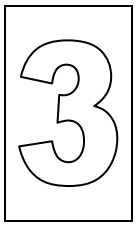
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THE ROLE OF @bts.bighitofficial INSTAGRAM REELS CONTENT IN SHAPING ARMY FAN LOYALTY IN EAST JAKARTA

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Abstract

The development of social media has transformed the pattern of communication between public figures and their fans. One of the most widely used features is Instagram Reels, which enables the delivery of information, entertainment, and interaction in a fast and engaging manner. This study aims to examine the role of Instagram Reels content on @bts.bighitofficial in shaping the loyalty of ARMY fans. The study employs the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which views audiences as active users who utilize media to fulfill their needs for information, entertainment, social interaction, and personal identity. A descriptive qualitative approach was used, with informants selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, documentation, and data triangulation involving three ARMY fans who actively followed Reels content from the account. The findings reveal that BTS Reels content is characterized by informational, entertaining, and interactive content that fulfills fans' needs. The study also found a high level of fan loyalty, demonstrated through active engagement, support for BTS's works, participation in fandom communities, and strong emotional attachment. Therefore, Instagram Reels content plays a significant role in fulfilling fans' needs and contributes to the development and maintenance of ARMY fan loyalty.
Keywords: *ARMY; Fan Loyalty; Instagram Reels; Social Media; Uses and Gratifications.*

Abstrak

Perkembangan media sosial telah mengubah pola komunikasi antara publik figur dan penggemarnya. Salah satu fitur yang banyak dimanfaatkan adalah Instagram Reels yang memungkinkan penyampaian informasi, hiburan, dan interaksi secara cepat dan menarik. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui peran konten Reels Instagram @bts.bighitofficial dalam membentuk loyalitas penggemar ARMY di Jakarta Timur. Penelitian ini menggunakan Teori Uses and Gratifications yang memandang audiens sebagai pengguna aktif yang memanfaatkan media untuk memenuhi kebutuhan informasi, hiburan, interaksi sosial, dan identitas personal. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah kualitatif deskriptif dengan teknik pemilihan informan secara purposive sampling. Data diperoleh melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi, dokumentasi, dan triangulasi data terhadap tiga penggemar ARMY yang aktif mengikuti konten Reels akun tersebut. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa konten Reels BTS memiliki karakteristik berupa konten informasi, hiburan, dan interaksi yang mampu memenuhi kebutuhan penggemar. Temuan penelitian juga menunjukkan bahwa loyalitas penggemar ARMY tergolong tingi, ditandai dengan

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keterlibatan aktif dalam aktivitas digital, dukungan terhadap karya BTS, partisipasi dalam komunitas fandom, serta keterikatan emosional yang kuat. Dengan demikian, konten Reels Instagram @bts.bighitofficial berperan dalam memenuhi kebutuhan penggemar dan berkontribusi terhadap pembentukan serta pemeliharaan loyalitas penggemar ARMY.
Kata Kunci: ARMY; Instagram Reels; Loyalitas Penggemar; Media Sosial; Uses and Gratifications.

I. INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has established social media as one of the main pillars of both mass communication and interpersonal communication. Social media is no longer merely a means of entertainment but has become a space for shaping public opinion in various fields, including popular culture. We Are Social Indonesia reports that the number of social media users in Indonesia is projected to reach 5.24 billion accounts by 2025 representing approximately 63.9% of the total population with Instagram being one of the most widely used platforms, boasting around 103 million users. These high figures confirm that Instagram is not just a platform for sharing photos and videos, but also a space for public figures to build a connection with their audience through various features, one of which is Reels. Instagram Reels is a short-form video feature designed to be easy to consume, engaging, and capable of reaching a wide audience. This feature is widely utilized by the entertainment industry, including the South Korean music industry (K-Pop), to build a dynamic digital fandom. The Korean Wave (Hallyu) phenomenon has further strengthened the presence of Korean culture through social media, including in Indonesia. Various K-Pop groups such as BlackPink, EXO, and Seventeen use their respective official Instagram accounts to share updates, promote their work, and boost fan engagement. Among these various fan communities, ARMY the fans of BTS is known as one of the most active and loyal communities globally.

BTS or Bangtan Sonyeondan, is a South Korean music group that debuted on June 13, 2013 under Big Hit Entertainment, which is now part of HYBE Labels. BTS's high level of popularity and the strong loyalty of their fanbase, ARMY, have made them one of the groups with the most dedicated followers in the K-Pop industry. The official Instagram account @bts.bighitofficial has grown into one of the most influential accounts with over 80 million followers, sharing content ranging from behind-the-scenes photos and music videos to album promotion moments. Through the Reels feature, this account actively shares snippets

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of stage performances, dance challenges, promotions for new songs, and interactions among members, with over one billion views across all its Reels content.

Although the Reels feature is widely used as a digital communication strategy, research specifically linking Reels content to fan loyalty remains limited. Most previous studies have focused more on increasing user engagement (likes, comments, shares) without thoroughly examining how such engagement contributes to long-term fan loyalty. In fact, high levels of participation do not always reflect satisfaction or sustained emotional bonds; therefore, it is necessary to further examine whether Reels content truly plays a role in shaping loyalty, rather than merely increasing temporary interactions. This gap between the high intensity of digital interactions and the lack of evidence regarding their actual contribution to long term loyalty is precisely what this study aims to address.

Several previous studies have shown a correlation between social media use, content quality, and fan loyalty. Al-Ghifari found that the quality of Instagram content is related to community member loyalty through a quantitative approach and The Circular Model of SoMe. Saraswati examined the motives for using Instagram as a source of information on South Korean entertainment based on the Uses and Gratifications Theory. Additionally, Meliala discussed the relationship between parasocial relationships and fan loyalty, while Ghaisany and Arista and Wijaya highlighted digital communication strategies via Instagram in building engagement and sustaining the group's presence. Unlike previous studies, this research focuses on the role of @bts.bighitofficial's Instagram Reels content in shaping ARMY loyalty through the Uses and Gratifications perspective using a qualitative approach.

Based on previous research, studies on the relationship between social media and fan loyalty have been conducted from various perspectives, such as content quality, digital communication strategies, and parasocial relationships. However, most of these studies still focus on general user engagement levels or use quantitative approaches to examine the relationships between variables. Meanwhile, studies that specifically examine how the characteristics of Instagram Reels short-form video content meet audience needs and contribute to fandom loyalty through fans' subjective experiences remain relatively limited. Therefore, this study offers a novel perspective by specifically examining the role of @bts.bighitofficial's Instagram Reels content in shaping ARMY fan loyalty using a qualitative approach based on the Uses and Gratifications Theory. This study not only examines the aspects of digital interaction that emerge but also explores how fans interpret

Reels content as a source of information, entertainment, social interaction, and a part of their personal identity.

II. THEORETICAL REVIEW

This study employs two theoretical approaches as the foundation for its analysis: New Media Theory and the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which complement each other in explaining how social media plays a role in shaping the relationship between idols and fans. New Media Theory explains that new media is the result of the convergence between conventional media and digital technology, enabling the transmission of information to occur more quickly, easily, and to reach a wider audience. hese media have four main characteristics: decentralization, high information transmission capacity, interactivity, and flexibility in form, content, and usage. The characteristic of interactivity is relevant to this study because it allows fans not only to passively receive information but also to respond to and interact with content uploaded by idols through comment sections, likes, or by reposting the content. Meanwhile, the Uses and Gratifications Theory introduced by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch serves as the primary foundation for this study. This theory explains that audiences play an active role in selecting the media they use to fulfill specific needs whether personal or social and are not merely passive recipients of messages. There are three basic assumptions of this theory: a. users have specific goals in using media; b. audiences are active users who select media according to their needs; and c. users are capable of choosing the most appropriate media to fulfill those needs. This theory is also relevant for examining fan engagement and loyalty because it links individuals' psychological motivations to media usage behavior

Generally, audience needs in the Uses and Gratifications Theory can be categorized into four types: cognitive needs related to the search for information and knowledge; affective needs related to emotional experiences such as pleasure and entertainment; personal integrative needs, which relate to the reinforcement of identity and self-worth; and social integrative needs, which relate to interaction and a sense of community with fellow media users. These four categories of needs serve as an analytical framework for examining how the Instagram Reels content from @bts.bighitofficial is consumed by ARMY fans.

Social media itself is understood as an internet-based medium that allows users to interact, communicate, and share information online, while simultaneously serving as both producers and consumers of content. Instagram, as one of the content-sharing platforms, offers various features that support the dissemination of popular culture, one of which is

Reels a short form video feature that enables users to create and share creative content that is easily understood by the audience in a short amount of time. In this study, fan loyalty is understood as the deep and consistent commitment fans demonstrate toward their idols, manifested through active engagement, support for their idols' work, participation in the community, and emotional attachment. Based on this theoretical framework, this study assumes that ARMY fans are an active audience who utilize the Instagram Reels content from @bts.bighitofficial to fulfill their needs for information, entertainment, social interaction, and personal identity. The fulfillment of these needs then fosters satisfaction, which ultimately contributes to the development of fan loyalty toward BTS.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using descriptive methods to gain an in-depth understanding of the role of @bts.bighitofficial's Instagram Reels content in shaping ARMY fan loyalty, as qualitative methods are considered appropriate for uncovering the meanings, experiences, and subjective interpretations of informants regarding a social phenomenon that cannot be measured numerically. Research informants were selected using purposive sampling, with the criteria being BTS fans (ARMY) who actively use Instagram, follow the @bts.bighitofficial account, and have experience consuming the Reels content uploaded by that account. As a result, three main informants and one expert triangulator in the field of social media and K-Pop analysis were selected to enhance data validity. Data collection was conducted through in-depth online interviews via the Google Meet platform, observation of visual and audio elements, captions, hashtags, and interaction levels on the @bts.bighitofficial Reels content, and documentation in the form of screenshots of the content, account statistics, and news archives related to BTS and ARMY, which were then supplemented with data triangulation to ensure the validity of the findings. The collected data was analyzed inductively through the stages of data reduction, presentation of data in the form of narrative descriptions, and drawing conclusions, thereby providing a systematic overview of the characteristics of Reels content and the level of ARMY fan loyalty in accordance with the research objectives.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics of Instagram Reels Content on @bts.bighitofficial

Based on interviews with three informants, it was found that the Instagram Reels content on @bts.bighitofficial has three main characteristics: informational content, entertainment, and interaction with fans. Regarding the informational aspect, the informants

stated that the @ Reels are used as a source for the latest information on BTS's activities, such as album releases, song promotions, concert events, and behind-the-scenes content. Informant Annisa Azzahra explained that the @bts.bighitofficial account features a variety of content, ranging from behind-the-scenes footage and promotions for the group and solo members to documentation of concert moments. She explained this as follows:

> *"It's definitely varied because what I found on the Instagram account @bts.bighitoffial includes all sorts of things behind the scenes footage, promotion content for both the group and solo members, as well as documentation of their concerts and tours."*

Syifani shared a similar perspective, noting that the content not only showcases the final product but also the process behind it, such as album releases, challenges, and concert rehearsals. She explained it as follows:

> *"I usually see content about album releases, challenges, promotions for new songs, behind the scenes footage of music video production, concert rehearsals, and even the members' daily activities."*

This characteristic underscores that BTS uses the Reels feature as a medium for conveying concise yet comprehensive information. In addition to its informational function, the Reels content from @bts.bighitofficial also offers high entertainment value for fans. Content showcasing natural interactions among members, dance challenges, and spontaneous behind-the-scenes moments is considered capable of delivering an enjoyable viewing experience. Zalfa revealed that she often rewatches content featuring funny moments or interactions between members because there are always small details she only notices after watching them multiple times. Zalfa explained this as follows:

> *"I usually like to rewatch funny content or interactions between members. Sometimes there are small moments that I only notice after watching a few times, so I never get bored of rewatching them."*

This demonstrates that the entertainment value in Reels content doesn't stem solely from visual elements or music, but also from the members' natural interactions, which create a unique sense of The third characteristic is content that interacts with fans, reflected in a presentation style that isn't too formal, thereby creating a personal touch. Syifani notes that BTS has a distinctive way of presenting themselves naturally on camera, making fans feel more comfortable while watching. She explained this as follows:

> *"In my opinion, BTS has its own unique style because they look very natural in front of the camera. They don't seem forced and often show their authentic selves. That's what makes me, as a viewer, feel more comfortable and enjoy watching their content."*

These three characteristics information, entertainment, and interaction complement one another and make Reels content an effective medium for building a closer connection between BTS and ARMY, in line with Salsabila's (2023) findings that audiences use the Reels feature because it delivers information concisely, engagingly, and in an easy to understand way through a combination of visuals, audio, and text.

Fans' Motivation for Accessing @bts.bighitofficial's Reels Content

In addition to identifying the characteristics of the content, this study also found four main motivations for ARMY fans to access @bts.bighitofficial's Reels content: the need for information, the need for entertainment, the need for social interaction, and the need for personal identity. The need for information was the most dominant motivation, with informants using Reels to get the latest news about BTS quickly and concisely. As Zalfa explained, Reels content helps fans learn about their idols' activities in a short amount of time while still providing clear information. She explained it as follows:

> *"Reels content helps us find out what they're up to in a short amount of time, yet clearly."*

This motivation aligns with Laiyenes' (2023) findings, which show that K-Pop fans use social media as a means to fulfill their need for information about their idols because it is considered fast, easily accessible, and comes from a reliable source.

The need for entertainment is also an important motivation, particularly in relation to relieving daily psychological stress. Annisa revealed that watching BTS Reels content has become part of her routine and has a positive psychological impact, including helping to reduce her stress levels after academic activities. She explained this as follows:

> *"Overall, watching BTS Reels content has become part of my daily life and has a positive psychological impact on me, so I think it's also a good way to reduce our real-life stress levels after going through fairly complex academic or work routines."*

Additionally, the need for social interaction is reflected in the informant's habit of sharing content with fellow ARMYs as a means of strengthening bonds and opening up

spaces for discussion. As Annisa explained, sharing content with fellow ARMY friends helps strengthen those bonds and brings shared joy. She expressed this as follows:

> *"When I share content with friends, it helps build stronger bonds among fellow ARMYs. It's also fun when, for example, our friends get excited about that content to, so we share the joy together instead of just experiencing it alone."*

The deepest motivation lies in the need for personal identity, where the values conveyed by BTS through their work and content are internalized by fans as part of their self-identity. Annisa Azzahra explained that the message of self-love in the *Love Yourself* album holds great significance in her life. She expressed this as follows:

> *"What keeps me a fan of theirs to this day is, first and foremost, their music, of course, because the messages conveyed in their albums like the *Love Yourself* album are about how to love ourselves and be ourselves, so that really means a lot to me."*

Meanwhile, Zalfa emphasized that the sincerity of the members' interactions is her personal reason for remaining a fan for so many years. She explained it as follows:

> *"It's because of their sincerity I see how their interactions with fans are genuine and authentic. Plus, since I've been following them from the very beginning and they've been there for me, I have my own personal reasons for sticking with them."*

These findings reinforce the basic assumption of the Uses and Gratifications Theory that media consumption is based on specific needs that the audience actively seeks to fulfill.

ARMY Fan Loyalty

The level of ARMY fan loyalty in this study is relatively high and is reflected in four forms: consistency in following BTS content, engagement in social media activities, support for BTS's work, and participation in the ARMY community, with emotional attachment being the most dominant aspect. Consistency is evident in the informants' habit of regularly checking the @bts.bighitofficial account despite their individual busy schedules, as expressed by Zalfa, who always turns on account notifications so she doesn't miss the latest updates. She explained it as follows:

> *"I turn on the notifications so I know when they post updates."*

This consistency evolves into active engagement in the form of like commenting, and sharing posts as a simple way to show support for BTS. Loyalty is also manifested through tangible support for BTS's work, such as streaming songs and music videos which all three informants do regularly as a form of appreciation for their idols' work.

This is reinforced by Expert Triangulator Kumi Laila, S.I.Kom, M.I.Kom., who states that activities such as streaming, voting, and sharing Reels content are already indicators of fan loyalty. The Expert Triangulator emphasizes this as follows:

> *"Whether they're streaming, voting, or simply sharing content on Reels, these actions are already indicators of fan loyalty."*

Furthermore, participation in the ARMY community helps strengthen loyalty, as the community serves as a space for fans to share information and foster a sense of togetherness, as emphasized by Triangulator Expert Kumi Laila, S.I.Kom, M.I.Kom, who noted that the role of the ARMY community' s is crucial in sustaining fan loyalty. She explained this as follows:

> *"The ARMY community plays a very important role in sustaining fan loyalty."*

The most dominant aspect of loyalty is found in fans' emotional attachment to BTS. All three informants demonstrated a parasocial relationship a sense of closeness and familiarity with their idols despite the absence of direct interaction. Annisa Azzahra explained that the short yet comprehensive Reels format fosters a sense of familiarity, as if fans know BTS as friends or family. She elaborated as follows:

> *"This Reels content fosters a parasocial relationship because, even though the Reels format is short, the content is conveyed comprehensively the warm interactions among the members create a sense of familiarity, as if we know them personally, and we've come to view them as friends or family."*

This view is also reinforced by Zalfa, who has been an ARMY since 2013 and has felt an emotional bond that has developed over the years. She explained it as follows:

> *"Since not all the content they upload is formal, I feel like we're friends, best friends, or family, and because we've bonded with them especially over the course of so many years."*

Expert Triangulator Kumi Laila, S.I.Kom, M.I.Kom., also emphasized that the closeness fans feel through natural and personal content is a form of parasocial relationship. She explained this as follows:

> *"Fans feel close to their idols, especially through the content that's distributed this is a form of parasocial interaction."*

This finding aligns with Putri (2024)'s research, which indicates that social media serves as a space for the formation of parasocial relationships and social interactions among K-Pop fans.

The Role of Reels Content from the Perspective of Uses and Gratifications Theory

The findings of this study can be explained through the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which views the audience as active participants in selecting media to fulfill specific needs. The four categories of needs in this theory cognitive, affective, personal integration, and social integration were all identified in ARMY fans' use of @bts.bighitofficial's Reels content. Cognitive needs are evident in the use of Reels to obtain the latest information about BTS; affective needs are reflected in the feelings of joy and relief fans experience when watching BTS's entertainment content; personal integration needs are realized through the internalization of BTS's positive values into fans' self-identities; while social integration needs are evident in the activities of sharing and discussing with fellow ARMY members. The consistent fulfillment of these four needs generates satisfaction, which ultimately encourages fans to continue accessing BTS content repeatedly. It is this high intensity of use that contributes to the formation of ARMY fan loyalty, in line with the perspective of Expert Triangulator Kumi Laila, S.I.Kom, M.I.Kom, who states that social media can serve as a bridge between fans and idols. She explained this as follows:

"Social media can serve as a bridge between fans and idols."

This finding reinforces the argument that the success of social media content is not only measured by the number of viewers or interactions it receives, but also by its ability to meet the audience's needs and build sustainable relationships a phenomenon also observed in other fandom contexts, such as Nctzen and non-K-pop bands-pop bands like "The Canary", all of which demonstrate that the intensity of digital interaction correlates with the level of fan loyalty toward their idols.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings and discussion, it can be concluded that the Reels content on the Instagram account @bts.bighitofficial features informational content, entertainment content, and content that fosters interaction with fans, which collectively provides an experience that is informative, entertaining, and personal for ARMY fans. These three characteristics complement one another and make the Reels feature an effective medium for building closeness between BTS and their fans, while also addressing the first research question in this study. This study also found that ARMY fans exhibit a high level of loyalty, as reflected in their consistent tracking of BTS's activities, active engagement in digital activities, tangible support for BTS's work, participation in the ARMY community, and strong emotional attachment the most dominant aspect. This high level of loyalty stems

from the fact that the @bts.bighitofficial Reels content fulfills fans' cognitive, affective, personal integration, and social integration needs, as explained in the Uses and Gratifications Theory. Thus, it can be concluded that the research questions and objectives of this study have been answered: the @bts.bighitofficial Instagram Reels content plays a role in fulfilling fans' needs while contributing to the formation and maintenance of ARMY fan loyalty. These findings confirm that the success of social media content is not measured solely by the number of interactions it generates, but also by its ability to build long-term relationships with the audience. Future research is expected to further explore the role of short-form video content in building fan loyalty toward different subjects and on various social media platforms, as well as to combine triangulation methods with other approaches such as netnography to yield more comprehensive results.

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