

Barriers and Orders: Study of Fans' Group Identification with Doujin Groups

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Abstract: With the development of diversified cyber-cultures, Doujin works, which are secondary creation based on original works or prototypes of characters, have become an important part of web authoring. Starting from Klink's dimensional division of group identification, this study explored how viewers of audio-visual works, enthusiasts of characters and fans of artists identified with Doujin Groups and participated in social group activities by adopting research methods such as netnography, interviews and text analysis. According to research findings, as group identification is gradually developed from its dimensions of cognition and emotion-evaluation, the imitation and learning in the behavioral dimension will be promoted, so as to join Doujin creation. Barriers and rules in the social group ecology can protect creation and works, and advance the prosperity and development of social groups, thus attracting more viewers.

Keywords. cyber-cultures, Doujin.

1. Introduction

As network platforms advance and we-medias emerge, communication has become popular, personalized and independent, and an increasing number of people are capable of expressing themselves through network [1]. In the open and interactive virtual cyberspace, quyu tribes formed based on hobbies and interests continue to increase and expand [2], and produce many virtual groups. As one of the members, Doujin Groups pooled out of the interest in Doujin culture are gaining attention increasingly in the research filed of subculture. Doujin culture includes both cultural behaviors of recreation, and cultural products brought by such creation [3], which centers on Fiske's fan textual productivity [4], and is conducive to better advertising original works, characters and participating personnel.

Doujin culture is composed of Doujin creators, readers and works [5]. Doujin Groups and works of secondary creation have been integrated into the leisure industry. Doujin Groups can stimulate the cultural and creative values of the IP to the maximum extent with their reasonable structures, lasting popularity and properly independent operation, which are complementary to original works. However, not every audience of original works, lover of characters and fan of actors will identify with Doujin works, who may distance themselves from Doujin Groups. This study attempted to investigate how common fans identify with Doujin Groups and engage in activities from the multiple dimensions of measuring group identification.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Doujin Group

Doujin Group is one of virtual groups. In the early 1990s, prior to the the Internet outbreak, Howard Rheingold had discovered that network communities would make a great difference to the communication among social groups, and proposed the concept of "Virtual Communities", that is, virtual social aggregates [6]. In 1997, Jones, S.G. pointed out that the existence of virtual communities proved that of virtual groups related to them, and virtual communities laid the foundation for the existence of virtual groups from two aspects of cyberspace and prerequisites [7]. Doujin Groups belong to the cultural groups in virtual groups, which require a continuous interaction and a shared

understanding of their culture themes among their members to form a social relationship based on respect and trust [8].

2.2 Fans

Nowadays, the term “fensi” is generally considered as the transliteration of the English word of fans [9]. Since the 1980s and 1990s when the participatory culture paradigms were changing, the British and American academic circles have been interested in “fans” as the representative identities and roles in the participatory culture. In Western academic circles, scholars’ studies of fans have been collectively known as “fan studies” [10] focusing on behaviors and motives of fans, formation and evolution of fan bases, etc.

In *Textual Poachers*, Henry Jenkins selected “poachers” and “nomads” to describe and analyze the significance production of fans, regarding fans as active producers and manipulators of significance [11]. The participation of fans will reorganize and reproduce the texts in the culture industry, so the moment of text acceptance is also that of fans production [12]. This is exactly the “textual productivity” in the “fan productivity” by Fiske, namely, fans have the ability to reconstruct official original texts and yield new ones [13].

In domestic and foreign relevant literature, few scholars will classify fans, while in fact, there are obvious boundaries inside fan bases. According to the textual productivity, this paper divided fans into ordinary fans who just followed official texts, and Doujin fans who interpreted the official texts a second time to produce ones with new meanings.

2.3 Group identification

The concept of “identification” was first proposed by psychologist Sigmund Freud, who believed “identification” was a process of psychological and emotional consistency between people or people and groups [14], which could occur between individuals or individuals and groups. Eric H. Erikson further brought forward the concepts of “self-identification” and “collective identification”, and systematically discussed individual identity and identity confusion. In his opinion, “identification” was essentially the exploration and understanding of self-status, and a process of acquiring a new understanding of self-status through constant comparison and analysis of the similarities and differences between oneself and other individuals or groups [15].

In the studies of “identification” at home and abroad, the majority of scholars categorized identification from multiple dimensions according to their own different dividing evidences. In line with the degree of identification, Jackson and Smith divided the dimension of identity into perception of intergroup situation, in-group attraction, interdependent beliefs or common fate, and deindividuation; Klink and other scholars classified it into cognitive factors, evaluation-affection factors and behavioral factors in accordance with human psychological factors, that is, the three basic forms of human psychological activities (i.e. cognition, emotion and will) [16].

On the whole, the research into Doujin Groups is currently focused on the behaviors and works of secondary creation of Doujin Groups. Taking *Harry Potter* as an example, Sun Shuoying advanced that in order to prevent the carnival from being disturbed, Doujin fans established a utopia of the cyber world, and protected the resource production and sharing in the communities, preserved community orders and gained a feeling of community belonging with the hybrid codes of cross-culture and popular culture, specific technical boundaries and similar orders of public ownership. Taking plots to Doujin videos on bilibili as an example, Yang Xinyue thought that in the interaction, fans not only constructed status identification by defining the diverse intergroup boundary, but deepened their emotional connection by strengthening their own and demoting others in the process of developing social group norms through consultation.

Most of these studies ignore how audiences of original works, supporters of characters, and fans of actors obtain a sense of group identification with and integrate themselves into Doujin Groups, and stimulate studies on their own textual productivity.

Beyond that, Doujin creation is usually taken as a derivative behavior of fan culture when being mentioned, while Doujin Groups rarely as a subclass of fans. In reality, in network communities, Doujin fans also erect their barriers for “hobby friends”. Because when audiences of original works, lovers of characters, and fans of actors conflict with a Doujin Group’s interpretation of the works, characters and actors, or the first three are seriously separated from the Doujin Group, the second interpretation of the Doujin creation may become a trigger of conflict. The well-known example is Xiao Zhan’s fan incident that broke out on February 27, 2020. The reason was that Xiao Zhan’s personal fans disagreed with the interpretation and deduction of Doujin fans derived from *The Untamed*. If the creation of Doujin is only deemed as that of fan culture, it is hard to explain such conflicts.

In addition, ordinary fans also need to identify with secondary creative behaviors and group status and conform to the specific orders before entering Doujin Groups. This study intends to explore how viewers of audio-visual works, lovers of characters and fans of artists identify with Doujin Groups and participate in social group activities.

3. Multi-dimension Analysis of Group Identification of Doujin Groups

This paper adopted the classic division of “identification” by Klink, and made adjustments to it according to the characteristics of Doujin Groups. If an individual wants to develop his identification with Doujin Groups of a cultural product, he needs to pay attention to the following four important components, that is, cognitive dimension, evaluative dimension, emotional dimension and behavioral dimension. This study employed netnography, interviewing method and text analysis, and selected a total of 116 fan comments from Weibo users, Weibo super topics, Douban groups and Lofter platforms. The specific distribution is shown as Table 1. In line with deep interviews, there are 2 senior members who have participated in Doujin community activities for more than 10 years, 6 stable members for 5 to 10 years, and 3 new members for less than 6 months.

Table 1. Sources of text analysis

Excerpt Sources	Number of Excerpts (Piece)
Weibo Users	43
Weibo Super Topics	28
Douban Groups	18
Lofter	27

3.1 Cognitive dimension

First of all, the cognitive dimension is a process of self-categorization, in which “individuals get positive emotional and value significance through mentalizing the connotation of a group actively, and differentiate themselves from the external members of the group [17].” Li Chun and Gong Xiuli believed that this process was centered on “deindividuation”, that is, when two or more individuals recognized their self-status with the group standards of classification formed based on common characteristics, a group was formed; when individuals categorized themselves into a certain group, they would draw close to the group prototype, ignore personality characteristics, and highlight the group similarity, thereby forming a sense of group identification, and enhancing their motivation of participating in group activities [18].

Doujin Groups are ones of secondary creation developed on the basis of cultural products, whose members generally come together out of identical hobbies, and whose basic status is the fans and enthusiasts of a certain cultural product. Therefore, in order to avoid being interpreted, Doujin Groups set up inherent thresholds, which both erect barriers for outsiders [19], and are regulations for internal members [20].

Doujin works derived from characters in films and television or literature will lay much stress on whether the personality of a character conforms to the character design in the original work, such as

personality, behavior logic, macroscopic features, etc. If the author fails to guarantee or desires to prevent disputes, he will label “OOC” (out of character, namely, the character collapses, divorced from the logic of the original) on the work as a reminder. Doujin Groups emphasize “respecting the original work”, while those Doujin creators that have not read the original work will be under controversy and rejection ^[21].

Net friend “Zhaonianshanfeng” said, “Personally, the output (note: Doujin creation) of people who have not read the original work is not worth watching, because Doujin is based on the original.”

The original is one of the barriers placed by Doujin fans in the cognitive dimension. In the eyes of most Doujin fans, Doujin works are secondary interpretation and deduction of the original. If the character does not accord with the setting in the original, the creation may be regarded with impure motives. In early Doujin Groups at home, OOC was even treated as a creative behavior derogating the intergroup image and devastating the group cohesion to be widely banned.

From the cognitive dimension, the original is a passport to enter the fan group, and a certificate to distinguish itself from the “passers-by” outside the fan group. For Doujin Groups that are more orderly, reading and watching same works, beyond doubt, are the first step in constructing a status identity.

Interviewee A: “There are many highly popular OOC Doujins, but their personalities go too far. Sometimes, I will wonder that whether Tongdan (note: fans who like the same character (s) or performer (s) as me) truly love my cp.”

When Doujin works are exceedingly OOC, the readers will doubt the true intentions of the author, “Does TA really enjoy the same characters as me or simply desire to gain popularity through Doujin?” It goes against with “generating power for love” tacitly approved by Doujin Groups, that is, the idea of purely loving and supporting creation not for the purpose of commercial use and profits. Once trust loses, the creators will be “avoided like a plague” and rejected by the hobby friends.

Each circle inside Doujin Groups is intertwined and classified on a complex basis, even through Doujin enthusiasts for same products will continue to be divided into secondary social groups according to their distinct favorite characters and understanding of the relationship between characters. The understanding of the typical role relationship is that of the romantic relationship, namely, CP (Couple), and beyond that, there are family groups, friendship groups, etc. In order to ensure that their inch of land escapes being disturbed, Doujin creators need to use appropriate tags to specify their works, commonly, single character names, double CP names, original work names, etc. There’s a lot of debate about tags in Doujin Groups, and there may be different methods for labeling the mainstreams from different cycles. The creators should make themselves known about them in advance.

In the 1464th piece of writing from Weibo account “Doujin Female bot”, a Chinese enthusiast for Harry Potter made a detailed description of the work to be translated, and inquired about how to make tags. A reasonable and accurate tag can help fans rapidly identify and screen the works that suit for their own orientation, which is both a way of further partition of affiliated Doujin Groups from the cognitive dimension, and an act of observing and maintaining the rules and orders of social groups.

The group regulations mentioned above are conventional ones of Doujin Groups in their long-term development, whose connotations also reflect the two major basic spirits of Doujin culture, separately, respect for the original and non-interference. In general, those two will not demote the public praises of the original works, characters and performers, but assist them to preserve their popularity and attract new fans. Therefore, it is not inevitable that audiences of original works, lovers of characters, and fans of actors will produce status identification, voluntarily appreciate Doujin works, abide by internal regulations of Doujin Groups, get closer to the group prototype, and develop a sense of group identification of “huddling together for warmth” [23].

3.2 Emotion-evaluation dimension

The emotion-evaluation dimension refers to the positive emotions an individual receives from the group and his emotional involvement in other members and the entire group. When an individual

considers such membership valuable, he will be more likely to conduct ingroup behaviors to support the whole organization, and improve his self-value at the same time [24]. In a Doujin Group, the positive emotions obtained from the group are mainly brought by the interaction with “hobby friends”, the appreciation of others’ works, and the recognition of their own works by others, all of which will promote the status identification of individual development and the acknowledge of the self-value in the group.

In order to encourage the progress and development of the creators, the group members will spontaneously protect the creators and their free acts of creation, and appose the belittlement and blunt criticism of the creators and their Doujin works. They understand that the creators need time to make progress and improve themselves. Relatively, for the purpose of avoiding the setting of secondary creation to cause discomfort to viewers and spark conflict, the creators need to make a prior announcement of their works.

Interviewee B, who has joined the Doujin Group since 2004, denoted that, “As early as the forum era, madams would issue a warning (note: prior announcement) before the text. Such practice seemed a convention. Everyone did that, and I don’t know when it started.” Strict tagging and announcement system can help creators clarify responsibilities and decrease concerns, that is, creators only need to indicate potentially controversial settings and plots ahead of time, and viewers avoid them according to the principle of “Please exit if you don’t like”. If the creator has made a prior announcement, yet viewers still express negative feelings about certain settings or plots, the group members will reject the viewers.

On Lofter, the largest Doujin website at home, though there is no rigid requirement or group consensus, there are still 985 works voluntarily tagged with “Don’t access if you don’t like”, whose creative scope spans novels, games, TV dramas, cartoons and animations, comics and cosplays, etc.

Based on this, the third conventional regulation in Doujin Groups is “creation protection”. Generally, the interaction between fans is mainly friendly comments and rational discussion, which provides a favorable environment for appreciation and creation, and enhances the cohesion of social groups. In the process of reading and appreciating derivative works written by others for their common favorite objects, they share their own interpretations and opinions with each other, support each other, and discuss in a friendly manner to pool the collective wisdom and promote the energy of social groups in the participative consumption [25]. In this way, they satisfy not only their own affection and imagination for characters or artists, but their demands for sharing similar emotions with like-minded friends. In this course, they develop a common status, improve their sense of self-value, and build up a tacit relationship in the virtual social group [26].

This protection extends to both works and creators. The creators and viewers in the same circle are a community of shared interests, which means that when the creators’ interests are damaged, the resources enjoyed by viewers in the social group will also be reduced.

A netizen called “Onmyoji Wanshiwu” published an article on Weibo “The Cold Pit of Productive Force MAX (note: the inter-cycle is less popular) Painter Jiatuzi Taitai was Supposed to Miss His Account after being Reported (note: His Weibo account was compulsively cancelled). The Case is under Trial Currently. How could this be...Why to Report me? Too Nasty”, which received 8,286 favors. Comments and forwarding mostly believed that his account should not be compulsively cancelled in the manner of a large quantity of complaints on Weibo for his repelling the setting of creators, and the correct practice is to avoid it consciously. Based on such consensus, except for few circles bothered by extreme fans, most social groups can provide favorable and comfortable conditions for creation and appreciation, and welcome the arrival of new members.

A netizen named “Ctium”: Every day I watch the CP videos edited by people on bilibili, and read articles on humanity in forums, I can’t help smiling benignantly, just like a fool. Madams (note: creators) write too well in varying styles. How delicate their feelings are. How wonderful they handle their feelings. Are they exactly their own characters and behavioral patterns? Their essays deserve to be called classics. How happy I am. Every day I can immerse myself into the ocean of joy, but my eyes will also get sore.”

From the emotion-evaluation dimension, under the protection of group regulations, the admiration and creation of Doujin Groups will obtain active emotions, which will bring them positive feedback and deepen their senses of identification and belonging for the social groups.

Except for a pure sense of joy from admiring works, in the Doujin Group, a direct contact with characters or artists will not occur though, all activities center on them. As it were, the reasons and motivations for the gathering of the group members are the charms of the characters or artists themselves. Therefore, Doujin works are not only the products of the passion and appreciation for the original works, artists and characters, but the bridge between fans and the original works, characters and artists as well as one of the approaches to enjoying the original works, characters and artists. Through appreciating the works, fans show their fondness for characters and artists, increase their intimacy with characters and artists, and improve their sense of belonging and loyalty to the social group. At the same time, the emotional bond between group members will also gain reinforced. They will conscientiously follow the group regulations, and carry out discussions and express opinions on relevant information to constantly search for the similarities between the group members, and enhance their contacts with each other and group identification ^[27].

3.3 Behavioral dimension

When individuals identify with the behavioral patterns, attitudes and ideas, and standards of value of others or groups, they will learn, imitate, and internalize them to make themselves converged with others or groups ^[28].

In the Doujin Group, if the individual fans believe that they belong to the same group with other viewers or creators of Doujin works, they will have the intention for taking part in activities in the objective-oriented relationship. Combined with the collective status developed by their interacting with other members, individuals will be easily affected by the value orientation and behaviors of the group to join group activities and gain a sense of pleasure in their consistent behaviors with the group, which improves the effectiveness of individuals and groups in activities ^[29].

At the beginning of 2022, a netizen called “Weird Nicknames” joined the “Anti-bomb CP” super topic after watching the TV series *Reset*, and also started to try creating Doujin texts spurred on by the creative atmosphere in full play. In this process, she had a sense of belonging to the fan base from the cognitive dimension through following the representative of the super topic, and acquired active emotions from her interaction with the super topic; considering the prosperity and development of the social group, she would imitate the creative behaviors of other group members, comply with the inter-circle orders, and make contributions to its contents.

The positive emotional feedback is also from the support of “hobby friends”. Before then, interviewee D had merely been exposed to Doujin works, but never created them. Until 2021, he became a fan of the TV series *Reset*, who published four literary works related to *Reset* and received 601 “favors” in total from the premiere on January 11 to the finale on January 25. Under the support and encouragement of lovers, she continued to release relevant Doujin works after the TV series ended.

In accordance with the degree of satisfaction with the self-fulfillment and -development that people experience, Nash divided and ranked people’s use of leisure time: they are, (1) creative participation; (2) active participation; (3) emotional participation; (4) game and glee for killing time; (5) excessive indulgence; (6) crime. Creative activities are undoubtedly the highest form of realizing self-identification, in which people can derive satisfaction from the completion of works, feedback from others, self-evaluation and other aspects ^[30].

According to the Social Construction Theory, the identification is the result of “co-construction” of interpersonal interaction, discourse space and others in the social environment. In the Doujin Group, creators and viewers play two kinds of important roles in group members, on the basis of which network interaction arenas centered on a certain platform or forum are derived. Whether conflictive or cooperative interaction will render support for participants to construct their self-value identification ^[31].

4. Conclusion

The multiple barriers and boundaries naturally developed in Doujin Groups continually narrow the scope of the inter-circle boundary, and intensify the members' sense of belonging in the cognitive dimension; various rules that are formed and safeguarded spontaneously in the community are of help for maintaining a friendly atmosphere, and enhancing the acquisition for positive emotions; the identification with cognitive and emotion-evaluation dimensions will promote the imitation and learning in the behavioral dimension, so as to join Doujin creation.

The rules of social groups will form a special protection for creators, prompt them to receive more positive feedback, enhance their self-value recognition, and produce more community resources to achieve the prosperity and development of social groups, attract more viewers to be their members, and develop an orderly exchange plaza and a virtuous circle of community ecology.

However, the range of application of those group regulations is only limited to the fans who have already identified with Doujin Groups. With the development of Internet, forums, post bars and other entirely different communities were on the wane. Subcultures and mainstream cultures conduct information exchange on the same network platform, and the content created by Doujin fans may offend ordinary fans and other netizens. By this time, the group regulations have lost their efficacy, and cannot protect the interests of creators.

In the past two decades of development, the Doujin Groups at home have automatically remedied the group orders, safeguarded the group ecology, and developed the identification and unification in the midst of conflicts through the interaction among the group members. It can be said that it is the constant frictions, collisions and even oppositions occurring between the external and internal community cultures that have posed an impact on the identification of group members to a certain extent, and consolidate the identification at the same time.

5. Conclusion

The inter-cycle of Doujin Groups is complicated. The members keep the group order, strengthen the sense of belonging of individuals, maintain an atmosphere of friendly exchanges, and constantly absorb new members through establishing shared and inter-cycle regulations. With the deep development of group identification, new members are gradually bound to the interests of the community to a large extent: The quantity and quality of the creators' products are also those of resources that the members can enjoy in the community. In order to reserve community resources, new members voluntarily conform to group regulations, and develop a special community ecology: The creators create freely on the premise of prior announcement, and viewers enjoy freely on the premise of actively avoiding the setting of dislike.

According to the textual productivity, this study categorized fan groups, and took the significance production behaviors of fans as the characteristics of Doujin fans, not those that could be generated by any fan. The members of a Doujin Group need to identify with the cognitive dimension, the emotion-evaluation dimension and the behavioral dimension, for whom the premise of participating in Doujin Group activities is to develop at least one dimension of group identification with the Doujin Group. There remain many limitations, deficiencies and places needed to be discussed, supplemented and perfected in this study. First of all, the research objects of this paper are the ordinary fans and Doujin fans of audio-visual works, while in the participatory observation, the study may be biased to some degree due to the inter-cycle limitation. Secondly, this paper mainly focuses on the positive image of those two. In this study, the estimation of the executory effect for group regulations is relatively idealized and short of criticism. The author will carry out further studies in future days.

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