nation's cultural and economic goals. Fundamentally, BTS's triumph at the BBMA tells a gripping story about how South Korean culture has changed over time and how its importance is becoming more and more apparent throughout the world. This phenomenon has increased the number of language learners who are interested in learning Korean, promoting respect and communication across cultural boundaries (Liang 2023). The immense appeal of BTS has also generated fresh interests in Korean food. Their music videos frequently include Korean foods and ingredients, therefore promoting Korean cuisine around the globe. This increase in demand has therefore fueled the growth of Korean eateries and food venues across the world, making Korean cuisine more widely available to a wider range of consumers (Valina Zahra 2023).

In addition, BTS's influence is not only in terms of language and culinary, but also has a major impact on South Korean tourism. Their devoted following, referred to as ARMYs, has traveled to the nation to take in performances, see historical sites, and get fully immersed in Korean customs. In addition to bolstering South Korea's tourism industry, this wave of tourists provides a stage on which the country's rich cultural legacy may be exhibited to the world. The global reputation of BTS has been skillfully utilized by the South Korean government to further cultural diplomacy activities. Utilizing initiatives like "Imagine Your Korea" and partnerships with private enterprises to endorse Korean goods, the government has capitalized on BTS's cultural impact to bolster the nation's diplomatic standing and global appeal (Wantanee Suntikul 2019).

## ***CONCLUSIONS***

In addition to being a major turning point in the history of K-pop's international recognition, BTS's ground-breaking win at the Billboard Music Awards (BBMAs) had a profound effect on South Korea's changing cultural identity and reputation abroad. BTS's success highlights K-pop's global significance as the first Korean group to accomplish such a feat, proving the genre's capacity to cross boundaries and connect with listeners everywhere. This accolade establishes South Korea as a major force in the international music scene by highlighting the

country's superior cultural qualities and ability to create content that appeals to a wide range of listeners. Furthermore, BTS's triumph at the BMAs demonstrates how successful South Korea's cultural diplomacy initiatives are in enhancing the country's soft power abroad through the group's songs and performances. In addition to becoming worldwide music stars, BTS acts as cultural mediators, promoting understanding and eradicating barriers between South Korea and other countries. Their influence goes beyond music to include things like language acquisition, food trends, and travel, all of which foster mutual respect and cross-cultural interaction.

Moreover, BTS's rise to prominence has demonstrated the potential of K-pop as a powerful soft power instrument in addition to propelling South Korea's modern cultural identity into the international scene. BTS's triumph at the BBMAs sheds light on the changing narrative of South Korean culture and its growing importance globally by raising South Korea's visibility overseas and gaining official backing for cultural and economic efforts. Due to this phenomenon, there is a renewed interest in studying Korean, which is encouraging cross-cultural communication and understanding. Furthermore, BTS has a significant impact on food tastes. Their music videos, which highlight Korean cuisine, have helped to popularize and expand Korean restaurants around the globe. Additionally, the devoted following of the group, referred to as ARMYs, has been instrumental in promoting South Korea's tourism sector as a result of the fans' frequent travel to the nation for concerts, site exploration, and cultural immersion. All things considered, BTS's victory at the BBMAs is proof of the transformational power of music and its capacity to alter perceptions, promote communication, and deepen cultural bonds on a worldwide level.

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