BTS: Group-Focused and Solo-Focused Eras (2019-2024): A Comparative Analysis of Search Interest, Album Sales, and Global Chart Performance

Rimjhim Kumari

Abstract: ***This study compares BTS's group-focused and solo-focused activities between 2019 and 2024 using worldwide Google Trends search-interest data, selected first-week physical album sales reported by Hanteo Chart, and selected global chart achievements. The study defines the group-focused period as January 2019-June 2022 and the solo-focused period as July 2022-December 2024, reflecting the group's transition into a new chapter while continuing to remain connected as a group. Google Trends is used as a relative measure of search attention rather than absolute search volume. For group-level analysis, yearly mean search-interest scores and monthly extremes are examined; for solo releases, each member's post-debut series is re-indexed so that the solo-debut month equals 100, allowing the direction and persistence of post-debut interest to be compared within each member. The results show strong group-level search interest in the displayed 2019-2021 series and substantial short-term attention around several solo debuts. Selected group releases recorded higher first-week physical sales than the solo releases included in the tables, although solo releases also achieved substantial sales and major global chart results. Overall, the evidence does not establish that solo activity caused a decline in BTS's group-level public interest or commercial visibility. Because the study is descriptive and uses relative search-interest data alongside selected sales and chart indicators, the findings should be interpreted as observed patterns rather than causal effects.***

Keywords: BTS; Google Trends; search interest; K-pop; album sales; solo careers; music industry

1. Introduction

Between 2019 and 2024, BTS moved from a period dominated by group releases and activities toward a period in which members also released individual music and pursued individual projects. This study examines whether that change was accompanied by observable changes in worldwide public search interest and commercial performance. The analysis does not treat the transition as a breakup; rather, it uses the group's framing of a new chapter that included individual activities while maintaining the group's identity and future plans. [3]

Research question. How did worldwide public search interest and selected commercial indicators change as BTS moved from a group-focused period to a period of increased solo activity?

Study scope. The study covers January 2019-December 2024. The group-focused period is January 2019-June 2022, while the solo-focused period is July 2022-December 2024. The division is analytical rather than a claim that BTS ceased to function as a group.

2. Methodology

Worldwide public interest was measured using Google Trends for the topic BTS, with the region set to Worldwide and
the search type set to Web Search. The author exported monthly data and calculated yearly arithmetic means for the displayed group-level series. Google Trends reports a normalized relative-interest index rather than absolute search counts; therefore, the values cannot be interpreted as the number of searches. [1]

For the group-level analysis, the displayed series covers January 2019-December 2021. For the solo-debut analysis, each member's series was observed from month 0 through month 12 after the selected solo debut. The exported values were subsequently re-indexed using: Indexed value = original monthly Google Trends value ÷ original debut-month value) × 100. Thus, month 0 equals 100 for every member. Values above 100 mean search interest higher than that member's own debut-month level; they do not represent absolute search volume.

Album sales were measured using first-week physical sales reported by Hanteo Chart's Initial Chodong data. The first-week window was treated as the initial seven-day sales period following release. Selected group and solo releases were compared descriptively rather than aggregated into a single total. [2]

Selected Billboard chart achievements were included as contextual evidence of international visibility, not as a standalone measure of popularity. The study uses descriptive analysis and does not infer causality from changes in search interest. Search behavior can also be affected by releases, promotions, performances, collaborations, media coverage, and other events.

3. Group-Level Search Interest

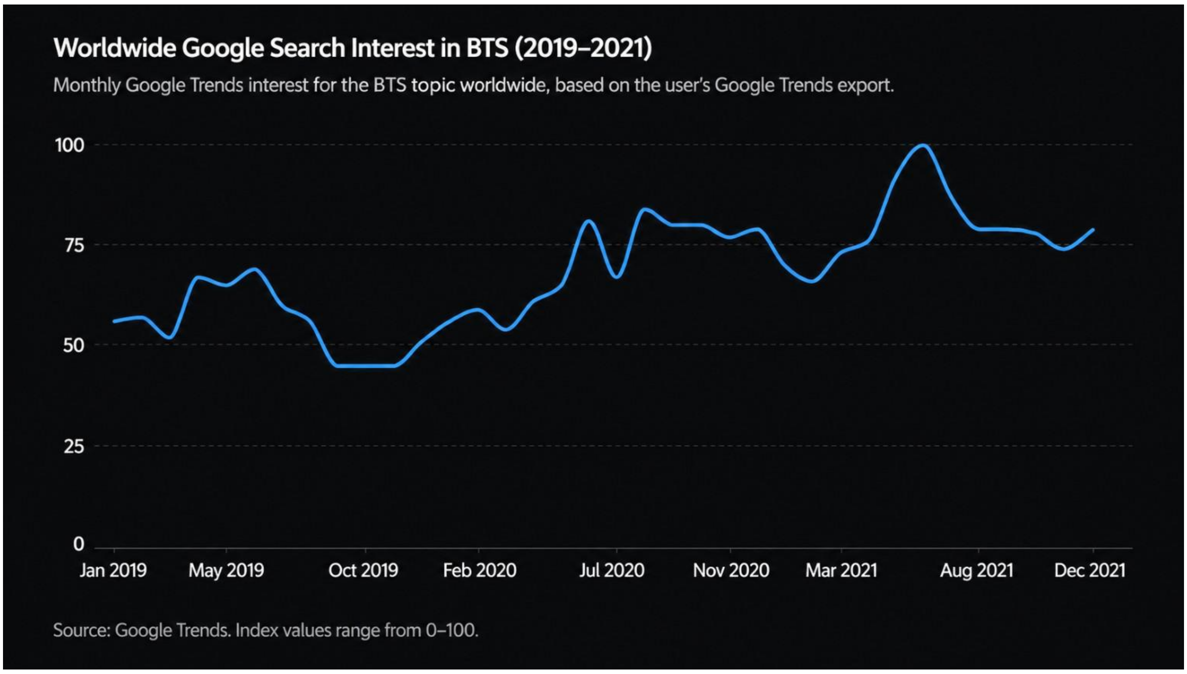

Figure 1: Worldwide Google search interest for the BTS topic, January 2019-December 2021. Source: Google Trends; data exported and analysed by the author. [1]

The displayed series shows increasing relative search interest across 2019-2021. This is a descriptive observation about search attention and should not be treated as a direct measure of general popularity or as proof of a causal mechanism.

4. Summary of Group-Level Search Statistics

Table 1. Summary Statistics of Worldwide Google Trends Interest in BTS, 2019–2021

Measure	Result
2019 Mean	55.67
2020 Mean	70.25
2021 Mean	79.42
Overall Mean (2019–2021)	68.44
Highest Monthly Value	100 (June 2021)
Lowest Monthly Value	45 (September–November 2019)
Increase in Annual Mean: 2019–2020	26.19%
Increase in Annual Mean: 2020–2021	13.05%
Increase in Annual Mean: 2019–2021	42.66%

The underlying monthly values in your uploaded Google Trends export support these figures.

Figure 2: Summary statistics of worldwide Google Trends interest in BTS, 2019-2021. Source: author calculations from Google Trends export. [1]

The annual mean increased from 55.67 in 2019 to 70.25 in 2020 and 79.42 in 2021. The increase from 2019 to 2021 is 42.66% in the relative index. Because Google Trends is normalized, this percentage does not represent a 42.66% increase in the absolute number of searches.

5. Solo-Debut Search Interest

To examine whether attention around solo releases was sustained, the monthly Google Trends series for RM, Jin, SUGA, j-hope, Jimin, V, and Jung Kook was aligned by

Paper ID: SR26829032124 DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.21275/SR26829032124

months since each selected solo debut. Each member's debut month was set to an index of 100 using the re-indexing formula reported in the methodology. This permits within-member changes to be compared without interpreting the values as absolute search volume.

The solo-debut series shows that several members experienced their highest indexed search-interest values around or shortly after debut, followed by lower values in later months. The trajectories are not uniform: V remains comparatively stable, Jin shows a strong short-term increase, and j-hope shows a later rebound. These patterns support the narrower conclusion that solo releases generated substantial attention, but they do not demonstrate a permanent increase in search interest for every member.

6. Post-Debut Search-Interest Patterns

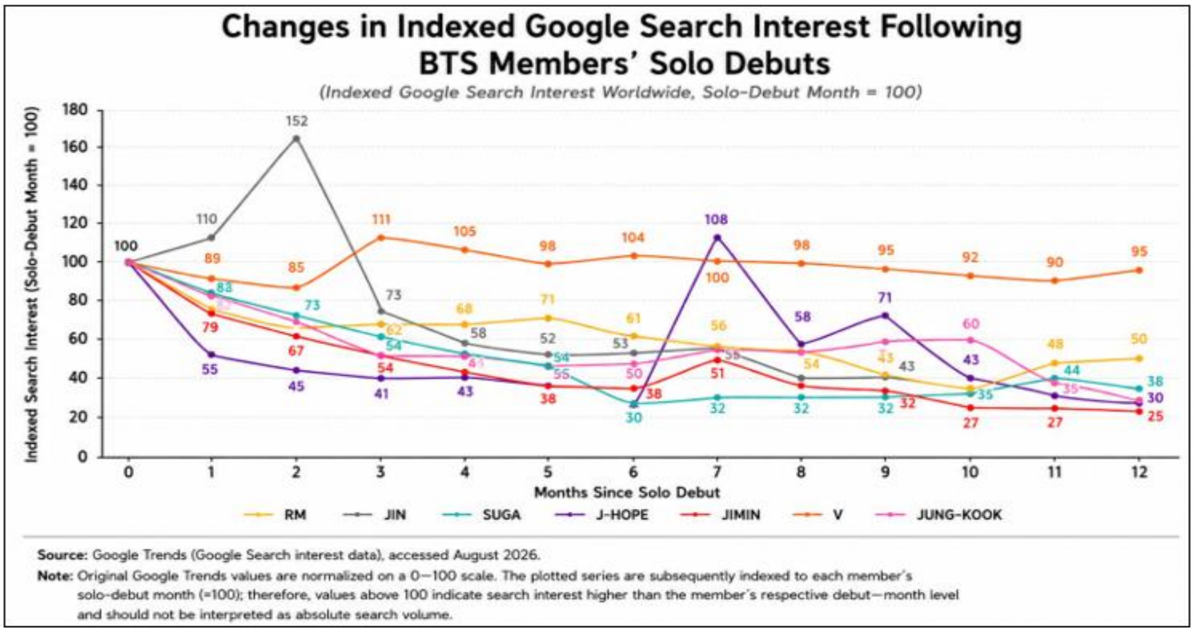

Figure 3: Changes in indexed Google search interest following selected BTS members' solo debuts. Source: Google Trends data; re-indexed by the author to each member's solo-debut month. [1]

Jin reaches the largest short-term increase, with an indexed value of 152 in month 2. V remains comparatively stable across the observation window. RM, SUGA, Jimin, and Jung Kook generally decline from their debut-month index, while j-hope shows a later rebound. Individual trajectories may reflect member-specific releases, promotions, media events, collaborations, and other factors.

Appendix Table A1. Complete Monthly Indexed Google Search-Interest Dataset

Complete Monthly Indexed Google Search Interest Dataset

Table A1: Monthly Indexed Google Search Interest following BTS members' solo debuts

Month Since Solo Debut	RM	Jin	SUGA	j- hope	Jimin	V	Jung Kook
0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
1	78.0	109.8	88.9	54.6	77.4	89.4	87.0
2	72.9	152.0	68.0	44.5	60.6	84.6	67.1
3	72.9	69.6	51.0	41.4	53.5	111.2	58.4
4	67.8	59.1	57.5	43.1	48.0	105.1	55.7
5	71.2	50.7	45.0	46.0	43.2	97.8	52.2
6	61.0	50.7	30.1	56.9	38.1	103.5	48.4
7	55.6	47.3	31.9	107.8	49.5	100.0	51.2
8	72.0	44.8	34.7	51.8	37.4	97.8	47.2
9	71.2	39.2	32.4	67.2	42.3	95.9	59.0
10	40.7	36.3	32.9	43.1	32.9	91.9	59.6
11	47.5	32.9	48.1	39.5	29.0	90.4	41.0
12	50.2	31.8	39.2	35.1	29.4	94.7	38.5

Note. Original Google Trends values were normalized on a 0-100 scale before the author re-indexed each member's series to the member's solo-debut month (=100). Values above 100 therefore indicate a level above that member's own debut-month value.

7. Commercial Performance: First-Week Album Sales

The following tables compare selected first-week physical sales from the same Hanteo Chart source. The comparison is descriptive: the releases are not aggregated into one group-versus-solo total, and selected releases should not be treated as a complete census of all albums. [2]

Period	Release	Artist	Release Date	First Week Hanteo Sales
Group	*Map of the Soul: Persona*	BTS	12 Apr 2019	2,130,480
Group	*Map of the Soul: 7*	BTS	21 Feb 2020	3,378,633
Group	*BE (Deluxe Edition)*	BTS	20 Nov 2020	2,274,882
Group	*Butter*	BTS	9 Jul 2021	1,975,363
Group	*Proof*	BTS	10 Jun 2022	2,752,496

Source: Hanteo Chart Data
Note: *First- week sales represent album sales recorded during the first week following each release*

Among the selected group releases, Map of the Soul: 7 recorded the highest first-week sales at 3,378,633 units, while Butter recorded 1,975,363. The selected group releases therefore show substantial commercial scale, with variation between releases.

Table 2: BTS Members' Solo Releases and First and Week Hanteo Sales

Period	Release	Artist	Release Date	First Week Hanteo Sales
Solo	*Jack in the Box*	j-hope	29 Jul 2022**	365,917
Solo	*The Astronaut*	Jin	28 Oct 2022	770,126
Solo	*Indigo*	RM	2 Dec 2022	619,232
Solo	*FACE*	Jimin	24 Mar 2023	1,454,223
Solo	*D- DAY*	SUGA/ Agust D	21 Apr 2023	1,277,218
Solo	*Layover*	V	8 Sep 2023	2,101,974
Solo	*GOLDEN*	Jung Kook	3 Nov 2023	2,438,483

Source: Hanteo Chart Data
Note: *Jack in the Box* was released digitally on 15 July 2022, while physical ***Waverse edition*** was released on 29 July 2022. The sales figure shown corresponds to the physical release

Among the selected solo releases, Jung Kook's GOLDEN recorded 2,438,483 first-week sales, followed by V's Layover at 2,101,974. j-hope's Jack in the Box recorded 365,917. The selected solo releases therefore also demonstrate substantial commercial performance, with marked variation between members.

8. Global Chart Visibility

Chart results are used as contextual evidence of international visibility. They are not treated as a direct measure of public popularity because chart methodologies combine different forms of consumption and may differ by market.

Table 3: Selected global chart achievements during the solo-focused period. Sources: Billboard. [4, 5, 6]

Artist / release	Chart	Achievement	Period
Jimin — "Like Crazy"	Billboard Hot 100	No. 1	April 2023
Jung Kook feat. Latto — "Seven"	Billboard Hot 100	No. 1	July 2023
Jung Kook feat. Latto — "Seven"	Billboard Global 200	No. 1	July 2023
Jung Kook feat. Latto — "Seven"	Billboard Global Excl. U.S.	No. 1	July 2023
Jimin — "Like Crazy"	Billboard Global 200	No. 2	April 2023

These results demonstrate that individual releases could achieve major international chart outcomes during the solo-focused period. Jimin's "Like Crazy" reached No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100 in April 2023, while Jung Kook's "Seven" featuring Latto reached No. 1 on the Hot 100 in July 2023. "Seven" also reached No. 1 on the Billboard Global 200 and Global Excl. U.S. charts. [4, 5, 6]

9. Sustained Public Interest: Test of the Hypothesis

One possible explanation for continued visibility is that staggered solo releases created repeated points of attention while members pursued individual activities. This is treated as a hypothesis rather than a conclusion. The evidence is assessed using member-level search-interest trajectories, the displayed group-level series, album sales, and selected chart outcomes.

The solo-debut data support the conclusion that releases generated substantial initial attention, but the post-debut trajectories vary by member. The evidence therefore does not show that solo activity permanently increased individual search interest, nor does it establish that the group lost public attention because members pursued solo careers.

10. Analysis of the Group-to-Solo Decline Hypothesis

The hypothesis proposes that increased solo activity by members of a successful group could reduce group-level popularity, commercial appeal, or audience engagement. The present study can assess only selected aspects because it does not directly measure fandom fragmentation, streaming, social-media engagement, touring, merchandise consumption, or long-term group purchasing behavior.

Predicted mechanisms
Fandom fragmentation: solo activity could divide supporters into member-focused groups and reduce overall support for BTS.
Decreased group value: increased emphasis on individual careers could reduce BTS's commercial or brand appeal.

Oversaturation: frequent solo releases could reduce demand for future group releases if audiences become saturated.

Evidence and assessment

Table 4: Hypothesis assessment based only on evidence analysed in this study.

Hypothesis / prediction	Expected outcome if true	Evidence in this study	Assessment
Fandom fragmentation	Solo activity would split supporters and reduce overall group support.	The presented data do not demonstrate a clear split in overall support for BTS.	Largely unsupported by the presented evidence
Decreased group value	Greater emphasis on solo careers would reduce BTS's commercial and brand appeal.	Group releases retained strong first-week sales, while solo releases also achieved substantial sales and global chart results.	Not supported by the presented evidence
Members increasingly prioritise solo careers	Individual careers would substantially replace group participation.	The study contains substantial solo activity, but the available measures do not test future group participation as a causal outcome.	Not directly testable here
Reduced interest in BTS as a group	Solo activity would lead audiences to become less interested in BTS itself.	The available search-interest and chart evidence does not establish a clear decline attributable to solo activity.	Not clearly supported
Oversaturation	Frequent solo releases would reduce demand for BTS group releases.	The study does not contain sufficient quantitative data on audience saturation or post-2024 group-release demand.	Insufficient evidence

Taken together, the evidence does not show a clear decline in BTS's public search interest or commercial visibility that can be attributed to solo activity. However, the appropriate conclusion is not that solo activity had no effect. The available data are insufficient to isolate its effect from other factors, so the hypothesis can be only partially evaluated.

11. Google Search Interest and Album Sales: Limitations

Google Trends is useful for observing changes in search attention and momentum, but search interest is not equivalent to purchasing behavior. Searches may reflect curiosity, publicity, controversy, social-media activity, media coverage, or release announcements. Google Trends should therefore be treated here as an indicator of public attention rather than a direct measure or precise predictor of album sales. [1]

Key limitations: (1) search activity does not directly measure streams or purchases; (2) Google Trends measures search attention, not sentiment; (3) physical album sales can be affected by formats, variants, bundles, and availability; (4) Google Trends uses a relative index rather than absolute search counts; and (5) the study uses selected releases rather than every BTS and solo release.

Stronger future approach: future modelling could combine Google search interest, social-media engagement, historical sales, playlist exposure, physical availability, streaming, and other indicators before attempting to predict first-week sales.

12. Overall Conclusion

This study compared BTS's group-focused and solo-focused periods from 2019 to 2024 using worldwide Google Trends search interest, selected first-week physical album sales, and selected global chart achievements. The evidence shows strong relative search interest for BTS in the displayed 2019-2021 group-level series and substantial attention around members' solo debuts. Several solo releases also achieved major international chart results, while the selected BTS group releases generally recorded higher first-week physical sales than the selected solo releases.

The solo-debut analysis indicates that attention was often strongest around the debut period and then changed differently for each member. This suggests that solo activity generated substantial short-term attention, but the available data do not demonstrate a permanent increase in individual search interest or a causal effect on BTS's group-level popularity.

The Group-to-Solo Decline Hypothesis is therefore only partially evaluated by the present study. The data do not provide clear evidence of a decline in BTS's public interest or commercial visibility attributable to solo activity, but they also do not justify the stronger claim that solo activity caused the group to maintain or increase its popularity. The distinction is important because the study is descriptive and the available indicators cannot isolate causality.

Future research should extend the analysis using a longer group-release history and additional indicators such as streaming, social-media engagement, concert attendance, merchandise consumption, and audience-level data. Such evidence would provide a broader basis for assessing whether individual activities complement, substitute for, or have no measurable effect on group-level performance.

13. Data and Reproducibility Notes

The Google Trends group-level analysis uses the worldwide Web Search setting for the BTS topic and the monthly export covering the period used in the displayed figures. The solo-debut analysis uses monthly values from month 0 through month 12 after each selected debut. Because each member's exported Google Trends series was re-indexed to its own debut month, the resulting values are relative within-member indices. The re-indexing formula is reported in the methodology so that the calculation can be reproduced from the underlying export.

All arithmetic calculations in this manuscript- including yearly means, percentage changes, and the post-debut indexed series- were made by the author from the cited data sources. Hanteo figures represent first-week physical sales during the Initial Chodong period, while Billboard results are used as contextual evidence of international chart performance. [2, 4, 5, 6]

References

Primary data sources

[1] Google Trends. (n.d.). Understanding Google Trends data. Google Trends. Accessed August 2026.

[2] Hanteo Chart. (n.d.). Initial Chodong Chart / Hall of Fame. Hanteo Chart. Accessed August 2026.

Official BTS / HYBE sources

[3] BIGHIT MUSIC. (2022). BTS "Proof" Release Information. Weverse. Official release information describing BTS's new chapter.

[4] HYBE. (2022). Letter to Shareholders. HYBE. Used for contextual information on the members' individual activities and the group's planned future activities.

Global chart sources

[5] Billboard. (2023, April). Jimin's "Like Crazy" reaches No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100. Billboard.

[6] Billboard. (2023, July). Jung Kook's "Seven" featuring Latto reaches No. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100. Billboard.

[7] Billboard. (2023, October). Jung Kook & Jack Harlow's "3D" debuts at No. 1 on Billboard Global charts. Billboard.

[8] Billboard. (2023, December 22). Jimin's "Closer Than This" Is Here: Watch the Music Video. Billboard.

Data and figure notes

Figure 1. Worldwide Google search interest for the BTS topic, January 2019-December 2021. Source: Google Trends; data exported and analysed by the author.

Figure 2. Summary statistics of worldwide Google Trends interest in BTS, 2019-2021. Source: author calculations from the Google Trends export.

Figure 3. Search-interest patterns following selected BTS members' solo debuts. Source: Google Trends; values re-indexed by the author to each member's solo-debut month.

Table 1. First-week physical sales of selected BTS group releases. Source: Hanteo Chart, Initial Chodong data.

Table 2. First-week physical sales of selected BTS solo releases. Source: Hanteo Chart, Initial Chodong data.

Table 3. Selected global chart achievements of BTS members during the solo-focused period. Sources: Billboard.

Table 4. Assessment of the Group-to-Solo Decline Hypothesis using evidence presented in this study.

Paper ID: SR26829032124 DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.21275/SR26829032124