A cause for academic euphoria: Seven BTS songs that inspire the learning and teaching of services marketing

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Abstract

Songs have been used as an effective learning tool in marketing. Despite the popularity of the K-pop group BTS in popular culture and the importance of services marketing in academia and industry, few studies have examined BTS through the lens of learning services marketing. This opinion piece discusses the services marketing lessons that can be inspired by the songs of BTS. A BTS-Services Marketing Playlist compiling seven selected BTS songs is introduced that captures and synthesizes key fundamental as well as contemporary themes in the services marketing literature. The integrated list of topics and consolidated key literature in the playlist can inspire future research directions for researchers who aim to specialize in the services marketing field. Further, the playlist is a useful compilation that can guide content creation and lesson planning for higher education programs in services marketing. This paper is one of the first to connect K-pop songs to services marketing and pedagogy and contributes to the literature on using the arts for the teaching and advancement of services marketing education.

Introduction

"I often think in music" – Albert Einstein (Greene, 2021, p. 161).

BTS, which stands for "Bangtan Sonyeondan" or "Beyond the Scene" is a multi-award-winning seven-member boy band comprising RM, Jin, SUGA, j-hope, Jimin, V, and Jung Kook (Kang, 2023). Representing the fourth-generation K-pop group from South Korea (Mackenzie, 2019), since their debut more than a decade ago in 2013, the band has grown to become a global phenomenon and generated more than USD 3.6 billion annually for the South Korean economy (Taylor, 2022). The seven members have broken multiple records, captured fans from the east to the west, and have been acknowledged by the international community for their music, entertainment value, and contribution to global culture (Kang, 2023).

Global popular culture can indeed be a force for many things, including the learning of marketing-related disciplines. For instance, Ivanov (2023) reflected on the relationships between salient themes in the Star Wars movies and the future of tourism and hospitality. On music, studies have investigated a myriad of phenomena, including the ability of music to affect brand attitudes (Chou & Lien, 2010), identify key communication themes (Henard & and Rossetti, 2014), and be used as a tool for research (Hartmann & and Ostberg, 2022) and learning in marketing (Bryant & and Riley, 2024; Weinrauch, 2005). In a recent study, Rich and Dingus (2024) developed 15 songs to teach the principles of marketing.

Given the significant impact of BTS in music, while most studies have analyzed BTS in terms of their growth and popularity (Courtney Mc & null, 2020; Hong et al., 2024; Lee et al., 2021; Parc & Kim, 2020), none have focused on providing perspectives of how BTS songs can inspire the teaching of the equally dynamic discipline of services marketing and its myriad of developments (Huang et al., 2021; Wirtz & Lovelock, 2022) with emerging technologies including artificial intelligence (AI) (Noor, 2024; Wirtz & Stock-Homburg, 2025).

Inspired by Ivanov (2023) and the aforementioned studies on popular culture and marketing, this viewpoint is written by the article author who is a services marketing academic as well as a BTS Army (bias: Jung Kook). Anchored by Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences in which musical intelligence can trigger and strengthen other intelligences (Rich & Dingus, 2024), this article answers the call by Heath and Tynan (2023) on the use of arts for marketing education and reflects on how seven selected songs by BTS mirror key concepts in the services marketing literature. The compilation of topics and key articles reviewed in the BTS-Services Marketing Playlist can serve researchers who wish to consider a wide spectrum of key research topics within the field. Educators can use our playlist to optimize the creative nature of teaching services marketing with BTS.

The BTS-services marketing playlist

This section lists seven selected BTS songs in the BTS-Services Marketing Playlist. The selection is based on the popularity of the song, its salience to important service marketing concepts, as well as the author's experience in using these songs as pre-lecture music and during classroom teaching. Each song is introduced with its background and lyrics from Genius (2025), one of the largest global repositories for song lyrics and community contributions of musical knowledge. This viewpoint then gives its reflections on how the song relates to services marketing through a synthesis of the key literature. The order of the songs is suggested based on the nature and coherent flow of the topics: from optimizing the service brand and experiences, to managing external and internal customer relations, and concluding with customer care and well-being.

Dynamite: Creating brand differentiation and distinctiveness

"Dynamite" was released as a single track album in August 2020 (Kang, 2023). The song exploded with joy and confidence as it made history as the first track to be completely sung by the BTS members in English. This spirit along with the song's lyrics "Cause I'm in the stars tonight. So watch me bring the fire and set the night alight. Shinin' through the city with a little funk and soul. So I'ma light it up like dynamite." suggest the importance of being bold and different. Indeed, the marketing literature has long advocated the importance of brand differentiation as a key component to strengthening brand equity (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993, 2001). While the differentiation concept has been applied for both product and service industries, emerging studies have given attention to the unique aspects of brand management for services, including how quality-based personalization strategy (i.e., differentiation or customization) is more suitable for products while relationship-based personalization strategy is more effective for services (Huang & Dev, 2019). Turning our attention to BTS, it is also arguable that there is nothing truly different about a K-pop band singing in English or wanting to shine in the city; explosive dynamite is not as different as it is noticeable. These arguments support propositions for a greater emphasis on brand distinctiveness as opposed to differentiation and the importance of being noticeable by creating brand associations that help to identify the brand (Romaniuk et al., 2007).

Left and right: Building mental and physical availability

"Left and Right" is a collaboration between BTS member Jung Kook and Charlie Puth and was released in June 2022 (Atkinson, 2022). The song's central theme is about yearning for someone who has successfully competed and occupied the person's thoughts, with its lyrics "Memories follow me left and right. I can feel you over here, I can feel you over there. You take up every corner of my mind. Whatcha gon' do now?". Similarly, brands that successfully compete for mental and physical availability make it easier for consumers to remember and select them (Sharp, 2010). Mental availability refers to how accessible the brand is in memory in

various cues that come to the consumer's mind - also known as category entry points or CEPs (Romaniuk, 2018) - while physical availability refers to the presence, relevance, and prominence that the brand has (Romaniuk & Sharp, 2016). Emerging research suggests that physical availability may be more critical for full-service restaurants as opposed to those with limited service (Lynn, 2024). Accordingly, similar to the collaborative efforts required to produce the hit song "Left and Right", more collaborations with service consumers are required to build appropriate mental availability (Romaniuk, 2023) and physical availability (Romaniuk & Sharp, 2016) to ensure that the brand is available to service consumers in all directions.

Universe: Creating omnichannel and omnipresence experiences

"Universe" was released in September 2021 by BTS and British rock band Coldplay and soon became the first collaborative song to top the Billboard charts (Jihye & Hayeon, 2021). Its lyrics "In the night, I lie and look up at you. When the morning comes, I watch you rise. There's a paradise that couldn't capture, that bright infinity inside your eyes." suggest the immersive love that is yearned to be captured yet difficult to fully experience between characters in different universes. Indeed, actualizing such immersive experiences can prove challenging for brands that need to be able to integrate and optimize all offline and online touchpoints to cater to the multidimensional expectations of customers across these physical and digital universes (Rahman et al., 2022). The use of AI-assisted technologies can assist in achieving the business goals of creating omnichannel experiences (Thaichon et al., 2024). Further effective collaboration strategies with AI and other human experts, as exemplified in the collaborative success of the "Universe" song itself, need to be explored to increase omnipresence in which the customer feels that they are being accompanied by the same, familiar companion throughout their customer journey (Liu et al., 2024).

Butter: Building bonds and reducing churn

"Butter" was released as a single track album in May 2021 (Kang, 2023). Its lyrics "Smooth like butter. Pull you in like no other. … Side step, right, left to my beat. Get it, let it roll." paint an uplifting positive energy. Indeed, similar to the butter churn device in which cream acts as the foundation and is bonded and rolled without much barrel spillage to create a smooth outcome, service managers aim to build the key outcome of customer loyalty by creating loyalty foundations, loyalty bonds, and reducing customer churn as conceptualized in the wheel of loyalty (Wirtz & Lovelock, 2022). Delivering quality service with AI can contribute to customer loyalty (Noor et al., 2022b). The emergence of generative AI (GenAI) allows for AI to create emotional connections and deepen bonds with service customers (Huang & Rust, 2024). Finally, in terms of reducing churn, increasing advances in AI-based models allow for more personalized relationship management by predicting customers who may churn and thereafter creating service fees that are acceptable to them (Ortakci & Seker, 2024). Further research relating to churn intelligence with AI is required to improve customer retention (Singh et al., 2024).

Life Goes On: Managing service recovery and relations

"Life Goes On" was featured in the BTS album "BE" released in November 2020 (Kang, 2023). The comforting lyrics of the main chorus which translate to "Like an arrow in the blue sky, another day flying by. On my pillow, on my table, yeah, life goes on. Like this again." reflect the ever-changing, fleeting moments of life and how our experiences can be shaped by the way we manage these events. In services, a critical component of reducing churn is managing difficult situations with customers; these moments can represent opportunities for effective service recovery. Appropriate procedural and distributive justice and, in particular, interactional justice, can turn complainants into returning customers in the context of traditional service encounters (Blodgett et al., 1997). Emerging research further suggests that human service agents continue to remain important when giving apologies to customers, while AI agents may be preferred when the customer requires an explanation of the service failure (Fürst et al., 2025). As organizations increasingly use AI to manage both external customer relations and internal ones (i.e., with employees), more research is required to fully understand how decisions, lapses, and explanations with AI may be perceived differently from their human counterparts (Narayanan et al., 2024).

Permission to Dance: Empowering service employees

"Permission to Dance" is the second track from the BTS album "Butter" released in July 2021(Kang, 2023). The rhythm of the track is designed to make hearts beat and contains the lyrics "We don't need to worry, cause when we fall, we know how to land… cause we don't need permission to dance". In services marketing, the service beat grows in tension particularly during moments when the service fails and the customer is dissatisfied. To this, the literature has long acknowledged the important role of service employees and how the challenges of managing the needs of the complaining customer can be promptly addressed with employee empowerment (Lashley, 1995). A culture of empowering leadership by service managers can lead to employee empowerment and creativity as well as better teamwork which is vital for managing the uncertainties of service (Hoang et al., 2021). In the context of AI service agents and the anxieties their introduction in the workplace may cause service staff, further research is required to better understand how the adoption of AI can further motivate service employees to instead become more empowered and productive (Tan et al., 2024).

Euphoria: Improving customer well-being with AI

"Euphoria" was featured in the album "LOVE YOURSELF" released in August 2018 (Kang, 2023). Sung by Jung Kook, the lyrics of the song capture a feel-good sensation that transcends mere attraction: "Take my hands now, you are the cause of my euphoria… when I'm with you, I'm in utopia." Closing this pedagogical playlist, beyond traditional outcome

measures of customer retention, the services marketing field continues to advocate for a more transformative agenda focusing on more sustainable service outcomes that uplift individuals and communities in their well-being (Field et al., 2021). The call for greater attention to customer well-being has permeated across multiple service industries, from retail (Troebs et al., 2018) to luxury (Batat, 2022) and even in higher education with GenAI (Cambra-Fierro et al., 2024). Indeed, the emergence of the fifth industrial revolution promises greater human collaboration with multiple AI-enabled technologies, with a focus on the well-being of all stakeholders in the service ecosystem (Noble et al., 2022). In this vein, researchers continue to make important strides in better understanding how AI-enabled technologies can be used to transform the well-being of users for the better (Huang & Rust, 2024; Noor et al., 2022a).

Conclusion

The BTS-Services Marketing Playlist shows how music can motivate the understanding of key services marketing themes as well as update its audience of learners with more contemporary issues. Through a reflection of popular BTS songs as well as a synthesis of the services marketing literature, this article contributes to the literature on the use of the arts, particularly music and K-pop, for the effective learning and teaching of marketing-related disciplines. The BTS-Services Marketing Playlist assists in the consolidation of various fragmented topics and key literature and can serve as a useful update and anchor for researchers needing ideas to build their research portfolio in services marketing.

For practitioners, there are several ways to optimize the playlist for learning and teaching. First, short videos can be created and shared on social media that feature the song and the accompanying lesson to generate interest. For higher education courses with full semester durations, the playlist can serve as a key component in the subject plan by outlining the topics that would be covered. Each song in the playlist can be applied in the form of a topic introduction video featuring the track and an explanation of what the upcoming course would entail. Instructors developing new programs may wish to create their unit plans using the underlying services marketing themes of the seven songs in the order suggested in the playlist. On the other hand, instructors with existing lesson structures can embed the song as part of their teaching method when the relevant services marketing topic linked to the song is taught. Assessment methods can include written individual assignments asking students to reflect the BTS song to group performances in which students give their own take on the lessons learned via a music video production. Finally, shorter courses for student clubs and marketing associations or training workshops designed for the wider public may be developed to cover the topics of interest.

Overall, it is remarkable that BTS songs can contain such rich insights in services marketing; perhaps this reaffirms the marketing genius that is BTS and the members' intuitive marketing insights as reflected in their songs. However, while seven songs have been originally selected in this paper, educators are encouraged to adapt the playlist and make it their own with other songs that they can draw inspiration from. In terms of the effectiveness of these songs for teaching, the article author has personally found that the "Butter" track is useful for teaching the wheel of loyalty, as students could better understand and remember the concepts. While this article has conceptually argued that the entire playlist can be an effective teaching tool for services marketing, practical measures including student feedback and classroom observations are required to better evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of the BTS-Services Marketing Playlist. Overall, it is hoped that the playlist can be used as a key element to guide the design and experience of a more euphoric class on services marketing.

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