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2 AB Communication

On behalf of an idol: the philanthropy of the BTS ARMY

There is no doubt that the popularization of social media platforms such as Twitter has changed the meaning of what it means to be a fan. Over the years, fandom culture has [transformed](#) from manageable part-time obsession to an all-consuming addiction.



ARMYs in BTS concert. Photo by Research BTS.

Among the most notable fandoms that have dominated the Twitter-sphere is the ARMY (Adorable Representative M.C. for Youth), the official fandom of the world-renowned boyband BTS, a septet from South Korea. There have been negative connotations attached to being a fan of a boyband, and ARMYs are no stranger to falling under the negative stereotype of being a fangirl - crazy, obsessed, and irrational teenage girls who spend all their time fantasizing about their idols. Media has consistently covered the ARMY for their toxic behavior such as their propensity to bring anyone who slightly disagrees with them to the gutter, their stalker tendencies, and excessive spending on merchandise. But others might not see beyond the

overboard dedication to their idols, where a deep sense of social responsibility lies within the fandom.

Of the many things BTS is known for, one of their notable qualities that have impressed both fans and onlookers alike is their social involvement, from their philanthropic efforts such as the [Love Myself](#) campaign in collaboration with UNICEF, alongside their own respective donations to [charities](#) both individually and as a group.



BTS and Big Hit renewed their commitment to Love Myself Campaign in 2021. Photo by UNICEF.

Although charitable acts are not new to fandoms, the philanthropy of ARMYs is note-worthy because of it being almost an [essential](#) part of what it means to be in the fandom. With their astonishing ability to garner attention towards social issues, there have been groups started out by ARMYs such as [One In An ARMY](#), an initiative that aims to collaborate with nonprofit organizations around the world and encourages microdonations. They have also organized notable campaigns such as the [#MatchAMillion](#) in support of the Black Lives Matter movement. The example BTS set along with the social undertones in the messaging of their

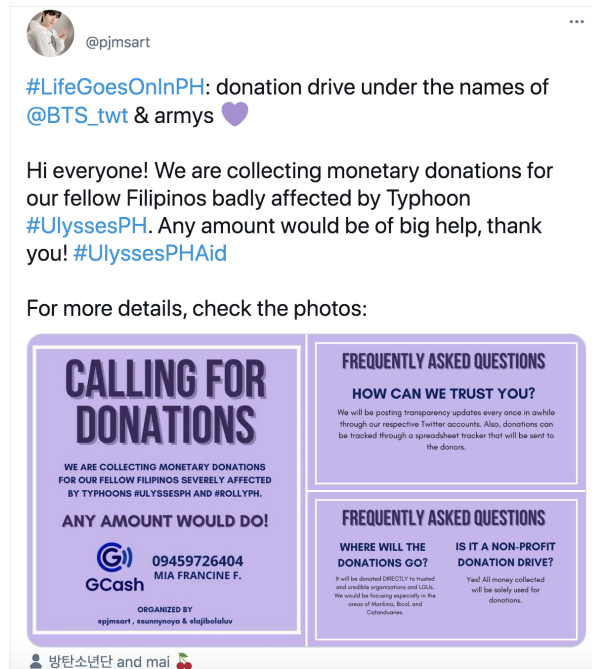
music have inspired ARMYs all around the world to do the same and perhaps even more, but all in the name of BTS.

As an outsider looking into the massive efforts of the fandom behind these initiatives, you cannot help but wonder: Why would anyone in their right mind donate on behalf of their idols instead of their own name?

Looking through the eyes of an ARMY

ARMYs have taken it upon themselves to use their own platforms as an avenue to serve others, dismantling the misconception that fans are just obsessed teenagers behind a computer. Case in point: Kaye, an 18 year old ARMY, started a donation drive called [#LifeGoesOnInPH](#), one of the many initiatives started out by Filipino ARMYs to aid victims of Typhoon Ulysses in November 2020.

Organizing anything is never an easy feat, much more a sudden donation drive. When typhoon Ulysses hit the Philippines which was met with the usual lack of urgency of the government, Kaye decided to take matters into her own hands by organizing a donation drive, amassing a total amount of PHP 15,150.9.



#LifeGoesOnInPH donation drive. Photo sourced from Twitter.

The quick acceleration of accumulating funds for various social causes is a testament to the strength, power, and solidarity of ARMYs. “I did not expect that the donation drive would accumulate a high amount of money. I even thought we would not be able to get any donations but eventually, donations started coming in one by one until more followed from both local and international ARMYs,” Kaye recalled. Including Kaye’s donation drive, Filipino ARMYs were able to raise an amount of Php 4 million on behalf of BTS that made [headlines](#).

It’s difficult to wrap your head around the unique kinship ARMYs feel towards one another and their idols, but one thing is for sure: it’s special enough for them to go the extra mile not only for their idols, but also their communities.

As previously mentioned, charity work is so ingrained into the culture of the fandom that you can [trace](#) back their philanthropy with initiatives like the [Wings Chronicles](#) in 2017 and multiple donations made by separate sub-fan groups to respective charities on behalf of the members of BTS during their birthdays, among many other initiatives depending on the need. It’s

almost like a tradition at this point. But one thing has stayed consistent among all donation drives: ARMYs have time and time again credited all their achievements and efforts to BTS. It almost seems like BTS is their God despite the achievements being their own personal effort.

It's no doubt that BTS has the exceptional ability to create music that transcends cultures, but their charm lies in challenging the norm in K-pop groups where political engagement is discouraged by openly speaking about controversial social issues, which is also reflected in their [music](#) rife with socio-political undertones. In fact, you'll notice that their entire discography is not only an ode to their journeys as individuals but also a social commentary in the form of angelic voices and mesmerizing visuals to match. The answer to why ARMYs credit everything to BTS is simple: because BTS cares, it has made their fans want to care also.

Their service to their community is their way of showing they care through action, and they credit it to BTS as an overflow of their gratitude towards the group. "BTS has helped me so much and they are a few of the people that I owe who and what I am today. I willingly donated under the name of BTS and ARMYs because this collaborative work would not be possible if it weren't for them," Kaye shared.

Continued legacy and commitment

Although still overshadowed by the negative connotations of being a fan of a boyband, ARMYs continue to build a name for themselves as one of the most remarkable fandoms to date. As BTS continues to strengthen their legacy, ARMYs are also in the process of reinventing what it means to be a fan, one charity at a time.

EXPLAINER:
Dissecting the driving force of boy bands: Fangirls

[Fandom](#) is a term which describes communities built around a shared enjoyment of an aspect of popular culture, may it be books, movies, TV shows, bands, sports teams, and the like.

Throughout the years, fandoms have engaged in participatory culture where fans are both

consumers and producers, with the production of different forms of creative media. However, the word “fandom” often [brings](#) about a negative connotation, with its roots coming from the word fanatic meaning crazy. A [fan](#) can be described as a person with a deep, positive emotional conviction about someone or something famous. Moreover, participation in fan culture is also gendered, given that a large number of fans who engage in “transformative activities” such as content creation and civic involvement are female. With that perception also comes the negative connotations with sexist undertones of fangirls, a portmanteau of the words fanatic and girl. Fangirls who make up a vast majority of fandoms then are often reduced to obsessed, screaming, and irrational teenage girls who spend all their time fantasizing about ending up with their idols. This is especially true in the case of fangirls of boy bands.

[Boy bands](#) are vocal groups consisting of teenage or 20-something singers who are usually conventionally attractive, marketed to capture the hearts of the female audience. [Notable](#) boy bands over the years include The Beatles, NSYNC, Backstreet Boys, One Direction, and BTS, with most of their fanbase being women. The onset of social media has also brought about a new generation of fangirls from Directioners to ARMYs, who have utilized platforms such as Twitter to connect with their idols and fellow fans alike. Fangirls have been associated with engaging in obsessive behaviors, such as memorizing trivia and collecting expensive merchandise from the bands.

Pamela Wojcik, a professor and director of Graduate Studies in Film, TV, and theater, [noted](#) that the dismissal of fangirls reflects the sexism within our society, assuming that female fans are an add-on, derivative, and lesser than male fandom, which is assumed to be motivated by more serious interests. But that is not the case. Aside from the fact that fangirls find meaning and connection with their idols alongside the community of their fandoms, the meaning of being

a fangirl is slowly being transformed as they engage in content creation such as fan fiction, art, fan videos, among others, utilizing social media platforms such as Twitter where their power is enhanced. With their enhanced power thanks to social media also [comes](#) an increased sense of social responsibility with their increased exposure to different ideologies and people from varying cultures. Although the meaning of being a fangirl is constantly changing throughout time, it's safe to say that they are more than just obsessed teenage girls behind a laptop but a force to be reckoned with.