

# The Fan Culture and Fan Economy

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## ABSTRACT

With the rapid development of the information age, the new media has given fans more possibilities and more room for growth. Fans learn various online skills to complete “self-satisfaction” and “self-fulfillment”, and gradually reach a balance of “mutual benefit” through technology empowerment and capital. The fan economy is thus born, and it is interdependent on fan culture. Therefore, this paper mainly explores the relationship between fans and stars, the development orientation of fan culture in the film and television industry, and how the fan culture generated by individuals and fan groups has contributed to the development of the film and television culture industry, as well as the effect of fan culture on film and television economy. Through this study, it is concluded that there is a certain intertextual relationship between fan culture and fan economy. With the development of social media and platforms, communication and clustering among fans are becoming more convenient and close, and its meaning is also being given new meaning on the Internet. Fan culture serves as the support and growth hotbed for the fan economy, and social media provides various channels and ways for it. Media and enterprises can generate economic benefits and promote consumption growth by guiding and driving it. Only by accurately grasping the current development trend of fans, idols and media can we better guide and develop the fan economy.

**Keywords:** Fans, Social effect, Fan culture, Fan economy, Culture industry

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Fans have long been the most active and largest audience in the entertainment economy, positioning themselves as both blind seekers and free “laborers” for capital, but the ambiguous nature of fans and the complexity of their participation dictate that society can no longer simply distinguish between producer and consumer, use value and exchange value. The fans have gradually moved from a passive audience to the top priority of the entertainment industry.

Most of the academic research on it is based on the local market economy and cultural benefits, or focusing on the internal cultural cohesion of fans, community division of labor and benefit output. On the basis of previous studies, this paper aims to understand and discuss the star economy with idols as the core in the fan community, the IP benefits of adaptation, the partnership business model with community as the core, the extensive connection and cooperation between fans, idols and commercial organizations based on community, and its influence on the development of the film and television industry. This paper mainly adopts the methods

of literature analysis and case study. The author also collects a large amount of information about idol worship, social hot spots and the influence of celebrities, as well as other topics and reference data.

As consumers, fans have now turned into “productive consumers” in the true sense. The productivity and purchasing power of fans not only greatly promoted the circulation and development of the market economy, but also produced special economic benefits, and created a more popular and distinctive economic structure and group image. They have been upgraded from the circle of small fans who enjoy themselves to a self-organizing and recyclable commercial platform. To a certain extent, it has a guiding influence on the film and television industries from an economic level, and has the role of a weather vane. Through the research, it can predict and instruct the future fashion, IP, film and television industries to a certain extent. On the one hand, we can transform the existing business model, effectively cultivate die-hard fans of enterprises and loyal users of products, and provide lasting consumption power. On the other hand, the media or the film and television industries use the “fan economy” to gain audiences. Through

specific research on fan groups and analysis of fan hobby potential and orientation, fans can keep in close contact, thus influencing more potential audiences and promoting the development of the film and television industries.

## 2. FAN CULTURE

Fan culture is the English translation of the word “fans”, which is called “fan” by Chinese netizen according to the harmonic sound. Recognition of fan group identification is an indispensable part of understanding the behavior of fans[1]. To a certain extent, fan culture refers to a comprehensive cultural communication and socio-cultural phenomenon that depends on popular culture, caused by the excessive worship and pursuit of an object inside the individual or group because of their virtual or real existence, resulting in cultural consumption and the resulting excessive consumption of their favorite object or unpaid labor time. According to Cai Qi, the fun community is a community with both traditional community cohesion and modern community freedom, and the communication within the group is flattened and hierarchical at the same time[2].

Henry Jenkins once proposed the concept of “textual poachers”. Cultural consumers’ consumption of popular phenomena and their investment in so-called icons are to some extent similar to poachers—the psychological feedback brought about by shooting at one place for another. When poachers gain prey, one comes from the pure sensory experience of the act of acquiring prey and the sense of accomplishment after achieving success, and the other is the sense of excitement and urgency brought by the poachers themselves after violating the rules of the “right phase”. To put it simply, fans pursue celebrities to satisfy their own psychological needs.

It is worth mentioning that even fans in the same community always have various views on idols, which will easily lead fans to not only resonate, but also cause arguments and even quarrels in the process of spitting. To some extent, moderate arguments are conducive to the achievement of community consensus and identity. However, uncontrolled or even heated arguments may affect the unity within the community. Therefore, with the standardization of community management, the managers of fan communities tend to restrict the content and ways of voicing. For example, in the “Descendants of the Sun” bar, the content that compares the show and its actors with other dramas or actors is explicitly prohibited, and posts containing personal attacks, politics or pornography are not allowed to be published[3].

## 3. THE DEVELOPMENT OF FAN CULTURE

### 3.1. *The boost under social platforms*

With the booming development of the cultural and entertainment industries and the popularity of social media, a huge number of fan groups have gradually entered the public eye. Rheingold first put forward the concept of online community in his book “Virtual Community: Home of Electronic Territory”, which defined it as “a group of people who communicate with each other mainly through computer network, know each other to a certain extent, share some knowledge and information, and care for each other like friends to a certain extent.”[4]

Van Dyke thinks that network community is different from organic communities, which transcends the time and space constraints of traditional communities, but still serves the general social, cultural or spiritual interests in real society[5]. On this basis, a unique fan culture has been extended. Taking advantage of the natural advantages of the Internet, audiences have established a kind of relationship network, and the rapid development of media has also driven the expansion of fan groups, while the growth of information fission speed has led to the expansion of fan groups and the flourishing of fan culture. With the new communication technology, communication among fans has become more convenient. The cost is lower, so interactivity is further enhanced. The increased interactivity further strengthens the cultural identity within the fan base and shapes the subculture system based on identity. The reduced cost of communication and interaction also further promotes the organization of fan groups.

### 3.2. *Group power of identity*

Identity is achieved through the projection of idols and group identity in socialization. Fan identity is the key dimension of fan culture and the source of fan cohesion. The establishment of fan culture is accompanied by a sense of collective identity and participation. Fans also establish collective ties by participating in celebrity interaction and companionship, as well as empathy protection, in order to seek spiritual transmission and cohesion.

Fiske, a popular cultural scholar, divides fan productivity into three categories: symbolic productivity, vocal productivity and text productivity. Among them, symbol productivity means that the masses “create the meaning of social identity and social experience from the symbol resources of cultural commodities”. Someone mainly constructed the authority of opinion leaders through the participation of meaning construction. As a dynamic field, in the process of crisis, change and equilibrium, the control of opinion leaders is mainly

enhanced by actively responding to others' remarks. This actually implies a way to construct one's own discourse capital in the Internet environment- active interaction and response[6].

### **3.3. Rise of female power**

"Delay", a youth subculture, emerged in Japan in the 1960s as a reflection of the awakening of female autonomy. The recent marketing of the "her economy" concept reveals the reality that the female population in a country where women have been educated about women's emancipation, gender equality, and the prevalence of female employment in urban areas has been subject to the explicit gaze of capital. But with it comes a new form of empowerment brought about by the logic of capital. The culture of delay carries the multifaceted demands of women who have grown up with the market. The establishment of female characters in most stream texts has always been difficult to satisfy female readers. Male oriented works are full of female characters with empty sex appeal but no brain empathy, while female oriented works are heavily popular with Mary Sue. They gave male characters more abilities and attention, so fans are easily to invest more emotions in male characters.

## **4. TIMES OF OPPORTUNITY**

### **4.1. "Pan-Idolization" wave**

The emergence of platforms such as Weibo, Raptor, Jitterbug and TikTok has made the sharing and dissemination of information easier and faster. In addition to traditional text and picture communication, the diversified media performance of short videos has given weblebrities more space and means to show themselves. These mobile interactive applications with increasingly wide coverage are reaching a wider audience. In the 5G era, the development of mobile media has made it easier and faster to disseminate information, allowing fans to learn about breaking news, fashion trends and other information at any time and any place. Interactive application platforms such as Jitterbug, Shutterbug and Weibo make the influence of internet celebrities even greater, and the creation of a netizen time will lead to the contention and imitation of netizen, causing a huge "Role model effect ", especially for teenagers. The 5G development makes mobile social networks directly enter the era of video face communication, to the point that today, any person has the opportunity to use online platforms as the original channel of fame, and the trend of idol generalization is becoming more and more obvious.

### **4.2. IP Boom**

The key to whether a text can become a sought-after object is whether it has content that can attract audiences

and whether audiences can keep its content elements constantly extended through repeated viewing. In fact, with the rapid evolution of media convergence, media texts are not only in the form of individual TV dramas, TV programs or literary works, but also in the form of new products formed by integrating various aspects of popular culture and mixing different elements. In another way, IP is a new product that can be transformed through various forms of development. It can be a story or a concept.

In addition, the core of IP is "content", and the key to IP operation lies in the fan effect created by the convergence of content. The Harry Potter series has been translated into more than 80 languages and has sold over 500 million copies worldwide. According to wikimili, the sales of the Harry Potter series were \$7.743 billion, creating a myth in the history of global publishing. With the rise of smart phones, handheld games now, Warner Bros. also allowed the release of "Harry Potter: Hogwarts Mystery" and "Harry Potter: The League of Wizards" two games.

## **5. FAN ECONOMY**

Fan economy refers to the cultural consumption caused by the psychology of individuals or groups worshiping and pursuing virtual objects in their minds or objects that exist in reality, which is a comprehensive cultural medium and a sum of social and cultural phenomena, leading to excessive consumption and unpaid labor time for their favorite objects. The rapid development of the Internet has not only broken the boundaries of time and space, but also prompted the fan economy to be widely used in multiple fields such as culture and entertainment, selling goods and providing services. In some ways, fan economy is an improvement on the "physical + virtual" consumption experience.

Idolize is a kind of consumption behavior. In the consumerist culture, stars are regarded as products offered by the entertainment market, while fans, as consumers, can freely choose stars that can meet their emotional experience needs and like them without being bound[7].

Moreover, the "fan economy" pursues the result of social herding behavior, and it does not consider whether such herding is blind or conscious, whether it is superficially obedient or internally acceptable. Whether the "fan economy" can achieve the desired effect depends on how to effectively guide the influence of core fans. The most fundamental point for "fan economy" to achieve the desired effect is how to effectively guide the influence of the core fans to make more users produce crowd behavior[8].

## **6. FAN ECONOMY AND FAN CULTURE**

### ***6.1. The substantial relationship between fan culture and fan economy***

The fan economy is a product of multicultural society and network development, and the “stickiness” and “loyalty” of the fan base have built an infinitely extendable fan economy industry chain. In this industry chain, fans are not only fanatics of a certain star or a certain brand, but also “consumers” and “capital investors” who will pay for their idols and purchase the latest products of the brand for the first time. Teleplays, sports teams and movie stars are just commercialized entertainment consumption forms for ordinary consumers, but for fans, they are “eddy currents” that shape themselves and build communities. Therefore, compared with ordinary audiences, fans will invest more time, experience and feelings in cultural products regardless of gains and losses[9]. As Weber pointed out, once an organization exists, it has the power of self-production, and it will try to find the reason for its continued existence[10]. With this fervent hobby, the star’s agency can develop peripheral products to add value, and the brand can firmly lock down the market consumer group and create business income. Many celebrities will make profits by endorsing products, and even entering the international market in the form of endorsements. On the one hand, they earn commissions for themselves, on the other hand, they drive their personal influence to continue to expand, and even some athletes can’t avoid customs. Taking Yao Ming for example, he joined the NBA for ten years, during which the NBA earned up to \$1.2 billion in the Chinese market through commercial sponsorship, television broadcasting and product licensing sales. Yao has boosted the Rockets’ assets by at least \$167 million.

### ***6.2. The unique economic advantages and behavior of fans***

Under the guidance of the fan economy mindset, businesses provide diversified and personalized goods and services to fan users on certain platforms, while using the idle effect to expand the influence of goods and attract consumers to follow and buy them, eventually forming a group concentration effect. Fans’ consumption is full of blindness. Taking advantage of fans’ following psychology and capital’s use of celebrities’ flow and influence, fans’ emotions are incited and eventually transformed into consumption to realize profits.

The consumption behavior of fans can be roughly divided into two categories: the first category is mainly peripheral, such as buying idol-related albums, movie tickets, cell phone cases, photo albums, etc., and the group uses the profits to support idol activities; the second category supports artist activities, such as casting

votes, etc. Among them, “peripherals”—cultural products related to idols but without actual functions—are the most popular. For example, fans buy movie tickets to support idols’ movies, which is normal cultural consumption, but buying posters, small cards, commemorative signed albums, and even bidding on idols’ used items at high prices is peripheral consumption. Fans constantly increase the number of plays, search frequency, and even spend a lot of money on the purchase of digital albums to give idols more exposure and proof of their commercial strength so that they can get better resources in the circle. This could be a pot of gold for the economic companies behind the idols.

The Word of Mouth Marketing Association (WOMMA) defines Word of Mouth as the act of consumers providing information to other consumers. As a consumer-driven channel of information exchange, word-of-mouth messages are intended to be delivered and received without corporate intervention. However, companies often do not voluntarily do nothing in this process. Information exchange and sharing between fans and communities through gatherings, organizing groups and public social platforms, improves people’s desire to buy around idols and expands their influence. So to strengthen this behavior, major brokerage companies and advertising companies have joined forces to look for flow stars as spokespersons, and produce a constant stream of new peripherals centered on the products to continue to drive fans’ consumption behavior and form a continuous consumption effect. At the same time, it strengthens the economic ties between fans and idols to a certain extent and the emotional ties as well.

## **7. DISCUSSION**

### ***7.1. Social concerns***

One of the biggest concerns about fan culture is the intermediate relationship between culture and violence. Because there is so much emotion in fan worship, it is easy for people to defend their idols and at the same time engage in excessive rhetoric, even violent behavior, or even violate the law. What is more critical is that many fans who are violent towards others do not realize the inappropriateness and irrationality of their behavior. There is a theory in communication called the third person effect, which means that people tend to think that they are the most rational one in the group and will not be influenced by other popular emotions or opinions, but in reality, it is often the exact opposite. The cultural industry makes use of electronic media once more, creating a simulated world for Fans through words, sounds, images, and so on, further confusing fans and immersing them in fantasy. If fans can’t tell the difference between reality and fiction, they will bring fantasy to reality and produce excessive and irrational emotions, and then they

will be able to engage in extreme and crazy behaviors[11]. At the same time, the explosive spread of fan culture has given rise to many underage fans, and many in this group lack sufficient discernment and blindly follow the trend to buy. This provides an opportunity for financial fraud and bad online loans to take advantage of.

## 7.2. Fans and Fan Films

Effective marketing requires that a film program have an image that communicates its content simply and directly to the public. Many movies like to attract more fans and get more box office by using the influence of popular stars. However, the blind pursuit of catering to the psychology of fans can easily lead to the simplification of the film market. Viet believes that the star image plays an instrumental role in such a strategy, and that marketing seeks to match the star image to the assumptions of the film's narrative. The star has to personify the concept of the film[12]. These films are precisely "single" to form an impression among the public and achieve maximum promotion. In the long run, the development of the film industry will be greatly restricted, and movies will gradually become homogenized and vulgarized. For film and television marketing, a huge fan base can indeed trigger the marketing effect, but this result can only bring temporary prosperity, and cannot dominate all future trends.

## 8. CONCLUSION

This paper mainly discusses the importance of fans as a collectivized product to the entertainment industry in the current high-speed information era of Internet development. With the help of the social platform and the consumption behavior generated by the interaction with idols-fan economy, this paper generally discusses the relationship between them and their influence on society, the cultural industry and the entertainment industry. The fans discussed are fans who are in idolize based on their own wishes and emotions. However, there are a certain number of professional fans in today's fan community, some of whom are employed by celebrity teams or companies, and some of whom are profit-making stations established because they see the huge market opportunities of Pink Circle ... Such fans are not covered in the scope of this article. However, their existence does affect the flow of fans, and the impact of the invasion of economic interests in the emotional field is worthy of further discussion in the future.

The general public needs to look at fan culture dialectically, not just to see its flaws and ignore its advantages, or to see its benefits and ignore its harms. People should try to look at the fan issue with a dialectical and judicious perspective, understanding that fan culture is neither beautiful and flawless nor completely corrupted, but rather contradictory - fictional and real,

love and antagonism coexist, respect and reconstruction alternate. On the one hand, it has the innate merit of being participatory, interactive and cohesive, but at the same time, we should be wary and its excessive impact and nonsensical effects.

This paper only examines the general direction of the fan group and the fan economy, without delving into the specifics of the fan group. There is no case study of fan marketing methods, and there is little description of the feedback effect of the market on fans. It is only analyzed in the vertical direction, without a detailed description in the vertical direction. Under the influence of the "fan economy" development model, all aspects of a person's life will be virtually infected and assimilated, such as values, life concepts, etc. Therefore, effective measures should be taken to control it, otherwise it will cause extremely bad consequences. The author's future research direction will be how to guide the positive energy values of the group and establish a correct concept while the fan economy is developing positively.

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