

Emotion Regulation of Fanatical Army (BTS Fans) Involved in Verbal Aggression: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract: The spread of *Hallyu* and the rapid advancement of social media has increasing the number of Korean idol fandoms all over the world, including Indonesia. However, this growth was eventually followed by the fan war and verbal aggression phenomenon that occur between fans and non-fans. This study examines the emotional regulation of Army who has experienced verbal aggression on social media. This research uses a qualitative method with phenomenological approach. Data analysis with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method. Data were collected by in-depth interviews, observation, and collecting evidence of verbal aggression. Two subjects were 20 and 25 years old each having experiences of verbal aggression on social media regarding their idol. The subject's emotional regulation was analyzed using five stages of The Theory of Emotion Regulation by Gross. The results found that the subject's involvement of verbal aggression aimed at his idol on social media attracted the subject to be involved and responded with verbal aggression as well. The emotion regulation process that should allow the subject to contain his anger failed due to the responses were considered rude and irrelevant.

1 INTRODUCTION

The fanaticism phenomenon among K-Pop fans has been going on for quite a long time and occurs a lot among fans of Korean groups and idols (Lastriani, 2018). One of the most talked-about is the fandom of the BTS (*Bangtan Boys*) boyband group called Army, which was established to exchange information about their idols (Fachrosi et al., 2020). The Army community and other K-Pop fandoms are growing all over the world along with the *Hallyu*/Korean wave which is spreading rapidly due to the development of social media. At the same time, fan wars occur between fandom groups, one of which is Army and EXO-L fans of the boyband EXO (Lastriani, 2018).

Fanaticism can be described as a high degree of concentration of sympathy and loyalty towards a particular brand, company, event, or similar thing (Deveci & Ercis, 2017). Fanaticism is identical with those who insist on ideas that are considered correct

and ignore facts that may conflict with thoughts and beliefs (Chung et al., 2008).

Previous studies have discussed that high fanaticism can encourage individuals to carry out verbal aggression on social media (Eliani et al., 2018). Verbal aggression refers to the use of aggressive language, whether polite or rude to others (Hamilton, 2012). This behavior expresses a form of communication that tends to be destructive both in social media and face-to-face situations (Rösner et al., 2016).

Understanding fanaticism psychologically can begin when an individual's motivation to idolize someone and participate in a community has a very positive impact on their well-being and self-identification in that community (Reysen et al., 2017). In addition, the phenomenon of K-Pop fans in particular has been investigated with findings that are related to significant factors in increasing happiness, self esteem, and social connectedness in the perpetrators (Laffan, 2021).

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Starting from these themes, the research wants to understand how verbal aggression occurs in Army with a psychological approach. The experience of verbal aggression was analyzed by the process of emotion regulation from (Gross, 2007) which describes emotion regulation as a series of emotional regulation processes that include (1) situation selection; action to get the expected situation, (2) situation modification; an individual's attempt to regulate his emotional situation to divert effects, (3) Attentional deployment; the way individuals direct their attention, (4) cognitive changes; changes in the way individuals assess situations to change their emotions, (5) response modulation; The tendency of the response starts from the emotion that has occurred. Another definition of emotion regulation is described as a series of individual processes controlling and directing the flow of emotions (Southam-Gerow & Kendall, 2002).

The occurrence of verbal aggression is important to study because several studies have found that verbal aggression can cause emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced professional efficacy/burnout (Yaratan & Uludag, 2012). This means that the impact of verbal aggression can affect the lives of individuals who are psychologically involved both as perpetrators and victims. In addition, higher fanaticism can significantly allow high verbal aggression on K-Pop fans (Cahyo et al., 2020; Khumas & Nurdin, 2021). By understanding how the subject's emotional regulation process occurs when verbal aggression occurs, this research is expected to be a guide in preventing and understanding the phenomena that occur.

Emotion regulation is an important skill that individuals must possess throughout their developmental stage because it will be strongly related to how someone responds to stress in any situation (Compas et al., 2014). As people age, emotion regulation becomes principal in influencing the way individuals deal with interpersonal problems (Coats & Blanchard-Fields, 2008). Especially at the early adulthood, based on Erikson's theory (in Brian et al., 2016) at this stage generally individuals will focus on forming intimate close relationships. Individuals have started to build careers and intimate relationships as independence mature (Seiffe-Krenke, 2006) Socio-emotionally moral development, identity, career will affect individual attitudes and lifestyles (Brian et al., 2016).

Based on the phenomenon occurs, we found individuals who are at early adulthood age still focusing on their fun with idols or even doing fun mocking each other idols. We want to explore how

fanaticism exists and becomes an individual's daily life. And departing from the phenomena that occur, the results of the study can be a perspective on the occurrence of verbal aggression on social media from the point of view of the Army involved.

2 METHOD

This study uses a qualitative research method with a phenomenological approach. The phenomenological approach is defined as a research approach that aims to explain the essence or meaning of a phenomenon from the point of view of individuals who have experienced it (Neubauer et al., 2019). This study wants to examine what and how Verbal Aggression occurs in ARMY with psychological analysis.

Participants in this study were two females aged 20 years and 25 years. These subjects were obtained using the Snowball Sampling sample collection technique, with the following criteria: (1) Early Adulthood, (2) Being an ARMY at least a year, (3) Spent money for BTS concerts or merchandise purchases, and (4) Experienced in doing fan war/verbal aggression on social media.

The procedural steps taken in this study include: (1) preparing instruments and criteria. The researcher prepares an interview guideline that is compiled based on the study of the theory used, then determines specific criteria to get the right subject; (2) looking for respondents. The search for respondents was carried out by making invitations via WhatsApp chat containing predetermined subject criteria, then the invitations were distributed in the ARMY Padang group; (3) conduct interviews on predetermined respondents. Subjects who meet the research criteria are then interviewed with a predetermined schedule through Zoom Meetings; (4) make verbatim from the results of the interview; (5) process data using the IPA method.

This study uses in-depth interviews and observations in data collection. Interviews were conducted according to a predetermined schedule via Zoom Meeting. Then observations were made to see the synchronization between the statement and the behavior of the subject. In addition to the interview and observation methods, additional data collection was also carried out by collecting digital trace evidence.

The analysis used in this study is the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method. This method aims to interpret the unique experiences of respondents and is analyzed in detail (Kahija, 2017). The steps taken in this method include (1) compiling

verbatim (original) transcripts; (2) reading the transcript many times; (3) composing exploratory comments, namely the researcher's interpretive statement on the subject's statement which is considered important; (4) create emergent themes from an exploratory comment; (5) create a superordinate theme from a collection of emergent themes that have similar meanings; (6) organize the whole theme in the parent table.

The validity checking of the data in this study uses the Triangulation method was carried out with the type of Research Triangulation, which involved the participation of more than one researcher in research to enrich the point of view of the phenomenon (Carter et al., 2014).

3 RESULT

Both subjects experienced similar emotional experiences in terms of fanaticism to each other. Meanwhile, in the experience of verbal aggression, there is a slightly different process but still produces the same emotional output between subjects. We summarize the themes obtained from the experience of the subjects with six superordinate themes. One theme discusses the picture of fanaticism and the other five is the description of the stages of emotion regulation based on the theory of emotion regulation from (Gross, 2007).

Table 1: Superordinate and subordinate themes.

Superordinate Theme	Subordinate Theme
Fanaticism Themes	Positive emotion such as enthusiasm and admiration from the self-love campaign and idol's positive values
	Willingness to spend money to buy merchandises
	Involvement in social events
Situation Selection	Interest to a post and comment about her idol, some of them are aggressive statements
Situation Modification	Subjects getting more focused on conversation topics at hand and start taking small action to alter the early emotional effect
Attentional Deployment	Subject 1 takes a distraction action by

	trying to help fellow Army defend their idol and ignore the insult
	Subject 2 is getting more focused and concentrated on aggressive and offensive tweet replies
Cognitive Change	Both subjects appraise the replies were getting irrelevant and even started to bully them personally
Response Modulation	Subjects couldn't stand the irrelevant insult and finally retaliate aggressively

3.1 Fanaticism

Both subjects admitted experiencing positive emotions by being BTS fans. Subjects admired the career journey, meaningful works, and inspiring self-love campaigns. These are the things that motivate the subject and make him excited every day. The subject believes that there are positive values that are worth following from his idol.

Subject 1 started liking BTS when her older sister showed her a BTS music video that she thought was interesting. After seeing this video, the subject admitted that she became interested in things about BTS until she finally became fond of BTS. While on the second subject, she admitted that at first, she did not like things that smelled of K-Pop. However, one day she became curious because she saw the enthusiasm of her friends for K-Pop. Thanks to her curiosity, the subject started watching K-Pop idol group music videos until finally became interested in K-Pop.

"I watched it 2 times, 3 times I watched them make noise, sis, the song is really good, she said that I started to get interested, why are people so interested, how come it was really cool, right? maybe this is what it looks like, maybe it's from my subconscious, I think so I'm starting to get curious, I'll find out for myself until I saw it on YouTube at first, oh, so this is what it looks like, maybe it's all like that, I looked at it and then watched it, how long has it been 2 months what's 3 months oh I don't know I forgot I slept late after 12 even after 1 just to watch their content on YouTube" (Subject 1)

On her way to liking BTS, the subject admitted that she had many positive impacts that motivated their lives. According to subject 1, BTS was able to

motivate her to study hard and increase her self-love. Not much different from the first subject, subject 2 admits that BTS's journey of life is very meaningful so that they can inspire and arouse enthusiasm and have values that are worth-following.

“It's more of a motivation. I put their photo card in my binder, so if I open it, I feel like I'm more enthusiastic. Then it's more about love yourself, said Namjoon. They are indeed influencing like this, at first we were insecure, but we saw their struggle from the start, how they really work hard, and it affects us just like that. So now I don't really feel the insecurity, since I know BTS, it's more like I'm more confident, more self-love.”
(Subject 2)

Subjects admitted that they were willing to spend some of their money and savings to buy BTS-themed merchandise. Some items even have a high price. Collecting merchandise such as photo cards, posters, albums, lightsticks creates pleasure for the subject. During their time as ARMY, the subjects claimed to have collected albums, lightsticks, posters, and photo cards. The subject admitted that she was willing to spend money to be able to get BTS merchandise even though it was not cheap. Subjects admitted that they really liked the availability of content, so she could always enjoy it.

“So it's been a while, yeah, it's been almost a month or two. I'm saving the money because I want to buy the original lightstick, which is around a million rupiah.” (Subject 2)

The subject often participates and is involved in events held by the fandom community both online and offline. In the experience of the two subjects, there are events such as birthday celebrations for members and groups, watching concerts together, to holding social events such as distributing food for iftar and raising funds. Subject 1 claimed to have been involved in social activities organized by Army. While the second subject admitted that he always participated in activities organized by the Army community in her town if the schedule did not occur at the same with her work schedule. The subject also claimed to be proud of the Army community in her city, even though they are a minority group, they can still carry out useful social activities.

“Well for contributions, I always participate if it doesn't coincide with my work schedule. For example, like watching an online concert together, participating in birthday events. There are birthday events, these events must

be held every year. If I'm not mistaken, the City's Army Community held a fundraising event and distributed food for iftar. I don't have the chance to join the last event, it was handled by the committees. Salute to the field committee. That's what makes me respect the Army community, they have a high social spirit. That's what I like about this fandom”
(Subject 2)

3.2 Emotion Regulation

We analyzed the emotion regulation experienced by the subjects from their experiences with each case. Subject 1 felt high negative emotions as a result of the Verbal Aggression that occurred. It started when the subject and her friends were curious about the reviews on social media about BTS, which later turned into a war between herself and the haters. She even had been dialed by the haters several times until she began to feel fear that her social media was tracked and her photos misused.

“Yes (she got several terrors), that's why I private my social media. I still use my account but I private it because I'm afraid that the haters will misuse the photo like that, I'm afraid it's more like that” (Subject 1)

In subject 2, the Verbal Aggression on social media she did began when she replied to a tweet that she considered belittling BTS. In addition to Twitter, subject 2 has also done verbal aggression in the comments column of a Tiktok who made content generalizing Korean culture too much. The impact of this incident was that the subject was verbally attacked, which made her reluctant to upload or update anything on his social media for a long time.

“Oh yes, definitely, mentally. Mentally, I felt a bad mood that it's like, uh, when I say something like this I'm afraid it's wrong. Or it could be chaos again. Anyway, it's been a few years that I haven't posted on Instagram at all, almost two years I think. I haven't posted anything on Instagram in almost two years, I haven't tweeted anything on Twitter, no. It's been crazy, two years. Almost two years.” (Subject 2)

Each subject told her experiences of carrying out Verbal Aggression on Instagram, Telegram, Twitter, and Tiktok. For a comprehensible description of emotion regulation, we analyze it one by one based on Gross and Thompson's (2007) emotion regulation theory, through the following five stages:

3.2.1 Situation Selection

The situation started when both subjects in their own events scrolled and discussed their idol as fangirling in social media. Subject 1 got interested when she began to see a kind of haters group link given by his friends on Telegram group. Then she joined the group and read the conversation and comments from haters.

“So at first, I was curious. A friend gave me a group link and then I tried to join.” (Subject 1)

While subject 2, the situation selection begins with her interest in seeing a tweet from a fan of another band comparing his idol to BTS. That person thinks that BTS's songs are not worthy to be displayed in international events. In another situation, the subject saw content on Tiktok discussing alleged religious harassment on a Korean TV station broadcast.

“At that time on Twitter I saw someone's statement, have you ever heard of you at that time some of BTS songs were going played for the rocket mission to the moon? So he said like this, your K-Pop idols are nothing compared to ours, plastics!” (Subject 2)

3.2.2 Situation Modification

The situation change experienced by the two subjects started with observing. Subject 1 tries to anticipate his fandom friends not to reply to haters and moves his friends to spam support his idol. In another situation, she is trying to understand that a posts in Instagram by a news portal are basically just information that can be good news for Army.

“When I joined the group, it turned out to be like a war (fans and haters argue), it's like why are you guys doing this?” (Subject 1)

In subject 2, the selection of the situation is a bit different. When Subject 1 still could respond more positively, Subject 2 started replying and commenting on the haters' posts with her opinion.

“I made it like this, just so you know, I told the FM fans earlier, for your information, our K-Pop idols have never nudged your artists, why are you nudging us? I said so. Remember, you guys aren't better than our idols, why? Your idol song even talked about a murder!” (Subject 2)

“He made content to pit Indonesians and K-Pop fans against each other. Meanwhile, this violation happened not because of BTS, but because of one of the television broadcasts in Korea.” (Subject 2)

3.2.3 Attentional Deployment

At this stage, there is a considerable difference between these two subjects. On subject 1, she tried to distract herself from the haters' comments and focus on supporting BTS. While in subject 2, she is more concentrated on replying haters' comments.

“We spam with purple hearts, a lot of hearts to cover up rude comments, all kinds of dirty comments. For Armys who come in and keep streaming, Armys, you don't have to feel down. Cover up those nasty comments!” (Subject 1)

While Subject 2 didn't expect her response could provoke the anger of the band fans, and other non-fans start blaspheming her. In Tiktok situations, she actually commented first but then she deletes it. Later she saw some comments given by other people to the Tiktokker is supporting and some more disagreeing. This is what makes her more concentrated on this problem.

“Well, finally, when I discussed it on Twitter, there were a lot of FM's fans replied to my tweet. Approximately there are 2000 or 3000 retweet on my Twitter.” (Subject 2)

“I actually made it (put a comment) rough before, but then I pulled it back before it was read by other people. I'm afraid it's going to be chaos again. But it turns out that a lot of people hate his content too, some Indonesian celebrities also replying his content.” (Subject 2)

3.2.4 Cognitive Change

Cognitive changes describe how the subject appraises the situation. Subject 1 began to think about replying to the blasphemous comments one by one as a defense for herself.

“If they insulted me first, then I insulted they back.” (Subject 1)

Meanwhile, subject 2 felt that the replies on Twitter related to herself were only used as a mockery for her. In another situation, she thought the generalization made by this Tiktokker is a situation that is considered irrelevant to the main topic it should be.

“There's my profile picture on Twitter for sure, my bio contains my address too. Everything on my Twitter account about me is complete. So they searched me on Instagram too, I was bullied in the DM. Also on Twitter, they mentioned me a lot. They're

mocking me like, you know, look, look at you, look at you, you pig! and you're not better than a pig's tail they said that." (Subject 2)
"They brought BTS into the conversation because BTS is the one who's getting popular at that time. They say, oh, this is crazy, K-Pop, all kinds of things, BTS, BTS, ice cubes, all kinds of things. Boys shake like that, waste plastics!" (Subject 2)

3.2.5 Response Modulation

At this stage the subject finally responds to the situation of verbal aggression he faces. Subject 1 chose to vent his anger by replying to comments and blasphemy that came. The subject does not hesitate to reply with a harsh word to the person who started the blasphemy with a harsh word first.

"The worst thing was that I was annoyed that he treated me with harsh words, do you understand? It's like they're mentioning the names of animals like that, so I replied to him directly. What bothers him? Just explain right here. I've also been insulted like, you, dog! There are also those who chat with me right away making a lot of noise, replying to voice notes also all kinds of things." (Subject 1)

"It's bad, really, if they have good intentions, we'll be good too. But if they are like that (harsh, aggressive), we will get like that too. If they don't nudge first, we won't be like that." (Subject 1)

From this situation, the subject admitted the feeling of satisfaction after doing "war" with haters.

"Yes, more like satisfaction, I'm satisfied, it's like I've already replied and they just replying with a sticker, there's nothing else to reply to, and that's the satisfaction after the war with haters" (Subject 1)

Meanwhile, the situation in Subject 2 became continuous verbal aggression on Twitter. In another situation, the subject also verbally acts in the comments section of the Tiktok's content regarding the content that overgeneralizes.

"Well, finally, I saw that it was more than 2000 replies, 2000 who retweeted my message because I was carrying FM. Honestly, my intention was not to insult FM, I just replied to this someone's tweet about my idol, you know, but why did I get those insult, oh, maybe because I'm a K-Poper, right?" (Subject 2)

*"Yes, until they look for photos of me on Instagram, after that they sent the photos to Twitter. Wow, come look at this child, this child is studying in U** (subject's college), she lives here, look at her photo! He said. What a shame for my town!"* (Subject 2)

From this situation, the subject admitted that she did not regret her actions because according to her, she had the right to express her opinion on social media freely.

"No regret at all. That's what my heart desires." (Subject 2)

4 DISCUSSION

Positive emotions manifested when both subjects became fans of BTS and joined ARMY. Both subjects felt a pleasant experience from the messages contained in each BTS song. This experience further increases fans' love for their idols and can form emotional loyalty because of the positive emotions formed (Worthington et al., 2010). This influence occurs continuously and continuously so that the subject is still a fan to this day.

Overall, it can be understood that verbal aggression that occurs in the subjects starts from negative emotions due to his idol being insulted or demeaned by others. Although initially, the subject admitted that they had tried to regulate their emotion and distract it, the comments and insults that came insistently started to get out of context, thus triggering the subject's anger. Eliani et al., (2018) research found that high fanaticism in K-Pop has a high influence on verbal aggression. The subject admitted that they did not accept if their idol was mocked, this feeling was described by Subject 2 like seeing her own friend being mocked.

The occurrence of verbal aggression in both subjects was described in four different situations, respectively. Subject 1 shared her experience with verbal aggression in groups of haters from the Telegram application and on a portal that reviews BTS on Instagram. Meanwhile, S2 experienced verbal aggression attacks from many Tweeps on Twitter and also had participated in verbal aggression in the comments column of Tiktok content. In the process of selecting the situation, each subject observed what was being discussed on social media about their idol and found that there was offensive content or reviews. This continues in the second stage, namely changing the situation where each subject anticipates to reduce negative emotions that will occur. Subject 1 focuses on positive comments

from fellow ARMYs. In other situations, she also tries to focus on news reviews that talk about her idol. S2 tries to reply to someone's tweet by comparing her idol to other idols. And in the other situation, she focused on the comments of a Tiktoker and some of his followers generalizing religious harassment to the whole Korean culture.

The next stage is attention deployment. In this stage Gross (2007) explains that there are two possible strategies, namely distraction and concentration. In the situations experienced by Subject 1, it can be identified that there is a tendency for distractions to occur because the subject shifts her thoughts and focuses on supporting his idol. Whereas in Subject 2 there was concentration because many people reply her tweets being responded to, and on Tiktok there were many comments that contradicted the statement of the content maker.

From the situation that occurred, each subject began to appraise the response to be disclosed. Subject 1 and Subject 2 assessed that the situation was starting to be irrelevant to the initial theme and instead tended to be blasphemous to each individual. From this appraisal, decision emerged of each subject to finally responding to comments and blasphemy with verbal aggression. From this incident, both Subject 1 and Subject 2 each felt a considerable impact on social media. Subjects experienced verbal aggression to the stage of bullying their personal space. Specifically Subject 2, the "war" made her reluctant to make posts or updates on her social media accounts. This means that the verbal aggression felt by the subject has a significant impact on his mental health (Walsh & Clarke, 2003). This problem was finally resolved by each subject by silence on their respective social media and over time. Finally, the reply comments stopped. However, from the whole incident, all subjects admitted that they did not feel regret for doing verbal aggression because it was a defense for themselves and especially their idols.

This study describes how the process of emotion regulation in individuals occurs, especially on how negative emotions are created based on verbal aggression cases. From these well-understood results, we would like to emphasize the importance of awareness of the ability of emotion regulation for individual psychological well-being as one of the mental health issues. Having good emotional regulation will support individual adaptive functions and maintain psychological well-being (Nyklíček et al., 2011). Moreover, a good emotion regulation mechanism is also correlated with mindfulness, well-being, and finally good mental health status (Mandal et al., 2017).

5 CONCLUSION

This study discusses two interrelated themes in viewing cases of Verbal Aggression that occurred in the Army group. Broadly speaking, the discussion includes Fanaticism which is detailed in the results as attitudes towards idols that create positive emotions in the subjects, and the satisfaction achieved when they can have merchandise with the BTS theme. Meanwhile, the discussion of emotion regulation based on the verbal aggression cases is described in five themes based on Gross's theory with five stages of the emotion regulation process. With the phenomenological analysis, it is illustrated how negative emotions develop significantly in the subject formed due to the phenomena that occur.

The subjects are quite active in activities as an Army. Not only fangirling with their friends but subjects have also been involved in social activities carried out by the community. As in the case discussed, they are also involved in verbal aggression between fandoms or haters. The subject admitted that they would not start a commotion if he was not nudged first. However, if the situation compels them to intervene, they will not be half-hearted and respond with verbal aggression. Subjects admitted that they had experienced terror until they was called by haters and caused their fear if his social media account was also reached and misused. From the whole incident, all subjects admitted that they did not feel regret for doing verbal aggression because it was a defense for themselves and their idols.

We want to highlight the importance of mindfulness to be able to master the regulation of emotions because it will have a huge impact on both ourselves and others. From the cases we discussed, we can learn that the situation created can be anticipated with the right attitude and consideration.

Thus, this study has some limitations. This study only involved female respondents, which may make a difference if the data were obtained from sources with different genders. Different experiences may also be found if the data is obtained from other respondents who have been fans longer than the respondents involved. We also suggest adding more data sources for further research to enrich more perspective.

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