

# Analysis of Emotional Labor in Interaction with Idols and Fans -- Taking Teens in Times as an Example

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**Abstract.** In the Internet age, when fans with technology empowerment pursue idols, they will not only make great investment in psychological level, but also make great investment in consumption level, thus giving birth to "fan economy". Weibo not only provided a platform for idol performances, but also provided a channel for fans to express themselves and actively participate, so the "emotional labor" of fans was formed in Weibo. This paper takes emotional labor as the research foundation, takes the Teens in Times and its fan groups as the research objects, and adopts the methods of online ethnography, questionnaire survey and in-depth interview, focusing on the behaviors of idols and their fans in Weibo, to study and analyze the two-way value generated by these emotional labors.

**Keywords:** Interaction with idols and fans; Emotional labor; Teens in Times.

## 1. Introduction

With the development of information technology and the transformation of industrial structure, the social economy has gradually shifted from an economic model focusing on the production of material goods to an economic model focusing on the production of non-material labor (such as knowledge, services, information, emotions and communication) [1]. The transformation of this economic model has brought about a change in the form of labor organization, gradually shifting from the Taylor factory with assembly line production to a more flexible and humanized cooperative organization [2]. To explain the change of labor nature and its social consequences, Hochschild put forward the concept of "emotional labor", and made in-depth research on positive emotional labor represented by stewardesses and negative emotional labor represented by accountants [3]. Hochschild's social emotion theory holds that emotion is not only shaped by social structure and cultural norms, but also more and more shaped by capital forces. The smiling service and professional and friendly demeanor of flight attendants are the embodiment of the core competitiveness of airlines and the important content of their vocational training. Although the academic research on emotional labor is very rich and diverse, its most basic concern is to understand how employers influence people's emotional labor and the social consequences of this influence on individuals, groups and organizations [4].

Emotional labor belongs to immaterial labor, which is driven by emotion and involves the communication and interaction between people [5]. When fans have feelings of love and infatuation with an idol, they need to release these feelings through some specific social behaviors such as discourse expression, voting for the list, buying peripheral goods, etc., and the fans' feelings will be satisfied in these activities [5]. These behaviors are emotional labor performed by fans for idols. In this process, fans do their own voluntary work on the basis of their love for idols, without any reward. This kind of emotional work is instinct and an inevitable choice to change the reality [6].

With the rise of fan culture in the field of Chinese popular culture, a new type of emotional labor also emerges. The two-way emotional labor between idols and fans builds an emotional community together, which then provides powerful emotional motivation for the consumption behavior and social media use behavior of fans [7]. This kind of emotional labor has created considerable value for the capital forces of cultural and creative industries, but at present, there are few researches on emotional labor of fans in China.

## 2. Emotional labor of idols in Weibo's environment

### 2.1 Text Analysis of Idol Emotional Labor

In the traditional media era, stars can only appear in front of the public through the media lens. In this case, their shapes have been carefully designed and their language has been carefully considered, showing the public an impeccable and perfect image [8]. After the emergence of social media, stars, especially the idols of the cultivation department, began to shed their camouflage, boldly show their true selves, draw closer to their fans, and let fans fully participate in their own cultivation process [9]. Based on the statistics of the emotional labor carried out by the Teens in Times in Weibo, the author divides the contents of Weibo issued by the Teens in Times into: life presentation, thanks to fans, discussion of social issues, public welfare, forwarding others' Weibo, mentioning other stars, and work propaganda. Niu Jing subdivides people's behavior of using social media into three categories: self-disclosure, opinion expression and interpersonal communication in the book *Research on Social Media Usage Behavior: Interaction, Expression and Disclosure*. After the text analysis of the content of Weibo of the Teens in Times, the author thinks that among other Weibo except work propaganda, Weibo, who shows his life and thanks fans, belongs to self-disclosure, Weibo, who discusses social issues and benefits, belongs to opinion expression, and forwarding others Weibo and mentioning other stars belongs to interpersonal communication.

Among all the Weibo issued by the Teens in Times, Weibo, who belongs to self-disclosure, accounts for the highest proportion, which mainly includes the records of his daily life and what he said to his fans. He showed his real life in front of fans through Weibo, including his daily life with his family, which made fans feel more realistic and satisfied in the process of forming idols.

**Table 1.** Classification of Emotional Labor in Weibo of Youth League of the Times

Emotional labor category		Quantity	Percentage	
Self-disclosure	Show daily life	Selfie	145	35.10%
		Mention brother and sister	38	9.20%
		Mention parents	8	1.93%
Express opinions	Express gratitude to fans		20	4.84%
	Discuss social issues		33	7.99%
	Help public welfare events		57	13.80%
Interpersonal communication	Forward others' Weibo		33	7.99%
	Mention other stars		79	19.13%

### 2.2 The characteristics of emotional labor of idols

Through the analysis of the emotional labor behavior of the Teens in Times in Weibo and the actual situation of other idols, the characteristics of emotional labor in the interaction between idols and fans are obtained[10]. In the early stage of idol cultivation, apart from offline activities and media interviews, the public can only learn about idols through the platform of social media, and determine their minds to decide whether they want to be fans of the idol. Under the double attack of the entertainment paparazzi and the public's desire to peep, it is more and more difficult for idols to protect their privacy, so they usually choose to show their private lives to the public on their own initiative in order to seize the opportunities in time. In the early emotional labor of Weibo, people usually carefully select the positive aspects of their own lives to display, and share their daily life bit by bit to make their idol images more three-dimensional and sensible. Texts, pictures and other

materials produced by these emotional labors will become the objects of active interpretation by the public. In the whole process of idol interpretation, passers-by are attracted and complete the transformation to the role of fans. At the same time, because idols mostly show their real lives in the early stage, it is conducive to the establishment and maintenance of the people's buildings in the later stage, so as to avoid the collapse of people's buildings. In the middle stage of developing idols, capital began to wait and see the market value and potential of idols. If the evaluation was qualified, capital would begin to intervene in the process of cultivating idols, and use various marketing methods to consolidate the positioning of idols in the eyes of the public. At the same time, idols will also take measures to cooperate with capital marketing, expand their popularity, and strive to achieve their own personality shaping. In the final stage, the cultivation of idols is coming to an end, and the image of people facing the public has been completely determined. The cultivation of idols begins to transform into the traditional image of idols. "Elite idols determine their 'elite' status by distancing themselves from the public and the secular." Idols in this period have stood at the top of the pyramid. They don't need or are no longer allowed to share their private lives. Instead, like traditional idols, they start to stay away from their fans properly and keep a sense of mystery in order to maintain a perfect set-up.

### 3. Emotional labor in the interaction between idols and fans

#### 3.1 A fan organization engaged in emotional labor

**Table 2.** Group Rules of Weibo Group of Teens in Times in Times

1	Dedicated to Teens in Times, focusing on data and focusing on Teens in Times.
2	Screenshots are forbidden in the group.
3	You can't pull people into the group without the consent of the management.
4	You can't promote other groups or advertise in this group.
5	Weibo, who needs to publicize Teens in Times every day, has no bottom line. The more the merrier.
6	The management will make statistics and release the data to the group, and those who have no data for three consecutive days and have not taken time off, or those who have taken time off for a long time, will propose the group;
7	There are rewards for full attendance and data volume in the first three months.

The fan organization is a typical representative of the interesting community. Individual fans gather spontaneously out of their love for the same idol, forming an organization with strict internal division of labor. During a long period of operation, the organization begins to abide by the same discipline and share the same set of symbol system. The biggest source of motivation and discipline for fans is emotional power. With the help of the same emotion for idols, fans work together to carry out collective emotional labor. Because of the fan organization, fans can communicate online in time, work together, and the emotional labor of fans can exert its maximum effectiveness and realize the expected value. Although the fan organizations in Weibo are spontaneously formed by fans, their interior is not disorderly and free. When they join the fan organizations, they have strict access standards, and fans must meet certain requirements before they can enter smoothly. The more core a fan organization is, the higher its access standard will be, because only in this way can the purity of the organization and the confidentiality of information be guaranteed. In addition to the strict access standards, the fan organization has a strict hierarchy, power stratification and a clear division of labor, which are the basic guarantees for the emotional labor of fans in the group to proceed smoothly. The Weibo Group, established by the Online Investment Group of the Youth League Support Club, is a

fan organization under the support club dedicated to blogging. The strict group rules are set up in this organization as shown in Table 2.

In the general cognition of the public, the fans who like idols on the Internet are mostly young, immature and easy to make all kinds of impulsive actions. However, in recent years, a large number of related studies have shown that fans are gradually getting rid of the "non-mainstream" label. The fan organization has created a field for fan communication, which has obvious boundaries and divisions with other fields. Clear rules and regulations must be established within the field to restrict fans and distinguish boundaries. Only on the basis of strict discipline can fan organizations run smoothly and exert their effectiveness. All members in the organization must abide by organizational discipline, and if they violate it, there will be corresponding punishment measures.

### **3.2 Two-way value interaction of emotion**

In the process of idol self-presentation through Weibo, the public is attracted, becomes fans of idols, and starts emotional labor for idols, while idols continue to present themselves and complete their emotional labor. Unconsciously, common spiritual symbols appear, and emotional labor becomes a habit. They help each other to build a common symbol system and emotional community, and the emotional connection between idols and fans is getting closer and closer, which is hard to break. Emotional labor with idol fans depends on each other and complements each other, and they share the same value pursuit in material and spiritual aspects. These two kinds of emotional labor are indispensable, and they must cooperate with each other and interact actively, so as to maximize the ultimate value. Fans' emotional labor in social media is unpaid. In this process, their emotional labor is continuously transformed into clearly visible figures, which are examined and selected by the market. At the same time, in the process of fans' emotional labor, there are bound to be many consumption behaviors. In Consumer Culture and Postmodernism, Featherstone believes that, to a certain extent, consumer culture is produced by "prestige economy", which uses images and symbolic commodities, and is the true embodiment of dreams, desires and bizarre fantasies. Fans who cultivate idols believe that the best way to support an idol is to give him money. Therefore, they buy products endorsed and promoted by idols, raise funds for various kinds of assistance for idols, and send valuable gifts for idols. This kind of "emotional consumerism" not only satisfies the fans themselves, but also is targeted by the market and continuously squeezed. So far, the whole process of emotional labor of fans has been packaged and sold to the capital market. The economic purpose of emotional labor between idols and fans is to improve the popularity of idols, promote market choice and obtain more commercial resources.

## **4. Conclusions**

With the rapid progress of digital technology, social culture has been developed on various social platforms, and the emergence of new media has prompted China's social and cultural atmosphere to gradually move towards tolerance, openness and pluralism. In the initial study of fans, it was believed that fans were always in a passive position in getting along with idols. This fanaticism was one-way and could not receive a reply. With the development of the times, idols began to walk down the altar, take the initiative to get close to fans, and create a true image of being friendly and close to the people. In this process, the identity of fans has changed, and they gradually occupy an active position and master the right to speak. Idols use Weibo to actively engage in emotional labor, sending selfies, daily records, family life, adoration, etc. These behaviors enrich the image of idols and attract the interested public to complete the transformation to fan status. After the public becomes a fan, in the continuous observation and interpretation of idols, they realize self-identity and group identity, and begin emotional labor for idols. The emotional work performed by idols for fans on Weibo shows their true selves, promotes self-improvement, and at the same time, creates a perfect personality for the public, meeting the individualized needs of the society for idol images and the socialization needs of fans.

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