



# Research on the Publicity Strategies of Nurturance Idols under the COVID-19

## A Case Study of “Teens in Times”

Kunyi Shi<sup>1, \*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Tianfu School, Chengdu, Sichuan 610000, China

\*Corresponding author. Email: 164903318@stu.cuz.edu.cn

**Abstract.** The closure of cinemas and cancellation of all concerts around the world is a huge blow to entertainment companies and fans. “Teens in Times” (TNT) as a nurturance idol group, who debuted in November 2019, has rapidly increased its online publicity and held online concerts. This paper studies the propaganda strategies and effects of nurturance idols in the context of an epidemic situation with TNT as the research subject. This study distributed more than 100 questionnaires and observed TNT’s accounts on Weibo, Bilibili, Kuaishou, and Tiktok platforms. It is observed that TNT carries out basic online publicity by posting materials, like photos of daily life on these platforms and participates in variety shows, films, and TV series to attract fans. Moreover, accepting advertising endorsements is also a means of promotion. According to the survey, the majority of TNT’s fans are female students from junior middle schools and colleges, and nearly half of the respondents got to know each other through short videos. The publicity strategies of the company, Time Fengjun, focus on online publicity and are very effective, but they also have many shortcomings from the perspective of fans. Most of the fans will not spend money on branded merchandise, which shows that the company needs to make adjustments in the way of publicity to promote consumption. This paper also gives corresponding suggestions and optimization strategies for the status quo.

**Keywords:** Nurturance idol, TNT, Promotion strategy, Short video platform, Psychology of fans.

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Research Background

According to the 48th Report on Internet Development in China released by the China Internet Network Information Center, the number of short video users in China reached 888 million by June 2021, accounting for 87.8 percent of the total Internet users [1]. Meanwhile, the Short Video Industry Data Analysis released by Imedia Data Center shows that, as of June 12, 2020, the number of videos submitted by Bilibili’s star channel reached 126.22 million, exceeding the total number of videos submitted by all

other channels [2]. It can be seen that short video platforms can help stars to do great publicity, and the popularity of stars also has a great influence on short video platforms.

Nurturance idols are very popular in recent years. In the early stage of training, the company will let these idols show in front of the public as trainees, which can not only show the trainees' hard training appearance but also attract some future "old fans", and short video platforms have become an important tool for the company to release these videos. In addition to those videos posted by the company, fans will also repost or edit videos to promote their idols. Through the short videos, the company will achieve or even exceed the expected publicity effect. For example, through various publicity channels, TNT has in recent years gained more than 10 million fans.

## **1.2 Explanation of Concepts**

### **1.2.1. Idol Publicity through Short Video.**

The short video is one of the branches of mass strategy, which has been popular in recent years. Short videos refer to videos of a few seconds and ten minutes released on various new media platforms for viewers. On short video platforms, fans and stars themselves will release, edit and forward short videos related to the stars for the purpose of publicity. This kind of short videos is classified as idol promotion short videos.

### **1.2.2. Nurturance Idol.**

Nurturing-type idol refers to a group of boys and girls who receive the most basic training since their childhoods, including singing, dancing, and acting. The term was introduced into China from Japan. From trainee to debut idol, their fans can participate in the whole process. As the most successful nurturance company, Time Fengjun has successfully transformed singing and dancing idols into actors, which is unprecedented.

## **1.3 Research Significance**

The cultivation of idols is popular in recent years, but the research on fans' consumption behavior of fans under this operation mode of idols and relevant propaganda strategies of the cultivation of idols is relatively insufficient. This study analyzes the publicity strategies of TNT from the perspective of their fans' consumption of official albums and branded merchandise.

As one of the most popular groups in China, TNT has a large number of fans and covers a wide range of age groups. It is of great significance to study the propaganda and marketing mode of the idol group which has great influence. This study tries to promote the further development of the industry and optimize the publicity strategy and marketing model.

## 1.4 Literature Review

### 1.4.1. The Relationship between Fans' Consumption Behavior and the Short Video Marketing Model.

With the rapid development of the short video industry, the marketing mode of short video has been gradually formed. Some scholars have proposed three marketing types of short videos, including series of marketing, knowledge marketing, and the flow of marketing [3-5]. These three types of marketing are different ways to achieve the same goal, namely, to encourage consumption. In addition to the most basic short video playing, live video has also become one of the main consumption channels for short video users. According to the data in a report, China's live broadcast industry showed a rapid development trend from 2012 to 2016 [6]. Three consumption characteristics were mentioned by some scholars – deep involvement, interactive participation, and inactive fans. This paper makes use of these characteristics [7]. Besides, a scholar separates fans into three types: economical fans, productive fans, and participative fans [8].

### 1.4.2. The Right of "Nurturance" Fans.

When Time Fengjun succeeds in making idols popular, fans will give their opinions to the company for the sake of idols. This creates a confrontational situation. In *Consumption and Empowerment: A Study on the Expression of Fans' Rights through Idolatry on Weibo*, the writer took TFBOYS, the first generation of idolatry fostered by Time Fengjun, as an example and conducted in-depth interviews with their fans to see their interaction with the company whose treatments to their idols were generally criticized [9]. A scholar thinks that due to the characteristics of “cultivation” of idols, “empowerment” of fans, and “symbolization” of consumption, the fan group is younger; the fan emotion is fanatical; and the fan behavior is intensified [10]. TNT, as the idol of the second generation of Time Fengjun, was also treated unfairly. The fan club also negotiated with the company, with both ideal and unsatisfactory results. At the same time, fans can provide feedback if they think there is a problem with the company's promotional strategy. Fans have their rights, but these rights do not represent the final decision of the company.

## 1.5 Methodology

This paper uses both quantitative and qualitative research methods. This research studies the propaganda strategies of TNT and their effect on their fans. This study observes TNT's official accounts on Weibo, Bilibili and Kuaishou, including the bullets and comments under their videos. In addition, this study produced and released a questionnaire to more than 100 fans and then analyzed the publicity strategies and influence of TNT based on the survey data.

However, the research method of questionnaire survey has certain limitations. Most of the respondents in this study may include fans with similar hobbies as the questionnaire publisher, because the questionnaire was distributed in the fan group, circle of friends and through Weibo's “Super Message”, and only a few of them completed the

survey through the questionnaire link provided by the “Super Message”. In addition, there is inevitably some information error in the observation of the official accounts of TNT because some fanatical fans will use several accounts to like and comment on the same videos.

Through observation and questionnaire, this study found that TNT’s main publicity methods are to release materials, to upload daily photos and stage videos, to accept advertising endorsements and a variety of external service, and to shoot movies and TV series. The main publicity channels are Weibo, Kuaishou, Bilibili and Tiktok. Fans also help publicize their idols by editing videos, polishing photos, and selling their products. However, there are some problems with the company’s promotion strategies for TNT, and fan’s satisfaction level is not very high. A large number of fans will not consume products endorsed by their idols or official albums. The company needs to make adjustments to promote consumption and improve fans’ satisfaction.

## **2 TNT’s Main Propaganda Methods**

### **2.1 Basic Methods – Weibo, Advertising, and Other Schedules**

The members of TNT mainly release daily photos short videos, and advertisements on Weibo. The short videos with TNT members’ photos are the most popular among fans, and these updates have the highest data value. According to the visual data, all members’ daily photos received about 1 million likes. However, the external advertising campaign rarely gets more than 500,000 likes. TNT has been on Weibo’s hot list several times, which helps to put members in front of more people. One of TNT’s members Liu Yaowen, for example, posted a set of live photos on Weibo. He became a hot search topic on Weibo because of his excellent appearance, and more people got to know him. It was a very successful campaign.

In addition to Weibo, TNT also received some advertising endorsements. Advertisements are common in people’s lives, so they can effectively popularize TNT in public. In addition, TNT’s members have been involved in a variety of shows, like *The Negotiator*. Those shows, as entertainment programs, are a pastime for most young and middle-aged people. Audiences are likely to turn to fans while relaxing. Moreover, TNT’s members can make friends with many senior stars while participating in variety shows. Besides, the whole TNT crew performed in the Spring Festival Gala. The Spring Festival Gala is a major program watched by almost all Chinese people. Countless pairs of eyes saw them and countless people could recognize them. In addition, TNT’s members perform at major events such as the Winter Olympics. Through this kind of international event, many people will pay attention to them and have a chance to learn about them. The publicity methods above are the company’s most basic publicity strategies for TNT.

### **2.2 Short Video Platforms – Bilibili, Kuaishou, Tiktok**

TNT has also released a large number of promotional videos on Bilibili, Kuaishou, and Tiktok platforms. According to the observation of the official accounts of TNT on

various short video platforms, these accounts mainly release stage videos and materials about daily life, among which stage videos also show direct shots of the members. Both stage videos and materials about daily life are very popular with fans, with more than 1 million likes. Besides, the content posted by each platform account is almost different. As a popular debut idol group, the stickiness of fans is very high. No matter what software platforms publish updates, most of the updates will be watched. However, compared to Kuaishou, which updates more frequently, accounts on Bilibili and Tiktok gained far fewer likes. Therefore, it is also necessary to pay attention to the needs of fans in the publicity strategy. Time Fengjun needs to strengthen the management of the Tiktok account to prevent it from becoming a “zombie account”.

Take a video released by TNT on Tiktok, featuring two of the members as an example. The video, which promotes friendship against school violence, had about 1.5 million likes. The video is popular for two reasons. The first is the crazy publicity of the “couple” fans of the two members, and the fans have published countless related videos or news on the Internet. The second is about the content and form, namely its professional shooting technique, the plot of the script written by a well-known writer, and the actors’ good appearance. All these make it easily surpass other sitcoms on the Internet. However, the company uploaded the same video 18 days later on Bilibili, where it received about one-fifth as many likes as it did on Tiktok. This is because the excitement stage was passed, and some fans did not know that the video was also posted on Bilibili. Therefore, the video will not be popular if it is not released the video in a timely manner. In addition, the company released not only the video but also the branded merchandise for sale. Unboxing branded merchandise videos recorded by fans will be publicized on short video platforms, which is another indirect means of publicity.

In addition to releasing videos on the platform, TNT also broadcasts videos about birthdays and anniversaries on Kuaishou. It is a rare cross-regional interaction between fans and idols during the pandemic. Live performances can also reveal the strength of idols. Videos posted by fans are other methods of publicity. Compared with birthday live broadcast, anniversary live broadcast is more popular among fans, because some underage members are not allowed to broadcast live, which makes many fans disappointed. In addition, some idols may not show up during the live broadcast of their birthdays, and even if they do, there are not many scenes. The annual broadcast is not only for the entire TNT cast, but also includes many game segments, shows, and raffles. Both the group and the fans are looking forward to it. Moreover, since concerts cannot be held during the pandemic, the live broadcast of the anniversary instead of concerts will make fans’ expectations higher. To sum up, the short video platform is another strong and effective publicity tool for TNT.

### **3 Analysis of the Propaganda Effects**

#### **3.1 Fans’ Growth**

According to the statistical data of the questionnaire, TNT’s fans are almost all female, and they are mainly distributed in high schools and colleges, accounting for 46.55% and 29.31% of the total respondents respectively. Thus, the cultivation of youthful

vitality is more popular with young people, and the company can promote TNT to more high school and college students. More than half of the fans were attracted to TNT in 2020 and 2021, which indicates that the company's publicity strategies during this period were very effective. In addition, about half of the fans surveyed were attracted by stage videos and short videos initially. When the official accounts of TNT are updated on Bilibili and Weibo, most fans will immediately check them. The results show that the publicity strategies of these two platforms are relatively effective compared with the other two platforms. Weibo is a necessary publicity platform for every star and an important platform for fans to hit the list. There are two reasons why Bilibili, as a platform featuring short videos, is so popular with fans. One is that some videos can only be watched on Bilibili; the other is that short videos are a trend in recent years, and many stars are using short video platforms for publicity. Moreover, idols' short videos also have a positive impact on the short video platforms. According to the statistical analysis of the data presented in the questionnaire, more than half of the fans have increased the utilization rate of short video platforms due to TNT, and 24.56% of the fans have even started to use short video software that they have never used before due to TNT. Therefore, in order to adapt to the trend of young people, Time Fengjun can further develop its online publicity.

### **3.2 Consumption Behaviour**

"TF Family Fan Club" is a kind of software specially developed by the company for fans to consume. Almost all official peripheral items, such as albums and sketches, can only be purchased by prepaid senior members, and only one can be purchased. In addition, only senior members can view the "Fan club updates" of TF family members, including photos, radios, and videos. According to the questionnaire survey, about half of the respondents who subscribe to the club aim to buy accessories and check their idols' "Fan clubs".

However, only 48.28% of the respondents will register for various reasons, while the rest of the fans have never registered for senior membership. However, 12.07 percent of the survey respondents buy albums and other accessories through proxy auction rather than through the application. Helping others to buy albums is a popular trend recently. If fans do not want to top up club membership or want to buy more than one peripheral, they will look for other fans who are in the club and have not bought that peripheral. Besides, the special dynamic of TF family that attracts fans to recharge the high club has also been spread on the Internet. Many fans who recharge the high club feel worthless, and many fans who do not recharge the high club feel that there is no need to recharge the high club.

When it comes to the products endorsed by TNT, 44.83% of respondents immediately buy them. They cannot only support the brands endorsed by their idols but also get gifts from the brands. Fans who want to buy products with endorsements usually do so in the live broadcast room of the brand, because there are not only promotional events but also opportunities to get autograph photos and posters. Some fans will post the purchasing updates on social platforms after the products arrive, and cheer for their idols. For example, some fans who have snapped up the ice tea endorsed by TNT, have

posted numerous photos of it on Tiktok and Weibo. Some fans who bought too much ice black tea, even offered them to passing delivery boys and sanitation workers in the public areas. This not only helped the idol boost sales but also helped many people working in the heat. As the consumption of most endorsement products is very fierce, 25.86% of the fans will give up buying them because they cannot get them. The rest of the respondents do not buy products endorsed by TNT. This shows that advertising endorsement can bring a certain benefit to the brand, but more than half of the fans do not make consumption. Time Fengjun can make improvements in the following two aspects. First of all, they can reduce the threshold of peripheral purchase, that is, reduce the cost of senior membership. In this way, more fans will be willing to spend money. Secondly, they can increase the quality of the branded merchandise. Diversified and practical peripheral items can attract fans to consume more.

### 3.3 Psychology of Fans

In addition to stage videos and new songs, Time Fengjun also arranges commercials, shows, and movies for its members. Most fans are satisfied with the stages, new songs, and variety shows, among which the stage publicity is the most popular, followed by the release of new songs and variety shows. Still, plenty of fans disagree with some of the company's decisions, such as its members' schedules. Only 32.76 percent of respondents agree with most of the company's decisions. The fan club has the right to give advice or negotiate with the company. However, about 30 percent of the respondents were not satisfied with the company's changes.

TNT's fans can be roughly divided into three types. The first type is active. They like, comment on and repost everything their idols post. They will also edit the highlights into videos and post them on short video platforms or refine the beautiful photos of their idols and post them on social platforms, which is called "An Li" in Chinese. As far as the questionnaire survey is concerned, one-third of the respondents belong to this type. More than half of the respondents are engaged, who like, comment on and retweet the posts less frequently than active fans. Finally, there are the inactive fans, who tend not to post online. The rest are inactive. All in all, in addition to the direct promotion made by Time Fengjun, most fans also publicize TNT online. The short video platform is one of the most popular publicity platforms, and this publicity method has become one of the main channels for TNT's fans. At the end of the questionnaire, a scoring question regarding the company's publicity strategies for TNT was set. The survey results show that the average score is 3.8 out of 5 points, which shows that the publicity strategies of Time Fengjun need to be further optimized. Therefore, the company can first observe some of the ideas posted by fans on the Internet before arranging the idols' schedules. In addition, in recent years, many idols with strength and background have joined the fierce competition in the entertainment circle, and many young people in a short period of time can become a fan of other idols. Therefore, it is inevitable that TNT will lose a large number of fans, and the company needs to put forward corresponding countermeasures for this situation.

## 4 Conclusion

In the era of new media, all entertainment companies are constantly changing and optimizing their promotion strategies to adapt to this change. Time Fengjun has successfully produced two generations of idol groups that have debuted and become popular, which is a process that relies heavily on the promotion of the company and fans on various short video platforms. However, there are some problems with Time Fengjun's propaganda strategies for TNT from the fans' perspective. The company should make appropriate corrections to address fans' dissatisfaction with the members' schedules and the problem that fans do not spend more than half of their money. Secondly, as youth idols, TNT also needs to set a good example for their younger fans. Finally, this paper hopes that the suggestions for modifications will be effective in helping to adjust the promotion strategies of the companies with nurturance idols.

## References

1. China Internet Network Information Center. "The 48th Report on Internet Development in China". September 15, 2021. Retrieved on June 3, 2022. Retrieved from: [http://www.cnnic.net.cn/hlwfzyj/hlwxzbg/hlwtjbg/202109/t20210915\\_71543.htm](http://www.cnnic.net.cn/hlwfzyj/hlwxzbg/hlwtjbg/202109/t20210915_71543.htm)
2. Imedia Media Center. "Short Video Industry Data Analysis: 126.22 Million Video Have Been Submitted to Star Channel of Bilibili Platform". June 20, 2020. Retrieved on June 3, 2022. Retrieved from: <https://www.iimedia.cn/c1061/72112.html>
3. B.B. Guo, "Research on short video Marketing Model in the new media Era – take Tiktok as an example", *Dissemination and Copyright* 2(2022) 58-60. DOI: 10.16852/j.cnki.45-1390/g2.2022.02.001
4. Z.Y. Zhong. "Research on the marketing model and strategy of 'short video +'". Master's thesis, Jiangnan Normal University, 2020.
5. X. Bi, "Research on the Reconstruction and Optimization Strategy of Short Video Marketing Model in the Post-Epidemic Era", *Price Theory and Practice* 10(2021) 121-124. DOI: 10.19851/j.cnki.CN11-1010/F.2021.10.366
6. Z.S. Jiang. "Research and Graphic Report on the Development Status and Trend of China's Live Video Industry". April 20, 2017. Retrieved on June 3, 2022. Retrieved form: <https://m.doc88.com/p-4019683414536.html#>
7. M.Q. Zheng. "Research on the operation strategy of Papi Jiang short video based on consumption behavior of fans". Master's thesis. Shandong University 2020.
8. Q.Y. Liang, "A Study on Consumer Behavior of Idol Fans Based on Participatory Culture", Master's thesis. Jinan University, 2021.
9. L. Chen. "Consumption and Empowerment: A Study on the power expression of idol-forming fans in Weibo Space – A case study of TFBOYS fans". Master's thesis. Jinan University, 2020.
10. W.J. Yu, "Contemporary Cultivation of Idol Culture: Representation, Causes and guidance, School of Marxism, Southeast University", *Journal of Shandong Youth Political College* 04 (2022) 51-56. DOI: 10.16320/j.cnki.sdqzzyxb.2022.04.012



**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

