

# Analysis of Fan Culture and its Formation Mechanism in the Age of Mass Media

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**Abstract.** With the development of Internet media technology, fans are playing a more and more important role, and their behavior has an important impact on society, which is a social and cultural force that cannot be ignored. The development of film and television industry and the spread of IP dramas are inseparable from the promotion of fans. Fans' culture is constantly moving from the small crowd to the public, from being misunderstood to understanding. Today, fan culture has become a cultural phenomenon that can't be ignored, and the existence of fan groups has attracted more and more attention and discussion from all walks of life. The continuous development of new media technology and Internet technology has changed the power structure of the audience to obtain and disseminate information, and promoted the empowerment of groups on the basis of self-empowerment, thus promoting the empowerment of society and organizations. The formation of fan culture is also bound to be inseparable from the interaction between individual fans and culture. From emotion to identity to active participation, this series of interaction processes completed the evolution from individual to fan. On this basis, it further extends the process of how the fan culture, which was originally a minority culture, merged into popular culture. This paper also further reflects on whether fan culture is a form of "carnival".

**Keywords:** Mass Media Era; Fan Culture; Formation Mechanism; Cultural Guidance.

## 1. Introduction

In a sense, the large-scale rise of fans has become an important symbol of the cultural landscape in the new century. Fan, a transliteration word with post-modern characteristics, has replaced the famous "Star Chasers" in the 1990s. As a result, a new post-modern fan movement is surging [1]. As a youth subculture, the prominent manifestation of the fan phenomenon is that the fan group, with their unique interests and habits, presents themselves as non-normal and/or marginal people in some aspects according to their identity, what they do and where they do things [2]. In China, the research on fan culture began with the popularity of Super Girl in 2004, which really made the Chinese public realize the huge influence of fan groups. In the following ten years, popular culture also began to grow and gradually localized in China [3]. Fan culture involves various topics such as youth cultural psychology, the relationship between subculture and mass culture, and has highly realistic research significance from all aspects [4]. The research on fans' culture is not only an in-depth analysis and inspection of the current controversial fans' culture in China from the perspective of communication and media science, but also a concrete reflection on the social psychology of contemporary youth and the character of mass culture from the perspective of culture. Fans gathered together in the process of participation, actively communicated and interacted, and created a unique fan culture [5].

Fan culture is an important part of popular culture in China. Since 2005, the academic circles have paid more attention to fans, and the research on fan culture has reached a new stage [6]. In the practice of fans' interactive behavior, symbols are used to convey meaning in a common space, connecting fans with different cultural backgrounds and living environments, and creating fan culture with social value in interaction. "Ai Man Data: 2019 Sina Weibo Star White Paper" collated the data of Sina Weibo fans in 2019, and found that Weibo has gradually become one of the indispensable links in the current fan entertainment ecology. In 2019, the data of entertainment star fans on Sina Weibo had a new update and breakthrough, and the number of entertainment star fans exceeded 19.2 billion, with a year-on-year increase of 2.5 billion. With the growing fan base, the fan culture has become the focus of all circles [7]. CCTV, as the largest TV broadcasting organization in China, is facing the widest

audience in China, spreading mainstream values, mainstream culture and mainstream lifestyle, and has a wide and profound influence in China. Southern Newspaper Group is an early newspaper group that took the initiative to attack in the face of fierce market competition. Southern Weekend and Southern Metropolis Daily are two representative newspapers under Southern Newspaper Group, which have great influence in China and are also important carriers of mainstream culture [8]. Through the research on its representation, it analyzes the media logic followed by the mass media, and the way to shape the image of extreme fans and even the entire fan culture, in order to explore the representation of fan culture by the mass media. From the perspective of media culture, the main research method of this study is to deduce and summarize the nature, element composition and communication mode of the classic text of fan culture - "talent show" through logical reasoning. Fan culture, as a form of youth subculture, involves complex cultural psychology and social participation. Qualitative analysis is more appropriate and operable.

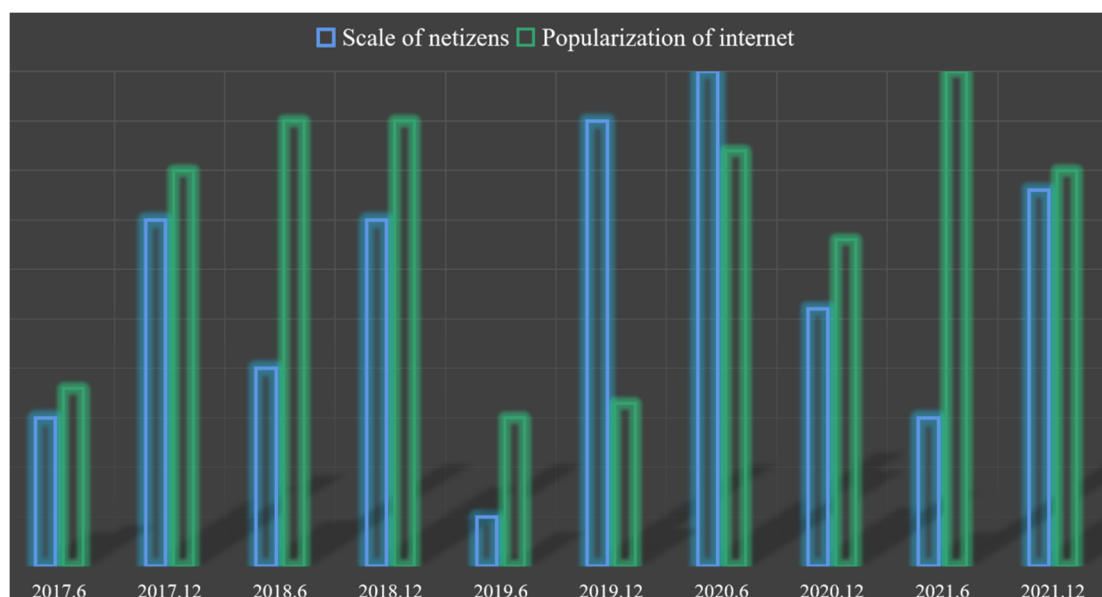
## 2. The Evolution of Fan Culture in Media Evolution

### 2.1 Analysis on the Group Character of Fans

At the beginning of the 21st century, if some Chinese people who have experienced the impact of the opening-up tide in 1980s and 1990s, but are still in a wait-and-see state for cultural imports and new things, are still hesitant about the "new culture" with popular culture from Chinese mainland and Taiwan as the main force, and their feelings about the popular culture in that is springing up like mushrooms are still at the level of "bizarre" and "elusive". The famous "Yang Lijuan Incident" largely stopped the Chinese people's hesitation and defensive attitude towards popular culture—a series of "idolize" behaviors of Gansu girl Yang Lijuan, which made people see the powerful magic of idols, popular songs and even the whole popular culture, which was undoubtedly a baptism-like impact. This also led to the emergence and popularity of the word "fans" as a groupie after the broadcast of Super Girl on Hunan Satellite TV in 2004 [9-10]. It can be said that the word "fans" and fan culture have a very significant negative meaning in China at the beginning. At the beginning of the 21st century, in addition to the growth of foreign culture and local popular culture, the gradual popularization of the Internet has objectively had a very important, irreplaceable impact and even a fundamental shaping on the development of Chinese social concepts and popular culture. In the context of the media reproduction of the "Yang Lijuan incident", this moral dualism shows the distinction between dreams and fantasies: dreams are human expectations and desires for beautiful things, although sometimes unrealistic; Fantasy refers to absurd ideas or hopes that go against objective laws and cannot be realized. Yang Lijuan has repeatedly stated that she met her idol Liu Dehua to "fulfill her dream", but CCTV reports and comments have characterized it as "fantasy", called it "delusion", "crazy", and labeled it as "crazy fans" and "crazy star chasing". Southern newspapers have called Yang Lijuan's pursuit of stars because of her dreams as "dream trip" and "move trip", Yang Lijuan's desire to meet with Andy Lau is summarized as "stating 'dreams', stimulating 'feelings', and changing destiny", which can be criticized to the utmost directly in a sarcastic tone.

The benefits obtained by fans from idols are not only the "positive energy" and "positive values" promoted by idol industry. From the perspective of text, fans who are decoders must also seek the reproduction and satisfaction of their personal experience in the production and dissemination of idols. The exploration of mass social identity and gender concept in fan culture is indispensable in the process of truly understanding the core appeal, text attribute and social and cultural influence of fan culture. That is to say, the question we are faced with is whether fans are individual people, whether fan groups are groups with real social and cultural status, or whether they are just "flowing" atomic beings. In the 21st century, China is vigorously developing the Internet field, and social life is surrounded by various new media. According to the 44th statistical report of Internet development in China in 2019, the Internet penetration rate reached 61.2%. In addition, the popularity of mobile

terminals also provides a lot of convenience for fans to participate in practice, and the communication between fans is faster. As shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Statistical Report on Internet Development

Driven by various new media, fans began to actively participate in the construction of fan culture, and the fan culture in the new media environment has undergone tremendous changes. In the idolize activities of fans, they changed from former information receivers to text consumers, spreading and consuming idol texts with their own unique decoding methods, and constantly creating and producing new media texts. Through interactive behavior, fans build their own unique fan culture, enhance their value and status, and in the process of idolize, they are also creating idols that are in line with their own tastes. They are no longer just followers of idols, but gradually become founders of idols. The ambiguous sympathy of CCTV and the ruthlessness of southern newspapers are not simply due to the different positions and views held by different channels, programs and media. Because this expression of superiority and sympathy is based on the operation of cultural discourse power, rather than the result of in-depth consideration of the existence of the object, it is difficult to really remove the destructiveness of fan subculture to social order and mainstream norms, so we can control the moral panic brought by the latter in the effort to belittle the object. In short, this ambiguity is caused by the contradiction between the sentencing function and the repair function of the mass media as the representation system of the mainstream culture.

## 2.2 Fan Culture in the Mobile Internet Era

When analyzing the concept of the word "fans" in the previous article, we have taken the mass media as the necessary social condition for the generation of fans, and regarded idols as the information products of mass media: under the direct influence of newspapers, magazines, radio, television and the Internet, they have a worship mood for consumer idols, and under this common appeal, they form a specific social group with extensive cohesion, a series of follow-up behaviors and certain realistic economic and cultural influence. It can be said that the shaping of cultural production and communication by electronic media is turned upside down. Apart from the changes of traditional culture, a new cultural form also appears and gradually rises, that is, media culture. Our development of mainland fan culture will also be carried out under the framework of media culture. "Xenophon, the ancient Greek philosopher, said 2500 years ago that people often shape God in their own image. Now, TV politics has added a new trick: those who want to be God shape themselves into the image expected by the audience. " From a general point of view, China's fan culture really started with the launch of Super Girl on Hunan Satellite TV in 2004. This program has a far-reaching influence,

because it is not only the first TV talent show in China TV history that has won a large audience and aroused strong social concern. What's more, Super Girl has promoted open multi-channel voting, to some extent, shaped the program value based on popularity rather than the skills valued in traditional literary competitions, and was widely accepted by Chinese mainland TV industry. As an important ideographic system of mainstream culture, CCTV shoulders the dual functions of spreading mainstream culture and mainstream values. Therefore, CCTV is more sensitive than southern newspapers in dealing with extreme fans.

In the information age, "on the one hand, people use modern technology to produce, copy and disseminate all kinds of information in large quantities, resulting in a serious asymmetry between information resources and attention resources; on the other hand, because the possibility of attention utilization is increasing, people are scrambling to seize this resource, which further aggravates this asymmetry and makes the scarcity of attention more prominent." Compared with the strict distinction between "onstage" and "off stage" in traditional literary and artistic forms, the audition of ordinary people enables people to witness the process of the generation of idols - or "production" is more appropriate - and narrow the psychological distance between the audience and idols, which also contributes to the transformation of the audience. It is worth mentioning that before the official broadcast of Super Girl every season, the program team will officially release the scenes of limited strength and embarrassing scene during the audition, which will make the judges laugh bitterly, as the tidbits of the selection recording to create momentum for the program. As shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** Super girl 2005 is one of the sources of fan culture in Chinese Mainland

A very important and far-reaching social influence of Super Girl is that fanatical audience, that is, fans, come into people's field of vision. The audience is no longer in the passive position of sitting in front of the TV, waiting for the opening of the program, fretting or lamenting the fate of idols in vain, but can participate in the collective decision-makers of the whole process of idols' entry, promotion or elimination, and debut to a great extent. In addition to empowering the audience, this talent selection method has largely reversed the value concept of traditional folk-art programs and competition selection, which takes professional skills as the absolute measure. "Popularity"-a new vocabulary that has entered the values of China audience and TV industry with the broadcast and popularity of Super Girl and similar programs-has become an important criterion for determining the survival of the fittest. These communities also constitute the first generation of media tools for fans to gather, communicate and spread to the outside world. To some extent, post bars and forums based on interpersonal communication have also become the origin of fan culture in Chinese mainland.

By 2017, with the launch of Hip Hop in China, the main battlefield of Chinese talent shows has officially shifted from television to the Internet. This change also indicates that the correctly established fan group and the preliminarily formed fan culture since the boom of the television era

have begun to formally demonstrate their social influence beyond the youth subculture through the development and popularization of the mobile Internet. If this kind of social attention is still mainly expressed by the topic degree and popularity in the program "Hip Hop in China", the two Internet reality show programs "Idol Trainer" and "Creation 101" produced by iQiyi Video and Tencent Video in early 2018 completely put the fan group in an unprecedented prominent position. Fans have an unprecedented degree of participation and even the right to decide on the program form and schedule. These series of changes indicate that in the era of mobile Internet, thanks to the progress of media technology and the evolution of the media environment, fan groups have gradually gained extensive social and cultural discourse power, and the influence of fan culture has broken through the restrictions of minority groups.

### **3. Reconstruction of Ideology**

#### **3.1 Building Consensus and Economic Benefits**

The ideological function of the media has been internalized into its operating mechanism and thinking mode. While it teaches us how to respond to members of different social groups, it also guides us how to conform to the value norms and system of the mainstream society. So "they played a key role in shaping and maintaining consensus", and carried out ideological work, that is, in the "dominant ideological discourse", the mass media "classified the world", between the "favored" and "excluded" interpretations, between meaningful things and meaningless things, between normal people and deviants, and constantly divided boundaries and provided concepts. Thus, it plays the role of "ideological effect". Generally, fans in the eyes of the public are fanatical and hysterical. They chase after idols, collect their endorsement products, imitate their clothes, and travel thousands of miles to pick up and see off their idols, which once caused chaos at concert and signing ceremony sites. They even asked plastic surgeons to make themselves look like idols, self-mutilation and suicide for idols. In the reproduction of fan groups and fan subcultures, what kind of fan events the mass media chooses to reproduce, what kind of media logic to follow, and what kind of fan images or fan subcultures are reproduced will affect the public's recognition and judgment of fan groups and fan subcultures. Such representation is actually a common way for mass media to use cultural power to suppress non mainstream culture and highlight the legitimacy of their own culture.

The mass media makes use of its own discourse resources and cultural power, avoiding the fact that society and media cultivate and induce fans' fantasies and desires in the process of commercial culture production, ignoring the inseparable connection between media and fans, and doing its ideological function with the deviation of reappearance to prove the legitimacy of the mainstream. The mainstream media shows the authoritative position of discourse power in guiding people how to treat the fan subculture, and its discourse on the fan subculture shows the intention of the mainstream cultural concept to define, standardize and restrict the fan subculture, so as to realize the incorporation and transformation of the youth subculture including the fan subculture by the mainstream culture. In the view of the mainstream culture, it is meaningless to indulge in the so-called fan culture of grandiose star idol performances or vulgar idol dramas, compared with the elite culture and classic culture that can edify and enlighten people by enjoying elegant concerts and worshipping historical and cultural celebrities. In order to minimize the differences, control and eliminate the resistance and threats brought by the fan subculture, the mainstream media constantly use their own discourse power to build common sense or consensus on fan culture, guide the public to recognize fans and fan subculture, and define, regulate and guide the marginal subculture. Under the new environment of continuous development of media, the media should take the lead in standardizing themselves, playing a positive role in spreading the authenticity, objectivity and guidance of reports, and making positive contributions to information with disputes. From the perspective of idols, as a person who may be imitated and followed by the public, we should establish our own good values and become the mainstream of culture.

### 3.2 Reflection and Guidance of Fans' Interactive Behavior

Under the background of the rapid development of Internet, multi-media texts provide many choices for the general audience, and the audience can choose their favorite idol texts by themselves, which to some extent satisfies the audience's psychological needs and enriches their daily lives. The process of information communication between fans and idols reflects the characteristics of interpersonal communication and meets people's social spiritual and psychological needs. The mainstream culture of our country today is a socialist culture with Chinese characteristics in the new era, guided by Marxism and based on the reality of contemporary China. As an important form of subculture, fan culture seems to be contrary to the mainstream culture, but in fact, it is also closely related to the mainstream culture. The mainstream culture plays a normative role in the fan culture, while the fan culture counteracts the development of the mainstream culture. The spread of mainstream culture mainly relies on newspapers, television and other mainstream media. People's Daily is one of the representatives of mainstream media and has a great responsibility to guide the direction of cultural development. Today, with the rapid development of fan culture, People's Daily also guides fan culture. The commentary article "People's Daily: Building a Healthy and Upward Fan Culture" published by People's Daily on November 28, 2019, this is just the publicity on the mainstream media to regulate the fan culture. A few fans mentioned in the article will do some bad behaviors in the process of star chasing. At the same time, they believe that the society should improve the tolerance of fan culture, accept and regulate the development of fan culture, and form a healthy fan culture. Stars should also use higher standards to demand themselves to be fans' idols and role models, and spread traditional culture Participate in public welfare undertakings to form a richer entertainment cultural ecology.

Undeniably, the present fan culture has gradually moved from the small crowd to the public, and the development of media has created a wider space for the development of fan culture. In the process of continuous development, fan culture has also exposed many problems, causing some disharmonious phenomena. Whether it is due to the excessive worship of fans' idols, the false establishment of idols or the excessive entertainment of media, the development of fan culture is full of unstable factors. What we need to do is to face up to the problems and seek solutions. At the same time, the media should also publicize to the audience how to scientifically use the media to obtain information. The development of media technology has made media platforms, including We Media, mixed. It is necessary to cultivate fans' awareness of actively understanding the media, learn to identify the advantages and disadvantages of media information, and obtain relevant information from specific media. In addition to the management of external support, fans should also strengthen self-discipline and avoid being overly emotional. When they see some untrue information or insulting words, they should report them in time and learn to use legal means to protect themselves, rather than just abusing and arguing. The development of the media has improved the fans' right to participate in cultural creation, but it should also be controlled within a reasonable and legal range. It is not allowed to use illegal means such as plagiarism, rumor making, and insult. It is also not allowed to excessively spoof and fabricate facts in order to gain attention. Always remember the Internet and the illegal places outside. The development of fan culture has become a topic of common concern in society. It is urgent to cultivate a healthy and positive fan culture environment. The sound development of fan culture requires the joint efforts of everyone.

## 4. Conclusion

The popularity of social media not only gives the media environment conditions for the rapid expansion of fan culture, but also makes it show new changes in the inspection of the mass society. The generation and development of fans is an entertainment phenomenon, a symbol of a new social identity and living state, and a new social relationship. Fans in the Internet era are extremely creative and productive, and are outstanding representatives of media cultural groups. With the development of social environment and media technology, fan culture has begun to change quietly. The positions

and attitudes of individual fans and fan groups have also changed constantly. Culture and industry have also achieved further upgrading. Research on fan culture has also begun to enter the public's vision. In contemporary society, the driving force formed by the media and closely related entertainment and cultural industries acts on all aspects of the development of fan culture. It makes star idols close to the audience, gives birth to the main body of fan culture, tries to shape the fan culture, and uses various media functions to make potential regulations on the objects that fans are addicted to. From the perspective of social and cultural governance, only by establishing a gatekeeper system for fan culture, guiding the development of fan culture, promoting young people to obtain a healthy and active lifestyle and embracing more diverse values can fan culture become a media cultural force with long-term development potential and productivity.

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