

Research on the Identity Reconstruction of Chinese Fan Communities from the Perspective of Platform Governance

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Abstract

With the rapid development of digital platforms, fan communities have become an important part of online social ecology in China, and their identity construction is deeply shaped by platform governance mechanisms. Taking 8 mainstream social platforms and 24 fan communities in China as research objects, this paper adopts the mixed research methods of questionnaire survey, in-depth interview and data analysis to explore the impact of platform governance (including content moderation, algorithm recommendation, community norms and interactive mechanisms) on the identity reconstruction of Chinese fan communities. The research finds that platform governance has a significant dual impact on the identity reconstruction of fan communities: on the one hand, it standardizes the behavioral boundaries of fan communities, promotes the rationalization of identity cognition, and enhances the sense of community belonging; on the other hand, excessive governance or inappropriate governance methods will lead to the alienation of fan identity, the weakening of community cohesion, and even the fragmentation of identity. Based on social identity theory and platform governance theory, this paper constructs a theoretical model of the relationship between platform governance and fan community identity reconstruction, verifies the key influencing factors through empirical data, and puts forward targeted optimization suggestions. The research enriches the research perspective of fan culture and platform governance, and provides theoretical reference and practical guidance for the healthy development of Chinese fan communities and the optimization of platform governance strategies.

Keywords

Platform governance, fan community, identity reconstruction, social identity, algorithm regulation.

1. Introduction

In the digital era, platforms have become the core carrier of fan activities. Chinese fan communities, which have developed rapidly with the support of platforms such as Weibo, Douyin and Bilibili, have formed a unique social group with strong emotional cohesion and behavioral synergy. Identity, as the core of fan community existence, is not only the spiritual link connecting community members, but also the key factor affecting the stability and development of the community[1]. In recent years, with the frequent occurrence of fan chaos such as abuse, fundraising fraud and irrational chasing stars, platform governance has become an important means to standardize the development of fan communities. The content moderation, algorithm push, community rules and other governance measures implemented by platforms have directly affected the way fan communities operate, the interaction between members, and then reshaped the identity cognition, identity emotion and identity behavior of fan community members[2].

Existing studies on fan community identity mostly focus on the internal interaction mechanism of the community, ignoring the external shaping role of platform governance. Although some studies have involved the impact of platform regulation on fan culture, they lack empirical analysis and quantitative verification, and fail to deeply explore the internal logical relationship between platform governance and fan identity reconstruction. Therefore, based on the perspective of platform governance, this paper explores the process, characteristics and influencing factors of identity reconstruction of Chinese fan communities, which has important theoretical and practical significance[3].

This study puts forward the following research hypotheses: H1: Platform content moderation has a significant positive impact on the identity cognition of fan community members; H2: Platform algorithm recommendation has a significant impact on the identity emotion of fan community members; H3: Platform community norms have a significant positive impact on the identity behavior of fan community members; H4: Platform interactive mechanisms play a mediating role in the relationship between platform governance and fan community identity reconstruction[4].

2. Theoretical Basis and Conceptual Definition

2.1. Theoretical Basis

Social Identity Theory, proposed by Tajfel and Turner, holds that individuals obtain self-worth and social identity by belonging to a certain social group, and the process of identity construction involves three stages: social categorization, social comparison and positive distinctiveness pursuit[5]. For fan community members, they form a unique social category by identifying with the same idol or cultural product, and obtain positive social identity through internal comparison and external distinction. This theory provides a theoretical framework for understanding the identity construction process of fan community members[6].

Platform Governance Theory holds that platform governance is a multi-subject collaborative governance process involving platforms, users, governments and other subjects, with the core of regulating platform operation and user behavior to achieve the healthy development of the platform ecosystem. Platform governance includes formal governance mechanisms such as content moderation and rule formulation, as well as informal governance mechanisms such as algorithm regulation and community self-governance. This theory provides a theoretical perspective for analyzing the external factors affecting the identity reconstruction of fan communities[7].

2.2. Conceptual Definition

Platform Governance: Refers to the various rules, measures and mechanisms formulated and implemented by digital platforms to regulate user behavior, manage content ecology and maintain platform order, including content moderation, algorithm recommendation, community norms and interactive mechanisms four dimensions[8].

Fan Community: Refers to a virtual social group formed by netizens with the same interest in idols, works or cultural products, who interact, communicate and cooperate through digital platforms, with the characteristics of strong emotional connection, clear group boundaries and high behavioral synergy[9].

Identity Reconstruction: Refers to the process in which fan community members adjust and reshape their identity cognition, identity emotion and identity behavior under the influence of external factors (such as platform governance), so as to form a new identity pattern that adapts to the platform environment and community development[10,11].

3. Research Methods

3.1. Research Objects

This study selects 8 mainstream digital platforms in China (Weibo, Douyin, Bilibili, Xiaohongshu, QQ Space, WeChat Moments, Kuaishou and Zhihu) and 24 fan communities (covering idol fans, drama fans, game fans and literary fans) as research objects. A total of 1200 questionnaires were distributed, 1086 valid questionnaires were recovered, with an effective recovery rate of 90.5%. Among the valid samples, 682 were female (62.8%), 404 were male (37.2%); the age distribution was 18-25 years old (65.3%), 26-35 years old (24.7%), and over 35 years old (10.0%); the education level was college and above (88.5%). In addition, 15 fan community managers and 20 ordinary fan members were selected for in-depth interviews to obtain rich qualitative data[12].

3.2. Research Tools

Questionnaire Survey: Based on the research hypotheses and related theories, the questionnaire is designed, including four parts: demographic information, platform governance scale, fan community identity reconstruction scale. The platform governance scale includes 4 dimensions and 16 items (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.872$); the fan community identity reconstruction scale includes 3 dimensions and 12 items (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.856$). The questionnaire adopts a 5-point Likert scale (1 = completely disagree, 5 = completely agree).

In-depth Interview: The interview outline is designed around the impact of platform governance on fan identity cognition, identity emotion and identity behavior, and semi-structured interviews are conducted to understand the real experience and perception of fan members.

Data Analysis: Use SPSS 26.0 and AMOS 24.0 software to process the questionnaire data, including descriptive statistics, reliability and validity analysis, correlation analysis, regression analysis and mediating effect test, so as to verify the research hypotheses.

4. Empirical Analysis

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Platform Governance and Fan Identity Reconstruction (N=1086)

Variables	Dimensions	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)	Cronbach's α
Platform Governance (PG)	Content Moderation (CM)	3.48	0.70	0.821
	Algorithm Recommendation (AR)	3.21	0.75	0.805
	Community Norms (CN)	3.65	0.72	0.836
	Interactive Mechanisms (IM)	3.34	0.67	0.798
Fan Identity Reconstruction (FIR)	Identity Cognition (IC)	3.56	0.70	0.812
	Identity Emotion (IE)	3.72	0.69	0.843
	Identity Behavior (IB)	3.45	0.73	0.809

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of platform governance and fan community identity reconstruction. It can be seen from the table that the average score of platform governance is 3.42 (SD = 0.68), indicating that the overall level of platform governance of the selected samples is moderate; among the four dimensions of platform governance, the average score of community norms is the highest (3.65, SD = 0.72), and the average score of algorithm recommendation is the lowest (3.21, SD = 0.75). The average score of fan community identity

reconstruction is 3.58 (SD = 0.71), indicating that the identity reconstruction level of fan community members is relatively high; among the three dimensions of identity reconstruction, the average score of identity emotion is the highest (3.72, SD = 0.69), and the average score of identity behavior is the lowest (3.45, SD = 0.73).

4.2. Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis is conducted between platform governance and fan community identity reconstruction, and the results are shown in Table 2. It can be seen from the table that there is a significant positive correlation between platform governance and fan identity reconstruction ($r = 0.682, p < 0.01$), indicating that the better the platform governance, the higher the level of fan identity reconstruction. Specifically, content moderation ($r = 0.578, p < 0.01$), algorithm recommendation ($r = 0.485, p < 0.01$), community norms ($r = 0.623, p < 0.01$) and interactive mechanisms ($r = 0.536, p < 0.01$) are all significantly positively correlated with fan identity reconstruction. In addition, there is a significant positive correlation between each dimension of platform governance and each dimension of identity reconstruction, which provides a basis for the subsequent regression analysis.

Table 2. Correlation Matrix of Platform Governance and Fan Identity Reconstruction (N=1086) Note: ** $p < 0.01$

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Content Moderation (CM)	1						
2. Algorithm Recommendation (AR)	0.523**	1					
3. Community Norms (CN)	0.587**	0.512**	1				
4. Interactive Mechanisms (IM)	0.545**	0.498**	0.603**	1			
5. Identity Cognition (IC)	0.532**	0.467**	0.589**	0.492**	1		
6. Identity Emotion (IE)	0.568**	0.495**	0.612**	0.523**	0.721**	1	
7. Identity Behavior (IB)	0.517**	0.453**	0.576**	0.501**	0.689**	0.703**	1

4.3. Regression Analysis

Taking platform governance and its four dimensions as independent variables, and fan identity reconstruction and its three dimensions as dependent variables, regression analysis is conducted. The regression equation is constructed as follows:

$$FIR = \beta_0 + \beta_1 CM + \beta_2 AR + \beta_3 CN + \beta_4 IM + \varepsilon$$

In the formula: FIR represents fan identity reconstruction; CM represents content moderation; AR represents algorithm recommendation; CN represents community norms; IM represents interactive mechanisms; β_0 is the constant term; $\beta_1 - \beta_4$ are regression coefficients; ε is the error term.

The regression analysis results show that the regression model is significant ($F = 138.62, p < 0.01$), and the adjusted R^2 is 0.472, indicating that the four dimensions of platform governance can explain 47.2% of the variation of fan identity reconstruction. Specifically: content moderation has a significant positive impact on fan identity reconstruction ($\beta = 0.235, p < 0.01$), verifying hypothesis H1; algorithm recommendation has a significant positive impact on fan identity reconstruction ($\beta = 0.182, p < 0.01$), verifying hypothesis H2; community norms have a significant positive impact on fan identity reconstruction ($\beta = 0.276, p < 0.01$), verifying hypothesis H3; interactive mechanisms have a significant positive impact on fan identity reconstruction ($\beta = 0.213, p < 0.01$).

4.4. Mediating Effect Test

This study adopts the Bootstrap method to test the mediating effect of interactive mechanisms. The test results show that the indirect effect of platform governance on fan identity reconstruction through interactive mechanisms is 0.132, and the 95% confidence interval is [0.098, 0.167], which does not contain 0, indicating that interactive mechanisms play a partial mediating role in the relationship between platform governance and fan identity reconstruction, verifying hypothesis H4. The mediating effect accounts for 23.1% of the total effect.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1. Research Results

The empirical research shows that platform governance has a significant positive impact on the identity reconstruction of Chinese fan communities, and the four dimensions of platform governance (content moderation, algorithm recommendation, community norms and interactive mechanisms) all play an important role in the identity reconstruction of fan communities. Specifically:

First, content moderation has a significant positive impact on the identity cognition of fan community members. Platforms delete inappropriate content such as abuse and slander, which helps to create a positive community atmosphere, make fan members form correct identity cognition, and clarify the boundaries of their own identity.

Second, algorithm recommendation has a significant positive impact on the identity emotion of fan community members. Platforms push content related to idols and communities according to user preferences, which enhances the emotional connection between fan members and idols, as well as between members, and improves the sense of identity emotion.

Third, community norms have a significant positive impact on the identity behavior of fan community members. Clear community norms standardize the behavior of fan members, guide them to participate in community activities in a rational way, and promote the transformation of identity cognition and identity emotion into practical identity behavior.

Fourth, interactive mechanisms play a partial mediating role in the relationship between platform governance and fan identity reconstruction. Platforms provide interactive tools and channels for fan members, promote communication and interaction between members, and further strengthen the impact of platform governance on fan identity reconstruction.

5.2. Discussion

The research results are consistent with the existing theoretical research and practical reality. From the perspective of theoretical significance, this study constructs a theoretical model of the relationship between platform governance and fan community identity reconstruction, enriches the research content of social identity theory and platform governance theory, and expands the research perspective of fan culture research. From the perspective of practical significance, the research results provide practical guidance for the optimization of platform governance strategies and the healthy development of fan communities.

However, this study also found some problems in the process of empirical research: on the one hand, some platforms have excessive content moderation, which restricts the free expression of fan members and even leads to the alienation of fan identity; on the other hand, the algorithm recommendation of some platforms is too single, which leads to the information cocoons of fan members, and is not conducive to the diversified development of fan identity. In addition, the community norms of some platforms are not perfect, and the implementation is not in place, which fails to effectively play the role of regulating fan behavior.

Combined with the research results and existing problems, this paper puts forward the following optimization suggestions: First, platforms should adopt a moderate content moderation strategy, balance the relationship between regulation and free expression, and avoid excessive regulation. Second, optimize the algorithm recommendation mechanism, enrich the content pushed, break the information cocoons, and promote the diversified development of fan identity. Third, improve the community norms, strengthen the implementation of norms, and guide fan members to participate in community activities in a rational way. Fourth, improve the interactive mechanisms, provide more diversified interactive tools and channels, and enhance the sense of belonging and cohesion of fan communities.

6. Research Limitations and Future Research Directions

6.1. Research Limitations

This study has some limitations: first, the research objects are mainly concentrated in 8 mainstream platforms and 24 fan communities, and the sample coverage is not comprehensive enough, which may affect the universality of the research results; second, the research methods are mainly questionnaire survey and in-depth interview, and the long-term tracking research on fan community identity reconstruction is lacking; third, the research only explores the impact of platform governance on fan identity reconstruction, and does not consider other external factors (such as government regulation, social culture) and internal factors (such as individual characteristics of fan members) on fan identity reconstruction.

6.2. Future Research Directions

In the future, we can expand the research from the following aspects: first, expand the sample coverage, select more types of platforms and fan communities, and improve the universality of the research results; second, adopt long-term tracking research methods to explore the dynamic process of fan community identity reconstruction under the influence of platform governance; third, introduce other external and internal factors, construct a more comprehensive theoretical model, and explore the multi-factor interaction mechanism of fan community identity reconstruction; fourth, carry out cross-cultural comparative research, compare the differences of fan community identity reconstruction under different platform governance models in different countries and regions, and provide more comprehensive theoretical reference.

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