



Map of the Soul: How BTS Reconstructs Cultural Identity Through Transmedia Storytelling



Introduction

In 2019, the Korean pop band BTS released their album *Map of the Soul: Persona*, followed by their 2020 album *Map of the Soul: 7*. The title for both works comes from psychoanalyst Carl Jung's theories of identity and allows the band to further reckon with their Korean identity on a global scale. BTS conveys their identities to their audience through their use transmedia storytelling, which is carried out via music videos, promotional content, and their complex lyricism.

As Korean artists, BTS is caught between conveying their Korean identity and embracing their international audience. Because the band is recognized on an international scale, they must incorporate their Korean identity in a way that adapts to the social contexts of the rest of the world. In reconstructing their identity, BTS also reconstructs their culture, making their work representative of the Postmodern concept of the fragmented self. BTS blurs the distinction between their true selves and their stage personas. This ambiguity between who BTS is as a brand and as individuals challenges the understanding of how audiences should understand popular music as a form of promoting national identity.

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[HYBE, 2019.](#)



[HYBE, 2020.](#)



[HYBE, 2020.](#)

Why This Matters



"When culture incorporates internationalization and technological advancement, it can be more competitive and thrive over time. Thus, culture is not inherited, but created" (Parc & Kim).

Intro: Persona

The self that is presented to the public is a projection of who the individual thinks they should be to others, but it is not necessarily an honest depiction of their true self. The persona serves as a mask to hide away an individual's shadow—the hidden self. The persona is therefore a collaborative effort between BTS and their audience; it is a combination of the expectations they set upon themselves and the expectations forced upon them by others.

Interlude: Shadow

In Jungian theory, the shadow is the self that is not publicly displayed, but it still influences the presentation of one's identity. Neither the shadow nor the persona can exist without the other. If there is no shadow, there is no self to hide; conversely, if there is no persona, then the shadow is always visible. As BTS continues to grow and become more famous, their shadow self—the doubts, fears, and flaws they have—grows, too. Their success makes the band uncomfortable, but in order to attain their dreams, the members must reconcile their dissonance.

Outro: Ego

The music video features a rewind of BTS' previous music videos to illustrate not just their growth but also how they integrate their past selves with their present work as a way of acknowledging the past without reverting back to it.

Each album produced by BTS has its own concept but builds up to the larger narrative of who BTS is constantly becoming. Coupled with their global fame, BTS transcends their personal identity and moves to a cultural scale of identity.

Conclusion

In recognizing and accepting their faults and successes as part of a larger, cultural, Postmodern identity, BTS creates music that allows them to transcend cultural boundaries and challenge what K-pop is in a transcultural context.



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