

Fans Creation in the Development of New Media Technology: The perspective of the Participatory Culture

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ABSTRACT

With the increasing development of network communication technology, fan culture has gradually entered the public's field of vision, and the development of media technology has played an important role in it. This article uses Jenkins' media culture theory as the theoretical foundation of the research. Through the observation of the Chinese famous fans' communities and their participation behaviors, the research tries to find out whether the participatory culture exists in the Chinese fan community, and whether it has a detrimental or positive influence on the authorship's profit. This article will use the literature analysis method and observation method. The characteristics of the fan community, participation culture presented by Chinese Harry Potter fan virtual communities, and short video applications are analyzed. On this basis, through the study of fandoms on different platforms, this paper argues that fan creations are still "narrowcast" texts. Due to the participation gap between fans, the narrowcast texts are different from broadcast texts that are accepted and recognized by the public. In addition, fan fans and their creations and interactions exist in some chaos like tort but still have a positive side. Based on this, this article believes that fan fans need to strengthen management and correct guidance.

Keywords: Fan Culture, Participatory Culture, Fan Community

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the concept of participatory culture was proposed by Henry Jenkins in his book *Text Poachers* in 1992, participatory culture has become one of the contents that have received widespread attention worldwide, some scholars have also used it to refer to the phenomenon of cultural engagement that has formed on the Internet in recent years [1-3]. Jenkins defined participatory culture as a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strongly supporting the creating and sharing of creations and some type of informal mentorship whereby experienced participants pass along knowledge to the novice. In the participatory culture, members also believe that their contributions matter and feel some degree of social connection with one another [4]. The popularization of mobile Internet technology and the development of social media have lowered the access and threshold for ordinary people, and a large number of

users have participated in the creation and dissemination of culture. While the Internet has become the main platform for fans and fan circle activities, it also promotes fan exchanges around the world [5]. In this case, the increasing numbers of fan creation, differences in cultural backgrounds, and changing ways of fan engagement have been changed through media innovations. Thus both the behaviors of fans and fandom deserve to be re-examined in the era of new media.

In China, fan culture existed as a subculture for some time and was not widely accepted. After the "227 Incident", some media and scholars also paid more attention to the behavior and psychology of fans on the Chinese Internet. The "227 Incident" refers to a controversy that occurred on Chinese social media on February 27, 2020 [6]. The incident originated from a fanfiction titled *Falling Down* published on Archive of Our Own (AO3). The work is a fanfiction work featuring a Chinese star named Xiao Zhan as the protagonist. After the widespread of the fans, it caused a lot of

dissatisfaction within the fandom. Some opinion leaders among the fans of Xiao Zhan led other fans to complain to the Chinese government authorities that the article contained pornographic content, and the website AO3 was eventually banned in China. It is worth noting that the fuse that triggered this incident was fan fiction, how to treat fan production has also sparked heated discussions in China's Internet society.

In this article, the era of participatory culture and the spontaneous creation of fan groups in the Chinese context will be discussed from three aspects. The spontaneity of fan creation (Spontaneous fan creation) refers to works that fans recreate based on existing works and such as Fanfiction and Fan video-making, spread in the fan community which is usually formed based on the fans' love of the existing works. Generally, these works are generated based on a deep understanding of the existing works of fans and are disseminated to a community of fans with similar perceptions. With the advent of the web 2.0 era, due to the popularization of Internet technology, these fan works have been spread more widely. This article attempts to explore what kind of spontaneous creation of fans in China is faced with some hot phenomena in the Chinese Internet community. Problems, what kind of changes have occurred, and what kind of countermeasures should be taken to deal with such changes. This article attempts to illustrate the spontaneous creation of fans in this context with some hot phenomena that have appeared in the Chinese Internet communities, discussing what kind of problems it faces in China, which changes have occurred, and what kind of countermeasures should be, be taken to deal with such changes.

2. THE PARTICIPATORY GAP

The participation gap also comes from *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century*, and argues that a principal challenge to the acquisition of digital skills and new media literacies, noting that this problem is particularly acute in economically or socially disempowered communities [2]. Some scholars believe that [the "digital divide" is discussed in most discussions of the participation gap, and they believe that the participation gap begins with limited access to high-quality tools and that large-scale participation in society requires overcoming huge cultural and structural barriers [3]. According to the *Measuring Digital Development: Facts and Figures 2021* released by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), more than 60% of the world's population is using the Internet. With the impact of the COVID-19, the problem of the digital divide has become even more obvious. The gap between developed and developing countries, urban and rural areas, and digital infrastructure construction and Internet access between different groups continues to widen [4]. At the same time, in China,

according to the *Analysis of the Digital Economy Situation in the First Half of 2021*, with the continuous improvement of infrastructure construction, China's "Access gap" is changing into a "Cognitive gap" [1, 4]. Different groups of people, different interests, and different cultural backgrounds may cause cognitive gaps, which may become obstacles to participation and interaction. This phenomenon is particularly evident in China's Internet communities. An important factor affecting user engagement is internet memes. In addition, another thing worth noting is that due to the uniqueness of the fan community, fans pay more attention to their contribution to the fandom rather than their true identities. In China, this difference in contribution could sometimes lead to differences in the discourse power in fandom, and may even cause a class gap among fans. Chinese fans often share fan production through social media. These fans often have skills such as drawing, editing videos, and writing text. These skills allow them to produce and share higher-quality content that receives more attention in fandom. The more influential content fans make, the more reputation they gain in the relative community. Thus fans who make more contributions in this process may have a greater right to speak in the fandom. It also enables them to have a greater voice in the online fan community, and even become opinion leaders, making rules and leading the fandom.

The Harry Potter Fan Community is very popular in China. Chinese fans broke the language barrier and created fan fiction in the Chinese language, sending them on the fan's creation platforms like lofter, Baidu Tieba, Potter more in the form of novels, videos, illustrations, and music. They have also made a local interpretation of the original works in the Chinese language community, only those real fans and community members understand these terms, which forms part of the fan culture and protects the fan community to some extent. For example, in the Baidu Harry Potter Bar, "Whitewashing" refers to the beautification of a character, or refers to the novice acquired experience, to get rid of the innocent and naive identity". Little Dragon" is the nickname of the character in original Harry Potter, Draco. In addition, the Chinese fan community has adapted traditional Chinese style to Western fan fiction, formulating the crossover fan fiction, such as those creations that match Lord Voldemort (the character in Harry Potter)and Lin Daiyu (the character of Chinese masterwork, a Dream of Red Mansions), is full of Chinese classical poetry, the style of writing also tends to be archaic. At the same time, there are many Chinese elements in the novel, such as Xiu Xian(learn to be immortal and become a god), martial arts and traditional snacks. These western original Chinese interpretations are rooted in Chinese Culture and form a barrier to participation which lead to only those who know Chinese culture can understand the meaning of it. In addition to the spacing between groups, this participatory gap also exists within circles. Because of

skill levels, there will be opinion leaders and a low sense of "Little transparency" in the fan community, which led to a huge participatory gap. Users with more popular works often have more say, serving as opinion leaders both in the creation of fan work and in their daily interactions with fans. While those users who are less active in the community can only be the opinion recipients.

In November 2020, the image of Ma Baoguo, the master of "Hunyuan Xingyi Taijiquan", with his black eyes, went viral on various online platforms. "Young people don't follow the martial arts", "Look out for yourself" (with the harmony of "Rat tail juice" in Chinese) and other "Golden sentences" had become popular imitations of the sentence pattern. A large number of those sentences had been applied in many parody videos at that time, appearing as a kind of "Viral" spread phenomenon online. While these videos had generated a huge degree of attention for Ma, some business organizations tried to participate in and lead the discussion of mass media, making a lot of noise about their actions of Ma to justify and encourage the public to imitate. People's Daily, an official media in China, stands out and argues that it was a farce and a way for capital to grasp financial profit from the social media platforms. It required the social media platforms to step up censorship of similar content and advised the government regulators to step up their scrutiny of such practices. Since then, relevant social media platforms had taken down the relevant videos and Ma's fan communities, announcing an official argument on the platform to explain the relevant policies. Through this "Ma Baoguo incident", the public realized the comments of People's Daily are somehow representing the attitude of the Chinese official positions. With the development of the Participatory Culture, this phenomenon has also attracted some attention. What role do opinion leaders play in the changing public opinion of social events? Will the gap between social status and discourse power become another gap affecting users' participatory behaviors?

On the other hand, if the participation culture can be used properly, like legally authorizing fans to do mass entrepreneurship and innovation, then the same intellectual property may let out the multiplying potential so that it can spread to the public by a viral transmission which could lead to unimaginable economic and social benefits [7]. Those findings may explain the phenomenon that the participation of the public and the carnival of fans are still relatively closed in a network era from a theoretical point of view. Without capital and commercial operation, it is difficult for fan works to enter the public's vision. Another problem of Chinese participation culture is that due to the low barriers to the entrance and creation in the fan community, the quality of many fan creations varies, with plagiarism, grammatical errors, misspellings, vulgar writing, and so on. Most of the fan creation is poorly made to attract the

attention of the audience and there is a small amount of content with the producer's thinking. The public tends to Interpret events entertainingly. In the case of Ma Baoguo, unlike the mainstream media, the attitude of the majority of ordinary users gradually changed from satire and criticism to teasing and entertainment. In the age of social media, the development of Internet culture is largely dependent on the engagement and interaction of users on social platforms. In *Amusing ourselves to death*, Neil Postman believed that "The biggest problem facing the media society is not that television provides entertainment for people, but the content presented in the form of entertainment, and even political, religious, news and other content has become the dependency of entertainment" [8].

3. THE PARTICIPATORY CULTURE AND COPYRIGHT

The controversy over participatory culture and copyright has shown some changes in the era of Web2.0. Before that, the controversy was more concerned about the copyright infringement of the original work by the fan creation, and now, with some fan works adopted by the original production company and broadcast as part of the sequel, the copyright owner of fan works has also become the focus of controversy. With the widespread popularity of short video social platforms in China, a kind of infringement on short video social platforms has aroused social discussion.

3.1. Secondary Processing

Opening the video platforms like Toutiao, Douyin, and Bilibili randomly, it is easy to see some fan creations uploaded in the form of short videos which is normally in a relatively short time (generally 5-15 minutes) to interpret a film or television works, without the producer's authorization. This kind of phenomenon which edits the classic films and television works twice is an infringement of the author of the original Copyright. At present, secondary processing in the short video industry has formed a black industrial chain, that is, these "Porters" steal other people's original video works to obtain the flow economy, using secondary processing in editing, producing pseudo-original video works to avoid detection of the short video platform.

For example, Bilibili's famed content publisher @ Wooden fish often uses good editing, good copy, and a gentle voice to explain a movie or a TV show in a few minutes, from anime to historical drama, from science commercials to esoteric art films, and come up with his unique insights. Although this kind of way of editing satisfies some audiences using the fragment time to understand a movie demand, it has affected the audiences' willingness to pay for those original movies, and television shows, which hugely damages the interests

of the original film and Television copyright holders, hitting the production of their work enthusiasm. Therefore, this kind of re-processing clip short video has been criticized by the current film and Television Industry in China and has constantly caused related public opinion and legal disputes. However, with the rise of Copyright Awareness, the relevant management departments, producers, editors and directors, and more ordinary people's awareness of copyright should be raised to a higher level since the casual use of material by producers of short videos is in essence a form of copyright infringement.

3.2. Handle Directly

"Handle directly" means that without the permission of the copyright owner, users directly download or forward the works of others, which infringes the copyright owner's right to information network dissemination. Some short video users like to be "Porters". When they see a good short video created by someone else, they will download it and release it again under their name. Others deliberately remove watermarks of original works, or alter only a small part of the content, to avoid copyright issues and ignore labels such as "forbidden" and "original" so that they could be regarded as originators and publish the content again on the social media to accumulate playback quantity which leads to the rising popularity of plagiarists while the originators did not get any benefits which severely hit their creative enthusiasm.

3.3. Similar Content

The phenomenon of having similar content is very common on the Chinese Internet. There is countless "Same paragraph" content that emerged which is often a hot creative content out of the moment. In Bilibili, there is a tendency for a single piece of content to take over for a short period. This content is often some kind of funny joke which owns nothing special meaning but can be used in a variety of video contexts. For example, "To be continued" originally comes from the Japanese anime "JoJo's amazing adventure" which is now often placed at the end of the video, indicating an unfortunate ending to arise in the audiences' imagination. Another similar example is "Can you promise the watermelon is ripe?" which originally came from the TV series "Conquest". But now it is often used in satirical videos. There are many more such languages on Chinese Internet platforms and they can occupy every corner of the Internet platform in a short period, showing the characteristics of viral spread and mostly empty content with no special meaning to it except to be funny and banter. Video with the same elements will not only cause users aesthetic fatigue but also lead to the emptiness of Internet content which could even affect the innovative development of the short video industry.

4. FAN CULTURE AND FANS' FREE IMMATERIAL LABOUR

With the advent of the web 2.0 era, as the early and main users, the influence of fans on the Internet cannot be ignored. Fans' creations through the Internet have allowed some companies to see their potential commercial value. Unlike the traditional opinion that fan fiction is a gift between fans, commercial companies began to use fan works to make a profit and invited (or even hired) fans to create by building new platforms [9]. Some academics have expressed criticism of this use of user-generated content (UGC), arguing that it is free to use fan contributions by some commercial companies that own the franchise.

In 2014, a fan of Chinese writer Liu Cixin's science fiction novel "Trisomy" updated a fan animation based on the game MC on Bilibili. In 2016, the company that held the Copyright of "Trisomy" collected the "eight-party of Fugue" team, "My Trisomy" from fan works to official works. The company that owned the copyright of "Trisomy" would be absorbed by the eight-party of Fugue team and step into the stage of commercial production. After the incorporation into the "Technological explosion" period, "My Trisomy's" original painting style had not changed (still in the form of MC), nor opened the members to watch the film to deliberately pursue commercial value. Even if there was no real economic benefit, the team was still focused on creating, and reflecting the synergy of media, audience, and art [10]. Outstanding fan creations by that time were attracting active and loyal fans and engaged in interaction in multiple media. These creations included user generated content such as user-edited songs, illustrations and plot analysis videos. For example, in the January 2020 "Trisomy immersive time and space" offline exhibition, a trailer for "My Trisomy chapter of Beihai Biography" was looped in the final hall of the exhibition which successfully attracted the fan of the original work. In 2018, fans were commenting about the anticipation of the "Trisomy" peripheral. Since then, the official Trisomy's flagship store posted calendars, badges, notepads, dolls, and other peripherals that were highly popular. The success of "My Trisomy" was not only thanks to the main creative team's tough revolutionary belief and beyond the professional attitude but also inseparable from the company behind the commercial blessing.

5. CONCLUSION

Fan culture has gradually entered the public's field of vision, and the development of media technology has played an important role in it. But the culture of fandom can not simply be seen as Jenkins's participation culture since Jenkins's participatory culture, from fan engagement to public engagement, was shaped in the

context of American society with a strong American tinge. It remains to be resolved whether the participation culture theory can be universally portrayed as distinct from Chinese public participation in the US. This article has presented the participation culture do exists in the modern Chinese fans' communities by observing several internet platforms in China, like Bilibili, Baidu Tieba, and Lofter which finds that the participation culture has its narrowcast texts which distinguish the fans and non-fan group. The application of fan participation is a double-edged sword for the development of fan culture. If the fans are blindly consuming the original content as cultural poachers, the traditional content producers may suffer a serious setback even bankruptcy which will lead to the disaster of the high-quality cultural industries. While pursuing entertainment, people should also think about what kind of interaction of information and views will be brought about by pursuing entertainment, and what impact will such a culture have on the survival and development of mankind in the future? Therefore, if the Chinese fan participation culture is to become a mass culture text with literary value, the quality, and level of the works must be improved. In the future, Chinese fan communities may gradually break down the participatory gap allowing more good fan creations to be seen as popular culture, rather than as a haphazard form of self-entertainment and copying within the community. Through the Participatory Culture, the participatory gap will be broken gradually, and the fan culture will not only be closer to the mainstream ideology but also to the mainstream culture. This is not the integration of one culture into another, but the dialogue and exchange of two ideologies and two cultures. Only when the ideology of the fan is close to the mainstream ideology can it receive more people's recognition of values, both inside and outside the circle. To the mainstream ideology of fans, the fan communities are more likely to produce outstanding fan creations that are recognized and accepted by mainstream ideology.

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