

Organization Life of Chinese Fans: Teamwork and Community Group

Xinyue Xie^{1, a, *}

¹School of Global Journalism and Communication, Southwest University of Political Science and Law, Chongqing 401120, China.

^akorakerr@126.com

Abstract

With the emergence of the post-90s' and post-00s', and the constant development of network technology, the discourse power, one of Chinese fan behaviors in the new era, has been formed among the post-90s' and post-00s' as well, thus shaping the unique fandom culture. Empirical research of this paper suggests that the star worshipping style of the fandom with the Internet as the main battlefield features the "participatory culture" advocated by Jenkins, and is organizational, coordinated and hierarchical. On the whole, the fandom culture, compared with other star worshipping styles, has developed a collective special symbol system, such as the wording of the fandom and support system. Specifically, under the unified management of the fan support association, a series of work groups covering Internet marketing, data, art design, and translation has come into being. These work groups function as fan organizations with a clear division of tasks and a strong awareness of teamwork.

Keywords

Fan organization; fandom culture; team collaboration; Internet community; collectivism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Currently, fans have formed influential groups. Fan groups, particularly among digital natives, namely the post-90s' and the post-00s', have demonstrated the youth subcultural characteristics. Nowadays, the network is teeming with social groups with para-social interaction as the bond. Members of fan groups are connected by complex social relationships and special spiritual recognition. Characteristics of network communication combined with the trend of pan-entertainment and consumerism have endowed the current fan economy with a stable source of consumers and specific operation modes. In activities supporting idols, fan groups have been commercialized and participatory, emotional and closely working together. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the current status of fandom culture in China and a collection of economic and cultural phenomena arising from the fandom culture.

2. FAN CULTURE WITH SUBCULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS

"Idol", originating from the religious belief and ceremony in the very beginning, is a visual personality symbol which is extremely worshipped individually or collectively. The word, "idol", first appears among entertainment circles of South Korea and Japan, and has been developed into an independent profession which is differentiated from professional singers and performers. After being spread to China, the word, "idol", has been used to reform to professionalized stars under the modern entertainment industrial system [1]. In essence, diol is a commercialized symbol generated by the mass media and providing entertainment for the

public, so the idol functions as the “spiritual support, emotional sustenance, and life entertainment”.

The earliest idol groups in China were represented by “The Little Tigers” (an idol group made up of three, including Su Youpeng, Wu Qilong and Chen Zhipeng). On that basis, idols developed from nation-wide talent shows, such as “Super Girls” and “Happy Boys”. In 2018, the nation-wide talent shows, “Idol Producer” and “Produce 101”, were all the rage. The group, “idols”, gradually appeared in the public, contributed to the robust growth of the idol-related industry and provided a creative thinking for the exploration of a whole industrial chain, so the year 2018 was also known as the “starting year of idols” [2].

Under the new media environment, a great number of video platforms and social media networks have laid a solid foundation for the development of the idol industries in China, and empowered the fans. On the one hand, the Internet communication is convenient and extensive, which can display the dynamic information of idols to fans sufficiently, satisfy idols’ fragmented and diversified information demands, and promoted online ceremonious interaction among fans. On the other hand, social media platforms and mobile terminals have provided adequate room for the aggregation and activities of fans, facilitated the para-social interaction among fans, and kept on strengthening the fan groups and upgrading their internal rules. So social media platforms and mobile terminals have become the internal driving force of the fan economy.

3. ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE OF THE FAN COMMUNITY

3.1. Organization and Management of the Fan Support Association

Fan support associations hold the absolute authoritativeness, discourse power and influence among fan groups. Meanwhile, fan support associations are the most direct representative of fan groups. The concept of “fan support association” was originated from Taiwan, and was then spread to Mainland China. As an authoritative organization that integrates the fandom resources and gathers the force of fans, there is usually one fan support association for one idol, and the fan support association is operated with the “President” at its core. Personnel at different levels in the association have clear responsibilities and styles of dealing with things. Fan support associations usually post various notifications and idol information, and remain a close contact with the idol team and partners of idols so as to grasp the first-hand information of idols and make immediate response thereto. In this way, the popularity of the idol can be commercialized. Meanwhile, fan support associations also provide welfares. For example, association members can obtain the film tickets of the idol before the market offers.

According to the introduction of respondents, the author summarizes three conditions for the establishment of fan support associations. On the first condition, the fan support association is established by the idol workshop or the entertainment company, and the specialist is sent for specific management. Idols of the kind are mostly performers, singers, and so on, and are under the strict and unified management of the official department. On the second condition, the fan support association is spontaneously organized by fans. Most idols found their fan support associations in this way. Fan support associations of the kind usually have a close connection with the official authorities, so the former has more accesses to the information concerning the idol agenda and ticket distribution. Under the third condition, the fan support association is spontaneously organized by the fans, and manages the idol. Fan support associations of the kind are for idols who are less popular or enter the entertainment industry not long or are not affiliated to any company. But these fan support associations are rare to find in China.

3.2. Organizations Establishing Fan Brands

Under the management of fan support associations, fan support organizations (namely support organizations responsible for the update of idol resources, recent information and

news) spontaneously by fans or set up officially will found the corresponding working groups to fully integrate and classify fan resources to facilitate the network communication of the idol's positive image. According to the author's statistics, work groups of idols are mainly oriented towards daily maintenance, network marketing, crisis PR, and so on, and can be divided into the data group, resource group, comment control group, network marketing group, anti-gang group, billboard group, recommendation group, transfer group, etc. See the list below:

List of work team (station) types affiliated to fan support associations

Group types	Functions
Data group	Increase support for traffic data of idols, and set up subsidiary groups hereunder.
Comment control group	Write documents to support idols under topics and dynamic news related to idols.
Recommendation group	Write documents and post positive information of idols to draw the attention from more people and increase the popularity of idols.
Anti-gang group	Report on negative and improper comments online about idols.
Billboard group	Increase votes for idols in relevant competitions and selections, and increase the popularity of issues related to idols to help them rank in the hot search list.
Transfer group	Forward and comment dynamic news about idols, adjust the idol ranking data, and enhance the topics and popularity of idols.
Resource group	Public relevant messages, dynamic news, and high-definition images of idols.
Same series group	Search, compare and post idols' wear, products used by idols, etc.
Public welfare group	Focus on developing and mobilizing fans and social personages to support the undertakings for public good in the name of idols.
Art design group	Responsible for making, modifying, drawing and designing pictures or photos.
Video/Image group	Make and edit videos or images about idols, and have a high requirement of the quality.
Copywriting group	Write documents or advertising texts to support the idols.
Translation group	Translate dynamic news abroad about idols and comments from foreign websites.

Data source: The above information is summarized on the basis of network materials and interviews.

These work groups (stations) manage their own affairs, respectively. They are usually affiliated to the fan support associations or connected with the latter. Relevant materials, resources, welfares and so on of these work groups constitute a complete idol image communication system.

3.3. Major Fans and Individual Bloggers as Opinion Leaders

Individual fans with relevant resources or technologies can make use of their personal conditions to establish and operate individual accounts that demonstrate the idol information and image. These individual accounts usually appear in Weibo, QQ and Bilibili. Due to the high quality of the content posted thereby, and professionalism of their star worshipping opinions, these accounts usually enjoy a high influence and appeal among fans. On the one hand, the

appeal is reflected as a positive driving force, such as activities for public good. On the other hand, the appeal can trigger the cohesion, separation or even quarrel among the fandom.

Part of these individual KOLs do not belong to the fandom. They irregularly post content about idols out of their own hobbies. Some of the content about the idols is relatively passive. Even if there are adequate materials or after relevant hotspot issues happen recently, they tend to choose materials on their own for recreation.

4. MANAGEMENT OF THE ONLINE FAN COMMUNITIES

The nature and composition of idol-related network communities are related to the nature of social media. This paper mainly discusses the online fan communities formed on Weibo. These fan communities are divided into the following three types according to the establishment of the fan communities and the nature of administration personnel. The first type of fan communities is established and managed by official idol teams, and the idols' personal accounts serve as the head of the communities. These communities are for fans meeting the requirements. Under the management model, the threshold is moderate for fans to enter these communities. Fans are required to post content related to idols on Weibo or their comment level in the super-topic column meet certain requirements. The second type of fan communities are founded by the fan support associations or the work groups affiliated thereto so that the fan communities can be standardized and organized to gather the collective forces of fans, and to generate the joint force in different sectors and improve the influence and popularity of idols. Generally, the group leaders and managers will post tasks in the group every day, and lead group members to take an active part in group activities and accomplish the tasks. Some communities might adopt a relatively strict and negative incentives. For example, members will be asked to get out of the group and receive a warning if failing to meet the task amount. The third type of fan communities is non-official and communities spontaneously organized and managed by fans. These communities are intended for making friends and sharing information. The threshold and requirements, generally related to basic qualities of community members, are relatively low for these communities. The social media tool, QQ, belongs to the third type of fan communities, which have a low threshold for members. Meanwhile, fans can participate in the support activities and generate the content on their own will.

5. SUMMARY

The fan behaviors on the Internet clarify the two sides – commercial and social – of fan groups. On the whole, idols selected through talent shows emphasize on the economic benefits brought by the fan-generated traffic. The network establishes the two-way para-social interaction between fans and idols, makes the online cooperation possible, and forms the unique subculture among fans. Specifically, operation of fan support associations and work groups and creation of “star brands” dominated by major fans have vitalized the fan economy via labor distribution and teamwork. Meanwhile, negative consequences, such as addiction to star worshipping and variety of marketing accounts and slandering accounts, have been caused. Under the segmented management of fans, strict hierarchical and power restrictions have been extended to the management of the whole fandom so that every member can acquire a complete set of code of behaviors before entering the fandom. In this way, non-members can be excluded from the fandom, and the collective spiritual cognition and behavioral mode that are peculiar to the fandom can be improved.

REFERENCES

- [1] Li Zekun & Du Rongfang. Behind the idols: Interpretation of Popular Stars [J]. *Film Literature*, 2010 (11): 126 – 127.

- [2] Shao Yanjun & Wang Yusu. Keywords of network culture [M]. SDX Joint Publishing House, 2018: 120.
- [3] Wu Xianju & Yang Yanyu. Model transformation and influence of fan economy in the new media era [J]. Journal of Guangxi Science & Technology Normal University, 2019, 34 (06): 32-36.