

Exploring the stigmatization of fan image in mass media

Yang Tao*

Broadcasting and Hosting Art of Media College, Sichuan Conservatory of Music, Chengdu, Sichuan, 610021 China

Abstract: With the continuous progress of network information technology, mass media has become increasingly developed, and China's cultural and entertainment industry has also shown a more diverse scene. At the same time, the development of the cultural and entertainment industry has brought about the development of fan culture. The existing fan base in China is constantly increasing, and the current fan stigmatization is becoming increasingly serious. This article explores the current fan stigmatization in mass media and the reasons behind it. By analyzing the factors such as rapid information diffusion of mass media, group aggression of fan groups, irrational behavior of minority fan groups, and highly binding relationship between fans and idols, the root cause of fan stigma is revealed. On this basis, this article proposes ways to eliminate stigmatization, such as strengthening the supervision of online public opinion, guiding fan groups, promoting positive culture, and strengthening constraints on celebrity capital. By implementing these measures, the stigmatization of fans can be effectively reduced, fostering the growth of a wholesome star fandom and contributing to establishing a virtuous fan community and a more civilized society.

1. Introduction

Mass media is the abbreviation of mass media, mainly including newspapers, television, the internet and more. With the development of network information technology, communication methods are constantly increasing, and the speed of communication is also accelerating. Mass media can transcend boundaries in a short period and gather information from all over the world with very important characteristics of transmission, communication and sharing.

Fans mainly refer to the group that generates fanatical emotions towards someone or something, while stigmatization refers to the labeling behavior of a group or individual with a derogatory or insulting nature. [1] Thus, fan stigmatization refers to the stigmatization behavior targeting the fan community. In recent years, the current situation of fan stigmatization has become increasingly serious, especially in the online era, where negative comments about fans continue to increase, and fans are often labeled with various negative labels such as "madman", "blind", "pathological", "mob" and "fanboy". For example, in "Star Chasing Causing Family Destruction and Death - Yang Lijuan Incident" Yang Lijuan became obsessed with Andy Liu at the age of 16. As a student, she not only paid heavily for Andy Liu's posters and records but also dropped out of school to give up socializing and pursue celebrities. Even Yang Lijuan's parents have raised funds multiple times, even to the point of selling a house and kidney, to support Yang Lijuan's pursuit of stars in Hong Kong. But the result of pursuing stars was not satisfactory, to the extent that Yang's father embarked on the path of committing

suicide by jumping into the sea. "Fans mutilate themselves for idols - Show Lou Zhixiang's female fans cut their wrists." Although Show Lou Zhixiang's current reputation is much worse than before when Show Lo held a New Year's concert in Taiwan, he was ready to leave for Kaohsiung at the end of the signing ceremony. There was a fanatical star-chasing female fan who chose to cut her wrists extremely because she didn't want to be separated from her idol. When she went to stop the car alone, the staff only learned about her wrist cut and took her to a nearby hospital. At the closing ceremony of the 14th Changchun Film Festival, Wang Luodan, dressed in a white long dress, was stopped by a man wearing a contrasting striped shirt offering flowers and simultaneously taking out a ring from his pocket. Wang Luodan quickly withdrew and refused, frightened. In fact, there was another opening ceremony for the film "The Man Taken Away by the Light" afterward. The man who had previously proposed once again took out his ring and proposed to Wang Luodan, but Wang Luodan firmly refused. Later, he was directly taken away by the security guard. And through these three examples, it can be clearly reflected why fans are often labeled with various negative labels such as "brain disabled fans". The stigmatization of fans can bring serious consequences, with the large fan base and many young people. Long-term stigmatization can harm the psychological health of fans, and even a small number of fans choose to end their lives after being stigmatized and subjected to "cyberbullying". If the voices in society only attack fandom instead of analyzing fandom and related behaviors from a more rational perspective, do not understand the situation of fan stigma, do not

* Corresponding author: 1812231137@mail.sit.edu.cn

understand the real reasons behind fans, and regulate society's cognition of fan groups and the construction of fan groups themselves, it will lead to more serious fan stigma.

2.The current situation of fan stigmatization in mass media

The cultural and entertainment industry in China is constantly developing. With the advent of the Internet era, the cultural and entertainment industry become increasingly prosperous, and fan stigmatization on the internet has become increasingly severe; especially in the entertainment industry, there have been many fan stigmatization incidents. For example, Cai Xukun's fans had long had conflicts with Bilibili's users or uploaders, and their fans were also severely stigmatized during the dispute between Cai Xukun and Bilibili. [2] Alternatively, in the Wu Yifan incident, before the final illegal behavior was determined, Wu Yifan's fan base clashed with a large number of other groups, [3] thus being labeled as "mentally disabled", which also belongs to fan stigmatization in a word, more and more incidents of fan stigmatization have led people to gradually pay attention to this situation, thus gaining a better understanding of stigmatization.

The scale of fan stigmatization is expanding. With the support of online media, the fan base is constantly growing, and a large number of fans gathering can make their speech more easily induced, forcing many fans to engage in more extreme behaviors. Moreover, online media will spread secondary information promptly, generating many controversies, and fans will be more likely to be stigmatized.

The stigmatization of fans is blind. The fans community consists of many different components, including the staff of idols and "Online Water Army" which means the hordes of people paid to post comments online. It has to be said that there are genuine rational fans and some extreme fans among these fan groups. However, this did not prevent many people from putting their hats on the heads of the entire fan community, and rational fans among them would lose their right to explain and suffer the same impact.

Fan stigmatization has serious consequences. Many ordinary people affected and stigmatized by the group have a certain chance of developing psychological problems after being stigmatized, which affects the generation of many concepts and even affects their physical and mental health and life safety in normal life.

3.The reasons behind the stigmatization of fans

3.1.the rapid spread of information in mass media

In the era of mass media, there has been a tremendous leap in the spread of information dissemination, and many pieces of information will be disseminated to a

wider range of cognitive levels in a short period. The fan group is also based on the development of mass media. According to the 51st Statistical Report on Internet Development in China released by China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) on the afternoon of March 24, 2023, as of December 2022, the number of Internet users in China has reached 700 million, and the number of Internet users increased by 35.49 million in December 2021. The Internet penetration rate has reached 75.6%, an increase of 2.6 percentage points compared to December 2021, [4] which means More and more people are starting to use the internet to obtain information. Only fast and efficient media can bring this group together and widely participate in speech publication and organizational behaviour. The high speed of information diffusion and the intensity of topic discussion will attract various people's attention. The behaviour of fans will also be rapidly amplified, causing discussion among everyone, especially for cultural and entertainment, which belongs to a group with relatively wide attention; many people will pay attention to cultural and entertainment news during leisure time. Soon there will be discussions about the behaviours of fans. If there are some unsatisfactory behaviours, language conflicts will also arise. So, in this environment, group stigmatization is already prone to occur, let alone among the widely watched fan community.

3.2.the fan community has group aggression

As a group, fans have obvious characteristics from their initial formation to their scale. [5] All fans group have obvious characteristics, such as shared goals or a sense of belonging. Fans develop a love for the same star, forming a common goal and belonging. However, for fan groups, the target audience they like is a small part of the vast cultural and entertainment body. If they like entertainment celebrities, they are independent individuals and there is a corresponding competition, which will also lead to certain conflicts and competitive relationships between their respective fan groups. [6] Under the induction of such competitive relationships, fan groups will intervene in the expression of certain groups, such as conducting "control reviews" to ensure that their favorite idols do not have negative comments and will also engage in "ranking" to make their idol or idol' works (movies, track, and others) become the fastest rising one. After these behaviors, it will cause resentment among competitors' fans or some interveners, and even cause certain conflicts. Therefore, the stigmatization of fan groups is accompanied by mutual competition among different groups of fans.

3.3.unreasonable behavior of a minority fan group

One important reason for fan stigmatization is that the number of fans group is too large. In a large fan group, a certain proportion of fans will engage in unreasonable behaviour, and some people will uncontrollably use this irrational behaviour as a reason to be biased and become

a weapon against the entire fan group, thus forming a more serious phenomenon of fan stigmatization. However, the irrational behaviour of the fan group also has certain reasons, mainly including the capital market (considers the business value the idols bring more), blindness in the group (just like the side of their love for their idol, don't have a deep understanding), emotional venting on the internet, using idols as emotional sustenance and others. [7] Under the guidance of numerous reasons, some fans exhibit certain blindness in their behaviour and may engage in many irrational behaviours, which has attracted the attention of some people with ulterior motives or caused resentment from outsiders who have paid attention to the event.

3.4.fans and idols have highly tied relationships

One of the main subjects of fan stigmatization is the idols or individuals that fans "fan". Taking the idol as an example, there is a highly bound relationship between fans and celebrities. When celebrities have a strong topic in public opinion and generate many negative comments, or for some reason, celebrities are stigmatized, fans will be stigmatized due to their high degree of binding with celebrities. For example, in recent years, the well-known "Zhang Zhehan" incident is a celebrity pro-Japanese behavior event that has attracted widespread attention. [8] However, its fans did not immediately realize the seriousness of this incident when the previous incident occurred. Instead, some fans, guided by the studio, carried out "whitewashing" operations on this matter, which caused more people's disgust. At the same time, there is the "Wu Yifan" incident. Before the incident is exposed, many fans will be in a state of trust and admiration for the star, leading to ignoring the truth behind the incident and actively engaging in high ties with the star. [9] So when celebrities engage in illegal and unethical behavior that is exposed or filed, the fan community will be similarly labeled with a stigma. As a result, this highly tied relationship will impact the image of fans if celebrities break the law and are unethical.

4.Exploring the ways of fan stigmatization in mass media

4.1.Strengthen the supervision of online public opinion

Mass media is the medium, and it plays a many roles. Much fan stigmatization is caused by media inducement, and some media distort the truth of things to attract attention or traffic, driven by interests and so on, leading to conflicts. So, in this situation, effective supervision of online public opinion can achieve a certain effect. Relevant units should strengthen the review of information published on the internet, deal with bad or misleading information, and deal with some media that often publish false information. After achieving certain supervision of the media, allowing the media to guide public opinion correctly and conduct news reporting and

publicity with an objective and fair attitude will reduce the occurrence of "online violence" to a certain extent and also reduce the occurrence of stigmatization events. [10]

4.2.Strengthen guidance for fan groups

The fan community is a very important and large-scale group in the online age and a group with certain social characteristics. So, the group needs positive guidance, it can reduce stigmatization incidents and make the fan community take on a certain degree of social responsibility. For example, positive energy guidance can be provided to fans group, public welfare actions can be organized, active competition can be organized, or a small group circle of mutual assistance can be formed. [11] There have been incidents where girls from the rice circle went out to donate materials to severely affected areas and participated in disaster relief as volunteers. [12] In summary, a fan group is a social group that, after actively guiding, can bring positive contributions and impacts to society to a certain extent.

4.3.Strengthen the promotion of positive culture

Positive energy in society is indispensable, and promoting a positive and positive culture in society can enable more people to choose positive attitudes and hobbies towards life, making some choices more rational and objective. For fan groups, if they can think more rationally about the people and things they like, it will also reduce the occurrence of some extremely irrational events. For some people passionate about causing controversy, a positive lifestyle can help them develop positive life pleasures and reduce the amount of fanfare at certain events. For others, focusing on more positive content can help them find their life goals, form an optimistic attitude, and view the fan base with a more rational mindset, reducing stigmatization.

4.4.Strengthen constraints on celebrity capital

As the backbone of fans, if relevant units can constrain celebrities and their underlying capital, it will provide more effective guidance to the fan community. Many idols and companies use their fan base as a means of profit-making and attacking others and will provide much negative guidance to fans for certain interests. So, after regulating celebrities and capital, effective constraints should be imposed on their behavior and speech to avoid inducing behavior toward fans. Moreover, allowing them to devote more energy to business research can reduce conflicts among fans and contribute to the better development of Chinese culture.

5.Conclusion

The stigmatization of fans in mass media is a serious problem society faces. This paper analyzes the reasons behind the stigmatization of fans, including the rapid

diffusion of mass media information, the group aggression of fan groups, the irrational behavior of minority fan groups, and the high bundling relationship between fans and idols. At the same time, this article proposes ways to de-stigmatize fans in mass media, including strengthening the supervision of online public opinion, guiding fan groups, promoting positive culture, and strengthening constraints on celebrity capital.

In practical terms, enhancing the guidance and education within the fan community is imperative, fostering rationality and cultural literacy among fans while mitigating the adverse effects caused by a small number of irrational fan behaviors on society. Concurrently, greater emphasis should be placed on overseeing online public opinion, regulating online discourse, and curbing the dissemination of false information. Additionally, there is a need to intensify the promotion of positive cultural values, encouraging individuals to adopt a constructive outlook on life and contribute to cultivating a favorable social environment.

In conclusion, the stigmatization of fans in mass media poses a multifaceted social issue that demands a collaborative approach from various perspectives. Implementing and reinforcing management and guidance measures become crucial in promoting a harmonious social environment. By undertaking comprehensive efforts to tackle this matter, society can actively contribute to mitigating the stigmatization of fans and cultivating a more inclusive and accepting social fabric.

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