

The Challenges of Manual Fan Creation in the Age of AI

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Abstract

The rapid development of generative AI technology is greatly changing landscape of creative production. As a core practice of participatory culture, fan creation—defined by “work created with passion” and co-created communities is facing many difficulties brought about by AI intervention on the front line. This study on how generative AI technology intervenes and changes fans creation ecosystem, and it shows the problems creators encounter in four areas dimensions: creative value, Right-Defending Mentality, Community Ecosystem, Bottom line Ethics.

Keywords

Fan creation, generative AI, participatory culture, creative ethics.

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background and Problem Statement

In recent years, the AIGC technology represented by generative AI is infiltrating daily life at an unparalleled pace. Midjourney, Stable Diffusion to large language models such as ChatGPT, the technical barriers to creation have dropped quite a lot - it can produce something pretty with merely a few lines of text input illustration or an effortless passage of prose in seconds. "Fan creation" overlaps with this technological wave, it is a derivative creation on the basis of current text, character or world - building. Rooted in fan culture, the core motivation for it isn't money but a love for the original piece, an imagination of a certain kind of emotional relationship, a yearning creation, and the joy of sharing and resonance among like-minded enthusiasts. This “passion project” nature gives fan creation its diversity. Take the tokusatsu community as an example, Fans like to draw and write fan art, fan fiction around series such as Kamen Rider and Super Sentai In China, there are also platforms like LOFTER and Archive of Our Own (AO3) have become major hubs for fan creation: the former gathers a large number of local Chinese creators by its ecology of pictures, texts, tags, and the other which is freer publishing environment, detailed rating and warning system hosts tons of stuff like break through language barriers. Although they appear different, they share the same principle:

the conversion of personal emotions into works that need a great deal of time and effort. Intelligent tools intended for standardization and efficiency have fiercely clashed with those that are purely handmade by fans, which depend greatly on personal aesthetics and a community's unspoken agreement to “create for the sake of love of it.” Discussions on creativity, value of works, community ethics also began quietly fermenting among fans. This paper's core part is about the discussion on what has actually happened since AI technology entered the fan community, and what dilemmas creators and viewers now face.

1.2. Significance of the Study

This is the meaning of the study which will be discussed both from a theoretical and practical standpoint.

In terms of theory, I hope to find an entrance understand today's youth and their digital culture. Existing research has thoroughly discussed the characteristics of fan creation as a participatory culture [1]; however, with the intervention of generative AI technology, this classic concept is facing new challenges—as the creative subject shifts from “humans” to “machines,” how will the meanings surrounding the “original work” change? Through in-depth interviews with frontline fan participants, this study captures the subtle shifts in these cultural concepts under the influence of technology, thereby supplementing research on youth subcultures in the digital age with empirical data from the Chinese fan community.

From a practical perspective, this study directly addresses a substantial and continuously expanding cultural community. Taking the Chinese internet as an example, the LOFTER platform, according to public reports from July 2023 [2], has 150 million registered users, over 25 million monthly active users, and 13 million creators. Meanwhile, as of August 2025, Archive of Our Own (AO3) had cataloged over 1 million Chinese-language works [3]. Behind these numbers lie millions of individuals who invest significant amounts of their free time and emotional energy into their creative work. The widespread adoption of generative AI is fundamentally altering their creative processes and community experiences: some use AI to spark inspiration, others feel angry and powerless when their works are scraped without authorization for training, and still others worry that new creators will lose opportunities to grow amid the flood of AI-generated content. Systematically presenting these voices not only helps the fan community understand its own situation but also provides a reference for platforms to formulate more reasonable AI content management strategies.

1.3. Paper Structure

This paper consists of four sections: Research methods, Research findings, Discussion and Recommendations, and Conclusion.

2. Method

2.1. Research Participants

This study recruited a total of 7 people who were participating in fan creation communities through purposive sampling. The selection criteria for respondents was that they had (1) at least one year of having experience with the fan community (2) having participated in the creation of and/or consumption of content; (3) have basic knowledge or some exposure to AI-generated content.

Table 1. Basic Information of Respondents

No.	Primary Role	Duration in the Community	Brief Description of Attitude Toward AI
A	Primarily a viewer	5–6 years	Strongly opposed
B	Creation + Viewing	4 years	Ethical Criticism
C	Creator	10 years	Not used, mild attitude
D	Creator	2 years	Used as a reference tool
E	Creator	1.5 years	Cautious, attentive to platform policies
F	Viewing > Content Creation	1.5 years	Strongly oppose
G	Mainly watching	6+ years	Have tried it, but am critical

The basic information of the 7 participants is shown in Table 1. In terms of identity types, the group includes pure manual creators, tool-based users, and deep viewers; in terms of duration of participation, it ranges from 1.5 to 10 years; and in terms of community distribution, it covers multiple well-known IPs like Tokusatsu, Fate, Pokémon and Idolmaster. This sample composition brings various perspectives to learn about this research has many faces: AI's impact on the difficulties felt in the fans' creative environment.

2.2. Data Collection Methods

This study used in – depth interviews as the main means of collecting data. Between February and March 2026, 7 participants were interviewed by means of one-to-one interviews an online text chat platform, each session lasted around 40-60 minutes. Informed consent was obtained before each interview and the participants were talked to experiences within the fan community, attitude on AI use and its influence on the ecosystem and ideas about the future: all interviews were recorded in written form

Formed and organized into archive according to the ID.

Furthermore, in order to complement the interview information collected, the researcher also carried out a structured observations on platforms such as LOFTER, Weibo Super Topic and Xiaohongshu December 2025 to March 2026. The observation was carried out twice per week, with each session lasting 60 – 90 minutes is noted, with attention paid to things relating to AI controversial discussion, users comments policy announcements and posts marked with keywords such as `#AI#`, `#anti-AI#`, and `#AI generated#`. All observed content was recorded in an organized observation log with these items: date of observation, platform name, anonymized post identifier, content summary, interaction types (e.g., likes, replies, reports), and brief analytical memos. The collected text data (post texts, comments, policy statements) were then coded thematically using the same procedure from section 2.3.

Specifically, the researcher carried out open coding to look for themes like "demand for mandatory AI labeling," "misidentification disputes," and "platform governance gaps." These codes were later grouped into higher-order themes that served to cross-validate and to complement the findings obtained by means of interviews In the analysis given in chapter 3 Conclusions derived from observations made on the platform are represented as [Platform Observation]`, whereas conclusions from interviews are marked with the corresponding respondent identifier (e.g., `[Respondent A]`).

2.3. Data Analysis Methods

This study uses thematic analysis. Having completely gone through all of the 7 interviews transcripts, the researcher open-coded every one of them and grouped similar codes together in order to create candidate themes. After many repeated comparisons, there were 4 core themes at last: ① Emotional value is irreplaceable; ② Anger and helplessness for feeding of copyright infringement; ③ Community's spectrum and tension about the attitude toward community. ④ Expectations for the future ecosystem, bottom line. Posts and policies text those seen on the platform were examined using a like technique for cross-checking.

3. Analysis

3.1. Emotional Value: AI Cannot Replace the Soul of Creativity

This emotional push forms the most important characteristic that is different from fan creation from other forms of content production[Interview Synthesis].

Interviewee A said this: "An image that takes five seconds to watch was not drawn in five seconds and a story that takes fifteen minutes to read is not drawn in fifteen minutes. What touches people is the author's love and emotion into it." [Respondent A]Echoing what

Respondent A expressed is a saying widely circulated in the fan community: "A drop of saline solution with the same temperature and composition cannot be called a tear." [Respondent A] This statement precisely captures the particular worth of Fan creation is what moves the people, it's not just the picture itself or words, it's the person who made it themselves - the one who has spent time and emotion on it. From herself, creative experience, Respondent F added: "Looking back at my own work gives me a sense of accomplishment-So, this is what I worked so hard to draw?" This is the way of one's own body. identity - the feeling of "I made this"[Respondent F] - is an internal drive that maintains identity—"I made this" [Respondent F] —is the inner force that holds me together: creators "working for the love of it."

We should also realize that "emotional value" is no longer merely a theoretical concept, it's really which has also been confirmed and strengthened by real life communities and feedback mechanisms[Interview Synthesis]. Interviewee A mentioned in the interview, "Receiving Feedback makes me so happy; I get more energy to work hard."

This is exactly how emotions achieve the acknowledgment and benefits obtained by emotional labor within a community. Creators post their work on the platform, where people like and comment on what the readers read and shares are not only an affirmation of the work but also an encouragement of the emotions the one who is creating it has put - this very exchange represents an emotion's reproduction value. But Respondent E took the issue from a different angle, by discussing "creation", saying that using AI to generate content "cannot be considered creation at all; creation should include the author's ideas and feelings." [Respondent E] AI is something they say gets skipped over by these fundamental components and just gives an outcome, that's basically laziness and exploitation. put another way, AI can only generate a static final product and cannot take part in the process in this dynamic flow of value based on interpersonal interaction.

On a technical level, generative AI tools rapidly produce vast quantities of images and text at extremely low cost; from a purely efficiency standpoint, they undoubtedly outperform time-consuming, labor-intensive manual creation. However, community surveys reveal that the vast majority of respondents stated that AI-generated works fail to move them[Interview Synthesis]. Regarding this, Respondent B drew a clear distinction: "AI-generated works are produced through algorithms and data based on countless existing works; while they may be beautiful, they ultimately lack genuine human emotion and soul.Handmade works may not be visually stunning, but the ideas and emotions they carry are unique." [Respondent B] Respondent E emphasized the significance of the creative process itself from another perspective: "I believe fan creation is inherently a "create purely for love"; I simply want to present what's in my mind to others in my own way. I don't think what AI produces is what I intend to express." [Respondent E]

In other words, creation is regarded as an act of conscious humans. This understanding is also held in academia. Taking the study by Professor Jin Zhe and other scholars on the Pixiv platform [4] as an example, the research used full-scale data to analyze changes in creator behavior following the release of Novel AI. From the results, we can see that more than 99% of current creators do not use AI drawing software, while the spike in AI-generated content was mainly attributed to newcomers entering market. Furthermore, compared to AI-generated content, works that clearly bear traces of human touch gained more people's attention and appreciation. these data points align quite well based on the subject perception from the people who are being studied, providing empirical proof of the fan community's value orientation—audiences do not seek "perfect output" in a technical sense, but rather look for traces of "humanity" that resonate emotionally.

When such a emotion-labour oriented creative ecosystem meets with technology Integration from the platform level on, conflicts are unavoidable [Platform Observation]. March 2023, LOFTER: China's largest fan-creation Website launched a new AI drawing program called "Lao

Fu Ge Drawing Machine.” Officially positioned as an “avatar generator,” it allowed users to generate artwork by entering keywords [5][5][6]. However, this move has sparked widespread resistance within the creator community. A large number of creators have chosen to deactivate their accounts and leave the platform. At its core, this protest is not a rejection of a particular technology, but a declaration that their emotional labor must not be collected and exploited as a “free material pool”[Platform Observation].

It is worth noting that even at the official policy level, with the formal implementation of the “Measures for the Representation of AI-Generated Synthetic Content” in September 2025 [9], regulatory authorities have required explicit and implicit labeling of AI-generated content; however, this remains limited to superficial governance in the realm of technological ethics. Most labels on AI-generated content can be easily removed. Distinguishing between human-created and AI-generated content is another challenge facing the fan community.

When asked what the bottom line for the fan community should be after the widespread adoption of AI, respondents gave a highly consistent answer: the emotion of love itself[Interview Synthesis]. Respondent C also expressed: “Most people who come to the fan community are not here for profit, so I feel it will be a bit more pure in the AI era.”[Respondent C] This response leads to another claim, that there is a basic contradiction in fan creativity at this moment of AI does not stem from a competition of capabilities between humans and technology—who can to draw better or write faster, to make more and do it well—but rather from the most basic of things irreconcilable conflict. What fan creators are defending is not “better” works, but the presence. The role of “humans” in the creative process. AI can imitate styles, duplicate compositions, and generate text, but it is unable to feel the exhaustion and fulfillment of someone who works all night to create. in order to meet the deadline; it can't enjoy the happiness and warmth of getting its first comment; it also can't sense that irreplaceable sense of self-affirmation that comes with the realization, “This is my expression.” And these are exactly the most basic value of fans creation. The ones that are hardest for technology to replace. From the resolute mass exodus of creators following the LOFTER incident, to the lamentations of “art is dead” triggered by the launch of X’s (formerly Twitter) AI editing features[7], to Pixiv users’ insistence on tiered management of AI-generated works[8]. All these micro-level struggles and acts of resistance ultimately point to the same fundamental question: When tech can endlessly clone “output,” the actual person behind it? has invested emotion, time, themselves and is it still worth being looked at? The interviewees in this study answered in the affirmative. Whether the future fan community whether can maintain this sense of “worth” depends on how platforms set up their governance mechanism, how a community creates consensus, and most importantly, whether the people are still have the courage to continue “working for the love of it” amidst the torrent of technology[Interview Synthesis].

3.2. Infringement Disputes: Creators’ Anger and Powerlessness

If the discussion on “emotional value” answers the question of “why fan creation is “irreplaceable,” then the copyright disputes reviewed in this section show a greater contradiction in the face of the AI revolution: when creators’ work is used without compensation to train AI models, what can they actually do? The basic tech for AI artwork/writing is ‘learning’ - taking in lots and lots using lots of images and text to create something new. But wait where did it get all that data for training have long stayed in a grey space. Countless AIs have scraped tens of billions of images and text from the internet without the original authors’ permission or any compensation, including works that fan creators have publicly shared on social media platforms.

Faced with this, they felt it was very immoral. Interviewee A said bluntly: “The distinctive style of every author is the result of many attempts and errors over countless years. and AI models could casually take it, even going on to produce content that is against the original creator’s

intent - it's a great disrespect to the creator and also feel like outright theft." [Respondent A] She stated it was not just a matter of economy exploitation but also a violation of creators' intellectual rights. Respondent F stated: "The fruits others' labor — something attained through ten or twenty years of toil and trouble - is now transformed into free material pool "it feels like their efforts are being carelessly wasted." [Respondent F] This anger isn't directed at technology companies or AI tools alone, but also at the platforms which passively allow, and sometimes encourage, this data-scraping behavior. Early 2023: Users on the well-known art community website ArtStation discovered that their works had been used to train an AI model called "Stable Diffusion," and the platform had not provided an effective "opt-out" mechanism. This provoked a worldwide protest by artists who started to label their works with "NO TO AI GENERATED IMAGES" and boycotting the platform[10]. Similar incidents have occurred in China: some creators discovered that works they had posted on Weibo and Xiaohongshu can be used by the platforms to train its AI model because there is ambiguity in the clause on users agreements. even though these related platforms then released clarifications or revised their terms, the breach of trust had already taken place[Platform Observation]. In sharp contrast to fierce moral condemnation is the feeling of being unable to do anything. spoken by the interviewees Interviewee B admitted, "I'm quite angry about this, but I feel powerless to change it." [Respondent B] However, Interviewee C said more calmly "I think this is absolutely unethical, and legal proceedings are unlikely to help creators. Unfortunately, there are plenty of unauthorized uses and piracy in our surroundings; this is only another one thing creators need to be on guard against." [Respondent C]

This inevitably makes me conflicted but the main reason is this relationship between the bourgeoisie and the common people—not me, who is not fault." [Respondent G] In the face of disputes about AI infringement, various platforms have taken completely opposite stands different attitudes, this has also made creators more anxious and decision making is more difficulties. Take X (formerly Twitter) as a case in point. around 2024, it launched an embedded AI picture editor feature, allowing users to generate and modify images with the use of the "Grok" model. After this feature went live, a large number of artists chose to leave the platform, citing that they "did not want their work becoming part of the training data." Some well-known illustrators even go as far as publicly stating that they would like for announced they would stop posting high-res works on X and post on only low resolution previews with large watermarks. Archive of Our Own (AO3), which operates on a non-profit model, explicitly allows users to upload AI-generated content but requires the use of tags for identification. Users can filter content using tags such as "Created Using Generative AI"[11]. these different policy approaches force creators in order to switch platform which results into further fragmentation of community unable to rely on the law and finding it difficult to trust platforms, fan creators have spontaneously produced its own kinds of resistances. The most obvious one being the "AI challenge." On platforms such as Xiaohongshu, people often carry out "challenges" to recognize AI-generated works - one side gives money and the other proves that they artwork was not made with the help of an AI, such as sharing the original layers or livestreaming the creation process. But from this "wager" format, it can be seen that the community is very alert toward AI-generated content, it has also triggered a series of side effects: some creators who produce entirely by hand have faced online harassment because they cannot provide a complete drawing process, or mistakenly identified as AI-generated. after a live-streamed drawing session due to difference in skills[Platform Observation]. this process itself is also mired in a "self-proof trap." Interviewee F said that this phenomenon during the interview: "Some artist friends have stopped drawing altogether because they had been "flagged" by the "little police" as AI-generated." [Respondent F] This shows that while creators are mad at particular infringers, it often ends up hurting themselves own peers—anxiety is further exacerbated in the community, eventually forming a atmosphere where everyone feels under threat.

3.3. Community Polarization: Not Everyone Rejects AI Outright

Among the interviewees, A,B,E and F are from the relatively clean “boycott camp”, emphasizing the erosion of creative ethics due to AI; C has although not created through an artificial intelligence, it is D and G are moderate stance, believing that “those who don’t like it simply don’t have to use it” D and G are tool-oriented users”, treating AI as an aid in research and textual analysis rather than creation itself. It shows even people who mainly create manually individuals do not share a uniform view of AI.

This division is generally displayed in terms of “private use” and “public use”. In the interview, Respondent D said something about the way someone does things for a friend; due to having too much work and lacking time creation, this friend puts their own articles into ChatGPT and has the AI create snippets based on their ideas, but keeping it just for themselves to see and never publish regarding this kind of 'private self-indulgence' type of use of AI, D stated, “Well I guess I can see it’s just fine as long as it is unpublished, not published, and for your own personal pleasure. [Respondent G] This attitude is the general idea in my community, which means: AI as entertainment for oneself-provided it doesn't involve public sharing or substitute for other peoples' efforts – it is acceptable.

However, once such use crosses the boundary between “private” and “public,” it draws strong condemnation. Similarly, interviewee G had also tried using AI to suggest revisions for her fan fiction and believed it “really did point out the problem and give quite a lot of help.” but she was very fast realized the limitations of AI: “After using it a lot, you come to understand that AI is a mirror of the user – but it’s not actually a person that thinks, so we don’t really get an intellectual conversation. ” This Journey from experimentation to criticism represents many creators who are open to technology yet maintain a clear-eyed perspective. Public discussions: Voices that oppose AI dominate almost entirely. Nearly all interviewees say “most of their friends” are “opposed to AI,” but it doesn't mean There are no ‘pro-AI’ voices in the community. An interesting phenomenon among the fans creation community is that while some artists vehemently despise AI art, these same people would have no objections to reading AI-generated fanfics on LOFTER and watching AI-generated cover videos on Bilibili, viewing AI-animated content on Xiaohongshu, using AI to create model figurines, or employing AI to voice their own works. This phenomenon suggests that some people are more sensitive to the impact on their own creative fields, while remaining is relatively unbothered by disruptions from other areas.

3.4. Future Concerns: Will AI Destroy the Fan Creation Community?

When asked, “What would happen if a large amount of AI-generated content appeared on the platform in the future?” most people’s first feeling is that it will eliminate platform: space for human made content. Respondent G said, “It will invade the ecosystem” of original creators, which can lead to a state where bad money drives out good. [Respondent G] In her view, AI content is produced at extremely low cost and with extremely high frequency; even if the quality of single items can't top off that from great people made works, its sheer volume is sufficient to gain the upper hand in algorithmic recommendations and the competition for attention. And then in the future as well audiences will get more and more familiar with AI over time handcrafted works that require a lot of refining will be drowned out [Platform Observation].

Respondent G’s depiction is very detailed, saying, “It is terrible to see the endeavors of new creators get buried beneath an eye-dazzling array of AI content. Her worry is lies in the distress of rookie creators: when a youthful artist steps into this community and their skills are still improving posts its first piece of fanart—drawn after burning the midnight oil – on a platform, then seeing the AI-generated 'beautiful image' right next to it — if viewer Can't distinguish AI work from humans, who would they click on? And whose work will receive more likes and comments? This contrast itself acts as a brutal elimination mechanism. Although the original

intent of fan art creation isn't to gain traffic, as mentioned earlier, the process by which creators receive feedback and gain the motivation to continue producing is equally important. If AI emerges victorious in this contest against human creators, the fan art community will lose more human creators—and, consequently, more new talent.

Respondent A added another concern from the audience's perspective: "When looking for like-minded people, communities will split into two camps: those who 'cannot accept' and those who 'can accept.'" The division among people in the community is more than skin-deep: attitudes; it is more likely to evolve into actual segregation. Although this may temporarily preserve the purity of each circle, it will eventually lead to "class solidification" weakening the Cross circle communications has stopped. Against the backdrop of China's already weak arts education, Respondent F raised a profound concern: "Arts education in China is somewhat lacking, and the large-scale invasion of AI on the internet will also significantly impact the aesthetic sensibilities of the next generation. If they are exposed to too much flashy AI-generated content, they may find ordinary, unremarkable creations uninspiring." [Respondent F] Her worry is that when adolescents are immersed in an AI-generated environment from a young age, their perception of what constitutes "good work" may be reshaped.

Respondent D stated: "I believe the fan creation community must have absolute respect for the act of creation... Since aesthetic education is so lacking in China, engaging in fan creation is arguably the easiest way for people to access artistic training. AI isn't creation. If we lose even the act of creation in fan creation, I don't know what's left to do." [Respondent F] In her view, one of the fan creation community's latent social values is precisely that it provides young people with a low-barrier, highly inclusive space for creative practice. If this space is overwhelmed by AI, young people may lose a valuable opportunity to experiment and learn from their mistakes.

Regarding other than the ecosystem concerns, the respondents were also pessimistic about long-term trajectory of aesthetic standards. Even though these are all negative things that were mentioned earlier, the people being interviewed do not display it. the willingness to let go of everything. But instead they drew a line in the middle of anxiety. in the sand: what is a thing that fans just cannot do without? The response from Respondent A was simply, "Love! It's love isn't it? You go back to make because you like it, because you want to do something, because you have an urge to make something Even though it's objectively of poor quality, if it is something that you made yourself "with your heart, it's precious and valuable." [Respondent A]: She put "love" first of all values, and they think as long as there is such an inner drive present, then the essence of fans community will not perish. Interviewee G gave a more simplistic view. "The most basic form of the true fan community is" Still people who have a love for that same piece of work, that specific couple, or even that certain person. What moves people is always the human element itself, so AI-generated content inherently doesn't have it. Even if the beauty goes down a little bit, there's no changing that fact in the end – at any rate, "the human experience of love has physiological characteristics." [Respondent G] This perspective anchors "love" in the emotional essence of humanity, arguing that no matter how no matter how strong the AI tech is, it cannot pretend to have this passion for making stuff The interviewees expect a future that is both pessimistic and firm. Most of them don't think that the AI will destroy the fans' community, and they all basically agree. the ecosystem will change But the bottom line doesn't care about any changes to the ecosystem. line remains clear: the fan community is defined by the presence of "people" and "love." As long as this basic principle does not change with the development of science and technology, fan creations will continue to have its irreplaceable value.

4. Discussion

This chapter explains the 4 points from Analysis part, placing In the current framework of participatory culture, digital labor and creativity studies. It also discusses the logical relationships among the themes, proposes refinements to current theories, and it also highlights unexpected theoretical consequences that come from empirical evidence data.

4.1. Theoretical Significance: Engaging Participatory Culture and Digital Labor

Participatory Culture Revisited. Henry Jenkins' basic idea of participation culture. stresses a lively audience, a collective wisdom and few barriers to artistic expression expression (Jenkins, 2016). Fan creation is often a paradigm case: fans voluntarily produce and share content out of affection for the original works, to form mutually supporting communities. But with the coming of generative AI there is fundamental tension. Our results showed that even though participation remained lively, the kind of "participation" is being contested. Traditional participatory culture assumes that creative contributions are humans made it for humans and emotions are the main form of value exchange. In but the AI age, but the appearance of AI generated content makes communities distinguish between "human-made" and "machine-made" participation. Respondents consistently argued that only human-made work carries the "soul" that defines genuine fan creation. This suggests that the age of participation culture in AI is no longer simply about making things easier. It talks about the human signature being a necessary prerequisite for valid participation. Platforms and communities are therefore developing new gatekeeping measures (such as required. labeling, AI challenge, boycott movements) that re-establish boundaries on what can be counted as authentic participation.

Digital Labor and Emotional Labor Reconsidered. The concept of digital labor—often framed in terms of unpaid user activities that generate value for platforms—has been extended to fan creation as "affective labor" or "unpaid" (e.g., Terranova, 2000). Our findings complicate this picture. Respondents rejected the idea that their creative work can be reduced to labor for platform profit. instead, they framed emotional investment as non-negotiable is inherently worthwhile rather than being something to mine. When platforms such as LOFTER tried to use users' own content for training AI, Backlash was not just over copyright infringement it was about emotional ties. creators saw their works as the continuation of their own personal relationships with characters and communities - something not meant to go into a machines training set without consent. It suggests that digital labor theory needs to make a distinction between consensual, identity-affirming affective labor (traditional fan creation) and extractive, alienated affective labor (AI training by scraping). the former enhances community bonds; the latter severs them.

4.2. Relationships Among the Four Core Themes

The four findings are not individual ones, they form a causal chain as well as a feedback loop. figure 1 shows the logical relationships.



Figure1. Logical Relationship Among Core Themes

The big insight is that the four themes reinforce each other. Anger and powerlessness lead to stricter in-group policing (polarization), which makes them care more about what happens next; those fears then cause some creators to withdraw or lower their activity, further weakening the emotional value foundation in a downward spiral.

4.3. Refinements and Extensions to Existing Theories

Revisiting “Textual Poaching in the AI Era. Jenkins’ textual poaching” describes fans taking the elements of the original works to form something else, opposite of the commercial stuff culture. We find a new twist in our study: AI poaches from fans’ poaching. Original poaching (fans using copyrighted characters) was tolerated or even encouraged because it was seen as non-commercial, passion-based and community-building. But when fan is scraped by AI companies to works to train models, the same act of appropriation is condemned as theft. This creates a recursive ethical dilemma: Fans can’t unjustifiably state that it’s their own. derivative works are “transformative” while denying that AI’s use of those works is similarly transformative.

Our respondents saw this paradox but used the standard of “human” “agency”. From them, it is less about the legal position of the original material and more on In terms of the presence of human writer’s intent and feelings. This implies extension to participatory culture theory: legitimate transformation requires demonstrable human emotion work, rather than just the technical transformation of inputs into outputs. AI lacks for intentionality cannot be a cultural “poacher,” only a mechanical re-processor. The “Labor undertaken for affection” vs. “Automated Imitation” Dichotomy Our finding adds a new layer: affective authenticity respondents like always Imperfections, little flaws, emotion that gets left behind in handmade things are much more than just techniques. perfection of AI outputs. This suggests that when it comes to community identity and emotions, in these sorts of situations resonance is most important, the value of creative work is not just a matter of how new but of its perceived human origin. It would actually take more to make it go against our own will, if anything. unless AI also fakes (or actually has) intentional emotional states – this is currently impossible. Thus the debate will not be decided by any technological development Alone; it would stay a sociocultural and moral fight.

4.4. Unexpected Theoretical Insights

The “Misidentification Spiral” as a Community Defense Mechanism. One unexpected finding was the prevalence and intensity of “AI challenge” practices (e.g., demanding layer proofs, livestreamed drawing). Although it might be startling at first, it could be seen as a ritual of being together The community created A low-tech, high-trust means to rebuild the division between humans and machines. This resembles what cultural sociologists call “boundary work” but with a performative twist: creators need to show they are human in real time. This may be of use for other online communities facing AI infiltration.

The “Private Use Loophole” and Moral Licensing. Another unexpected finding is the tolerance for private, non-published AI use. Even staunch critics of artificial intelligence like Respondent D took in a friend’s use of ChatGPT to generate personal “guilty pleasure” stories as long as they were not shared. This points out a moral divide between consumption/entertainment and public making. The community’s ethics code is based upon the community circulation and substitution of individuals. Private self-indulgence is deemed harmless as it doesn’t vie for social recognition or audience attention. It’s also absent in most academic discourse about AI ethics have the tendency to see every use of AI as being problematic or okay. Our data indicates social harm of AI generation is mediated by the visibility and substitutability of the output. Pessimism as a Mobilizing Emotion. while respondents showed strong pessimistic sentiment toward future, this pessimism did not lead to passivity. But it motivated collective actions on the contrary (e.g., move to AI-friendly/AI-unfriendly platforms, use Glaze like counter-

techniques organizing boycotts) This goes against the popular belief that negative expectations result. Instead, it might lead to a defensive mobilization with threatened value are important parts of what makes us feel like ourselves. To the fan community, "love" becomes an existential danger: Creative principle works as a great solidary machine.

4.5. Summary of the Discussion

In summary, this discussion has:

Connected our empirical findings to theories of participatory culture (Jenkins), digital/affective labor, and creativity studies. Proposed a conceptual model showing how emotional value, infringement anger, polarization, and future pessimism form a self-reinforcing cycle. The refinement of current theories by adding a "demonstrable human emotional labor" as a prerequisite for transformation in the AI era Unexpectedly found out: Misidentification spiral is a boundary-work ritual moral distinction between private and public AI use, and pessimism as a mobilizing emotion.

These contributions suggest the hardships faced by fan creators are not simply technology-based, legal; they are greatly cultural and emotional. Any effective response has to be about communities' meaning-making activities, rather than policy or tech alone.

5. Conclusions

5.1. Research Conclusions

This paper discusses how the creation of fans is affected by the use of generative AI. Mainly focusing on the issue of how does artificial intelligence integrate into fan creativity and change it? "What difficulties do fans creators and fan viewers encounter?", the study analyses the phenomenon at the levels of practice, cognition, discourse and governance. through in-depth interviews with seven fan participants and long-term observation of platforms. the main results can be summarized as follows: The irreplaceable emotional value is the core of fan creation. All interviewees Stressed about the emotional investment and the time, personal expression. those in handcraft creation signify the "soul" that AI generated content lacks Replicate Regardless of how advanced the AI technology becomes, the interviewees generally think that that it doesn't have that human feeling and resonance in what it creates. the unauthorized use of data for the training of AI has caused much anger and a feeling that powerlessness from creators. the very existence of fan creation is a copyright gray area this predicament over rights protection is further muddled by Community attitudes toward AI are not single-minded, they have a range of views. Moreover there's also some people that pay more attention to the creative fields they get involved in have poured their heart and soul, although they might be somewhat more accepting of AI's effect on other areas. Respondents see a bleak future for the fan community ecosystem but they And stick to some basic principles that will never be compromised, as well as 'bad money' concerns. driving out good"and newcomers' growing obstacles were repeatedly mentioned However, underneath all those worries there was 'love', 'humanity' and 'authenticity of creation' Respondents universally viewed it as evidence that fans remain loyal to itself, it is those very values which must never be abandoned by any fan-creator. In summary, this study shows that the biggest problem for fan creations in AI times isn't just that a technical debate, but rather the defense of the value of emotional labor and the reshaping of the creative ecosystem. This dilemma reflects an even broader contemporary question: right now of a technological wave that focuses on efficiency, what would become of those delicate and emotional "traces" Of humanity": How should it be regarded, how should it be received and protected? Researchers think that fan communities need to guard themselves against erosion of the community.

6. Recommendations

6.1. Recommendations for the Fan Community

Trust caused by “AI misidentification.” Research has found that the phenomenon of “AI misidentification” has already caused substantial harm to some creators who produce entirely by hand. If this “witch-hunt” atmosphere continues to spread, it will ultimately damage not only the manual creators but also the very foundation of trust in this whole community. Research shows that respondents feel “angry” and “powerless” regarding platforms’ use of user-made works for AI training. Platforms if insist on training AIs like this, they would have to accept the loss of creators. Conversely, platforms should proactively make clear and Enforceable commitments: they don't use work uploaded by people for any ai training. unless it's allowed to. Also this kind of things shouldn't be put away lengthy terms of service but communicated to users in a more prominent manner (such as through announcements on official accounts).

Therefore, the fan community needs to establish a principle of prudence when questioning AI. In addition to the current “verification” process, the principle of “presumption of innocence” should be implemented, and channels such as “appeal threads for false positives” should be established to mitigate the problem of collateral damage.

Research has found that individual creators generally feel “powerless to change” when facing AI infringement. Researchers suggest that creators could jointly submit a petition to the platform, demanding a clear “opt-out of AI training” mechanism and the development of “anti-AI scraping” technology.

6.2. Recommendations for Platforms

Research indicates that current AI content management practices vary significantly across platforms. This uncertainty exacerbates creators’ anxiety and divisions within the fan community. Researchers recommend that platforms allow users to check a box indicating “whether AI was used in creation” before publishing, and label works marked as “AI-created” with an AI disclosure. Although most people would choose to conceal this information, implementing such a design would help categorize content to some extent. Complementing this, platforms should allow users to opt out of viewing AI-generated content. This “labeling + filtering” mechanism has already been implemented through tag-based categorization on Archive of Our Own (AO3), proving the feasibility of this approach.

Research has found that the phenomenon of “AI misidentification” occurs not only within fan communities but also on platforms, where some works are erroneously classified as AI and Labeled as such. It's better if platforms open up an appeal path for AI- disputes. When a user's work is identified as AI by the system or reported by others as an AI generated work, platform should give a handy appeal gateway (upload files such as screenshots of layers or screen recordings of the creation process as evidence) and have human staff do a review Platforms need to set up penalties for those who report maliciously. Even if this requires men, women and resources, researcher feel it is worth. is needed in order to retain creators and form a better creative atmosphere.

6.3. Research Limitations

This study interviewed a total of 7 participants from fan communities. although i tried to to ensure diversity in terms of identity, length of time in the community, and subculture distribution, the sample size is small and cannot completely represent all the fans. community. Specifically speaking, these are the following shortfalls: Firstly, this is lacking from the point of view of the creators that mainly or completely use AI for theirs fan creations. All seven interviewees were manual creators or participants whose main creative practice remains handcrafted; their attitudes toward AI ranged from strong resistance to cautious, tool-based

use. none of them considers themselves an “AI-first” creator. This sampling bias has some very important consequences when it comes to interpreting our results

(1) Overestimating community resistance. This view is shown through an expression of complete opposition to AI: might represent only the perspective of manual creators by our respondents. AI-first creators - actively produce fanart, fiction, videos and more with the help of Midjourney, Stable Diffusion, etc., ChatGPT—have completely different mindsets. They consider the AI a true means of making, emphasizing efficiency or convenience over emotional truth and feeling left out misrepresented by the dominant discourse of resistance. without their voice, our studies run the risk regarding the fan community to be universally against-AI, perhaps this viewpoint could be too simplistic.

(2) Incomplete understanding of “creation” and “authorship.” Our findings highlight that manual creators think creation is man-centered and full of emotion, which takes a person. effort. However, in the eyes of AI-first creators, creation would be curation, prompt engineering, or iterative collaboration with machines. They might also claim authorship over Based on the originality of its prompts or parameter changes, an AI-generated output is produced. By excluding their views, it’s hard for us to evaluate if those other definitions are gaining traction or how they coexist (or conflict) with traditional views.

(3) Blind spot regarding relational dynamics between the two groups. The sample does not capture the interaction between manual creators and AI-first creators, whether it is that they collaborate, they ignore each other, or there is open conflict. some of them are still created by humans, and others may have some kind of connection with people who create AIs like themselves consume and enjoy manual crafts; others even want to mimic some specific artists’ styles which causes arguments we cannot shed light on The lack of this relational dimension means our conclusions about “community polarization” rely only on the manual creators perceptions of the “other side,” not on direct evidence from that side.

(4) Positive adaptation could be underestimated. Our sample were expressed pessimism about AI’s impact on the fan ecosystem. AI-first creators might offer a a more optimistic or down-to-earth stance that would say something like AI reduces barriers to people with disabilities. or time-constrained fans, enables new forms of expression (e.g., AI-voiced dubs, animated (storyboards), or create new types that make people want to be part of the community instead of destroy them without their input, so our research may overemphasize its negative impact underrepresenting possible benefits or adaptive strategies. Therefore, the conclusions drawn in this paper are also true about those which involve the “irreplaceability of emotional value,” the “universality of infringement anger,” and the “pessimistic future outlook” - Manual Fan's view of it. creators rather than the whole fan community. extending this study with a Balanced sample of AI-first creators needed for fuller and more nuanced understanding understand how ai is changing fan creations. The second is there is a lack of comparative data from other fan groups outside of China. this paper the focus is on Chinese platforms like LOFTER and everyone who responded was from China Although literature on creative platforms outside China was reviewed during the research process, it is not sufficient to know how artificial intelligence affects fan production all over the world. this is due to are huge difference in law environment,policy and community on platform across countries and areas - factors not considered in this paper. the lack of it is confined to cross-cultural comparison, so the conclusion from this study cannot be applied elsewhere. Also, the coverage on fans communities was lacking. respondents were mainly anime or game fan creators. This paper did not look into how their viewpoints vary from those of fans creating in live-action movies and television or original fiction.

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