

Analysis of the Characteristics of Fandom Culture and Its Influence on Group Behavior of College Students

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Abstract: The fandom, originally a spontaneous entertainment community formed by star-struck fans, has gradually developed into an organized and specialized circle of interests. Is it possible to extend the fandom culture from cyberspace to reality and establish a boundary separating the fandom culture from the mainstream culture? Are fans just a bunch of kids who are easily manipulated without their self-judgement? How can practitioners of ideological and political education correctly understand the fandom culture and properly guide it in the process of education, enabling college students to treat the fandom culture with correct concepts and mindsets, and steering the healthy growth of college students? This is the main research question of this topic.

1. Fandom Culture and Group Behavior of College Student Fandom

1.1. Fandom Culture

The fans of Xiao Zhan (a well-known Chinese actor and singer) have been recently on the trending list of Weibo and Zhihu with “227 Event” raising a colossal uproar in the entertainment world, causing the attention of the public on fandom culture once again. The fandom refers to the fan circle formed by fans of a specific star or a combination of two or more stars. Fandom is a group concept, a general term for a collection of fans of different stars.

Fandom culture involves the mindset, psychology, concept, behavior, mechanism, terminology, and business model in general. The main practitioners of the fandom culture are the majority of teenagers against the background of the Internet, whose cultural creativity should not be underestimated.

1.2. Characteristics of Group Behavior of College Student Fandom

1.2.1. Huge low-age student fan bases

This project recently conducted a study on the influence of fandom culture on college students' group behavior among 770 college students aged 17 to 24 years old. The survey results indicated that the number of students who follow stars or have joined the fan circle reached 353,

accounting for 49% of the total number of students, of which 30.91% were freshmen, 25.97% were Sophomores and 31.69% were juniors.

Table 1. 第3题：您是饭圈人士吗？[单选题]Q3: Are you a member of the fan circle? [multiple choice]

选项 #	小计 #	比例
是的，我有参与的饭圈	79	10.26%
不算是，我追星但不参与饭圈	284	36.88%
我不追星	407	52.86%
本题有效填写人次	770	

选项 Options

小计 Subtotal

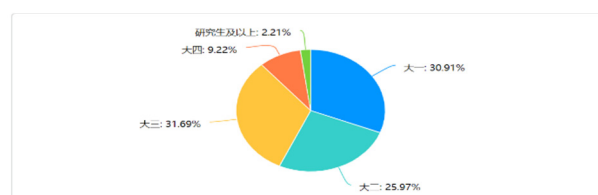
比例 Proportion

是的，我有参与的饭圈 Yes, I am involved in the rice circle.

不算是，我追星但不参与饭圈 Not really, I follow stars but do not participate in the fan circle.

我不追星 I don't follow stars.

Table 2. 本题有效填写人次 Total of effective respondents 大一 Freshmen



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大二 Sophomores
大三 Juniors
大四 Seniors
研究生及以上 Postgraduate and above

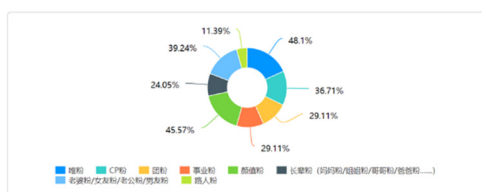
老婆粉/女友粉/老公粉/男友粉 Wife Fan, Girlfriend Fan, Husband Fan, Boyfriend Fan
路人粉 Onlooker Fan

Together with this questionnaire, the researcher also interviewed many fans, industry insiders, experts, and scholars. The total number of fans of different categories in China is over 600 million, and the data terminals of popular fan apps such as “Idol”, “Superfans” and “Owhat” revealed that online users aged between 18 and 24 account for 46.2%. Among them, the portion of college student users of “Superfans” accounts for 75.8%, and the portion of “MoDian” accounts for 58.6%. It is evident that a large part of the current college student group is a star-struck member of the fan circle, which is increasingly common in the student group, and the degree of participation of students involved in the fan circle is inversely proportional to their age, tending to be of lower age.

1.2.2. Emotional cult-based identity specialization

In this research, only 11.89% of the respondents were onlookers (fans who show occasional interest in the idol), while the rest of the respondents had the same attributes and preferences. In fact, the composition of the fan circle members is often the result of an emotional group derived from a common hobby, emotional resonance, and dream pursuit for a certain idol or star. The fandom culture serves as a mechanism group behavior linked by emotional worship, and all the original power originates from the emotion of their own identity. The loyalty of college students to the stars makes them willing to spend a lot of time and money for their idols, and spontaneously form organizations where doing everything for the idols is their only goal. The exclusivity to the idol stars makes the members of the circle constantly derive a unique culture and do not accept the existence of fans who like other stars within the circle. This exclusivity makes the members within the organization unconsciously produce negative exclusionary or boycott behavior towards other stars.

Table 3. Emotional cult-based identity specialization



唯粉 Dedicated Fan
CP粉 CP Fan
团粉 Group Fan
事业粉 Career Fan
颜值粉 Appearance Fan
长辈粉 (妈妈粉/姐姐粉/哥哥粉/爸爸粉.....)
Elders Fan (As a mother, older sister, old brother, father, etc.)

1.2.3. Strong organizational discipline supported by data

The researcher interviewed a number of senior fans of the fan circle to understand the characteristics of the group. In the past, people often believed that the fandom culture was spontaneously generated by a certain opportunity; but nowadays, it has turned into an organized group with a stable internal order for a long time, even with professional operation at the company level. There are different factions in the kernel of fandom culture, which will be divided into different levels depending on economic strength, specialty skills, discourse power, output influence, etc. The arrival of the big data era has given the stars a quantitative indicator of whether they are popular enough. The questionnaire survey indicated that more than 69.62% of college students would have joined fan groups or local support groups to support their favorite stars through Super Talk, Tieba, Douban, or local fan clubs. The organized and large-scale centralized support activities in the group time and again demonstrated not only powerful action and rallying power, but also discipline in the frenzy.

1.2.4. “Big Fans” leading to strong commercial operation

The seemingly inexplicable messages are the daily routine of every student fan; for example, “Please buy a Weibo account to like and forward it”, “Share some snapshots of mv and endorsement products”, and so on. The researcher accessed a star’s Super Talk and found that there are more than 10 daily routine tasks of voting, forwarding, anti-hacking, and purchasing, and fans who completed the tasks would clock in and leave messages under the task list. One of the most widespread operations of the fandom culture is the scoring of tasks and the execution of tasks by student fans. Fans are organized under the leadership of big fans to increase influence and exposure for their idols. When they encounter challenges or comments that attack their idols, members of the fan circle will organize themselves to attack dissidents or eliminate negative comments by means of “comments control”. Unlike fans who buy albums and concert tickets within their reach, the fandom is characterized by its tight organization and a large number of people, rendering some behaviors and activities typically commercialized.

2. Positive Influence

2.1. Setting a good example for college students

College students are in the critical transition period of their lives, and positive role models play an essential role in the formation of their life goals. The traditional way of

education on campus and at home can hardly be fully internalized by students. The fandom culture formed by the college students' spontaneous feelings of admiration acts as one of the motivations for their efforts in life and study. For example, college students learn the value of hard work through the idols behind the stage, so that they can firmly draw the power of role models; or through the behavioral remarks of celebrity idols and their participation in public welfare activities, college students can realize the gap between themselves and their idols, so that the spirit of idols and excellent peers can be internalized in their hearts and externalized in their actions.

2.2. Providing positive guidance for correct values

Fandom thinking serves an essential role at specific times. Besides fandom patriotism, the fandom phenomenon also made a significant difference in the epidemic prevention and control process. At the beginning of the Wuhan lockdown, several fans initiated more than 300 donations totaling more than RMB 7.5 million in 10 days from January 23 to February 2. In this process, the fan circle raised supplies under the certain name of celebrity fans and diverted the supplies according to clear data, alleviating the situation in some areas where supplies were in short supply.

2.3. Referential significance of the structure of organized behavior to the development of student organizations

The advantages of the organization and behavior mechanism of the fan circle can be applied to the ideological and political education management of college students. The fandom has a reasonable division of labor, including fundraising, cashier, auditing, purchasing, transportation, and distribution of materials. After a certain idol released online fundraising information, within 4 minutes, more than 10,000 people participated and raised more than RMB 200,000. At this point the idol sparked a spark of responsibility among the college students in the fan circle, reflecting the rapid response capability, mobilization, and synergy of the fandom organization. In a particular period, the members of the fan circle shifted from virtual online users to responsible adults, overturning the original public perception of the fandom phenomenon.

3. Negative Influence

3.1. Blindly following stars delays the development of one's own personality

Following the development of media technology, various kinds of hit lists and fancy support have turned into a regular way, and stable fandom culture is gradually formed among fans. It is more worrying whether it is rational or blind to the completion of the task again and again. College students will not blindly follow stars. It is

precisely worth paying attention to the fact that they are highly sensitive and cautious in socio-political events and will repeatedly confirm their authenticity, but it is also true that their attitude will be influenced by the statement of the stars they follow. Although college students have independent thinking, they are also easily guided by the values of the fandom culture. In the process of participation, college students might gradually deviate from their original thinking, from the initial worship to the deification of idols. The exclusivity of the circle they belong to drives college students to blindly follow the trend, indulge in it and lose their own selves regardless of the truth.

3.2. Fan base expansion leads to more online violence

The mask of anonymity can amplify the hostility of those behind the keyboard, and in the face of those who denigrate their self-identity, the vast majority will hit back with worse words. The AO3 incident in early 2020 was essentially a case of cultural bullying by one fan circle against another circle, which in turn led to the phenomenon of fandom hostility. The blind following of fans made more idols out of character, which led to the expansion of the phenomenon of fan-circle hostility and thus more cyber violence. According to the questionnaire of this study, 41.77% of college fans would quarrel with others for their idols, while 37% of them agreed to join the ranks of anti-blackness. In the long run, online hostility will inevitably be brought offline, and it will be difficult to see both sides of the issue correctly by treating matters outside of exclusivity with an attitude of rejection in daily life.

3.3. Fandom thinking erodes mainstream values

In the frequent fandom fights, anti-blackness, reporting, human flesh search, and network patrol have already been common, with college student fans being made advantage of. These events time and again on the trending list may seem to be the internal problems of the network culture, but its kernel holds the rational thinking judgment of college students, destroying the existing ideological and political education achievements and eroding the mainstream values. The efficiency and replicability of this mode of operation have created a greater challenge to social morality and public order. Nowadays, ideological and political educators should realize that the conflicts created by the current fandom culture and the group behaviors of the same party are harmful to college students whose values are not yet firmly established, which is an overwhelming danger to the future development of society and the key to the internalization of ideological and political education results by educators in the future.

3.4. Frequent out-of-the-circle behavior infringes on public space

Incidents have occurred frequently in recent years, including meeting stars at airports which then causes flight

delays, buying celebrity endorsement products through online loans, and reporting media that do not give close-ups of their idols, with more than 50 airline fan police cases recorded so far since 2017. The incident of airline trouble that hit the hot search in 2018 was just because of local traffic paralysis as a result of all re-security checks of passengers due to the refund of tickets from those fans. In addition to the airport, public order is also often broken by some crazy fans. These phenomena suggest that the bad elements of the fandom culture are frequently out of the circle, causing some damage to the social order and public space, and even resulting in personal injury.

4. Conclusion

The practitioners of ideological and political education understand the theoretical and practical significance of "fan circle culture"; Introduce some of the latest research on the behavioral mechanisms of the fan circle cultural group from the perspectives of concepts, content dimensions, and implementation methods; Pay attention to the characteristics and causes of college students' participation in the "fan circle" culture through special discussions, establish a feedback and sharing platform, reasonably utilize organizational structure and influence to correctly guide the process of ideological and political education, enable college students to treat the "fan circle" culture with correct concepts and thinking, and guide young college students to grow healthily. Since the beginning of the research, a literature research method has been adopted to collect and analyze the main literature in the relevant fields of this project, as well as current excellent articles. Through educational observation and survey research methods, the individual feelings of teachers, students, and parents during the learning and growth process, as well as relevant materials, have been obtained to explore the practical focus of the impact of fan circle culture on the behavior of college students, The case study method is also used to track the behavior mechanism cases of different types of students under the influence of the food circle culture and after joining the food circle, to master the first-hand materials of the research object, so as to find out the various influencing factors that actually affect the organizational behavior of the "food circle" group from the perspective of ideological and political education intervention. And substantive research and exploration were carried out using the approach of researching, exploring, practicing, and summarizing at the same time. Over the course of several months, relevant achievements were gradually formed.

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