



Interrelation between Subcultural Groups and Economy in the New Consumption Era

An Empirical Study Based on Various Fan Culture Groups

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Abstract. With the advent of the new era of consumption, the development of the Internet and technology has brought different characteristics and influences on our community formation, subculture and economy. With the changes in the interaction mode of social groups, social groups have gradually formed different groups and cultures based on various Internet products and models. In the theoretical basis of combining many subcultures and economic relations, Jenkins defines participatory culture as a kind of culture. A person who allows free expression of artistic talent and civic engagement to share his creations with others. Under this theoretical framework, this paper explores the emergence of new subcultures with the characteristics of fan groups through the methods of online ethnography, observational empirical research, and in-depth case interviews. It can be a good reference for economic development and social well-being.

Keywords: fan culture; fans Groups; relationship with economy; new consumption era; subcultural groups; *participatory culture*; subcultures

1 Introduction

From the early 1990s to the PC Internet in 2008 to 2014, the communications industry has taken off, bringing great convenience to society as a whole while generating online social networking, streaming video, e-commerce, and entertainment and corresponding business models due to the explosion of smartphone technology. When thinking about the future Internet of Things era and virtual world, the mode of social group interaction has also changed. From the traditional agricultural and industrial societies in the past, people gathered and interacted with each other by blood and kinship, and by ritual and geography, to the formation of different industrial organization members due to the mode of industrial production. Nowadays, social groups are also gradually forming different groups and cultures with various Internet products and modes, which corresponds to the post-industrial society as discussed by Bell, an era in which the new technological revolution with computers as the core is rapidly unfolding.

The culture generated by these groups has different attributes: 1) Different formation backgrounds, from blood, geography, and industry to fun. Various apps and mobile applications have brought together people with different hobbies and interests. Fan definition is not limited to film and television stars, Idol, not limited to the rice circle, but more have brands, works, film and television, and novels. 2) There are many subcultural groups. The Internet's work, social, and network worlds have a variety of interest clusters, thus breeding the attributes and differentiation of subcultures. The user data of Facebook, Twitter worldwide, Weibo, Tik Tok, and bilibili within China can show that the number of participants exceeds all groups in the past. The number and size of users are measured in billions, and the speed of spread is increasing. 3) Different cultural groups have the ability to consume in a participatory manner. Giddens' social binary structure is no longer limited to the real village, the virtual website will be different cultural labels of people, derived from the phenomenon of subcultural fire. 4) The definition of culture and cultural groups is no longer limited, cultural groups practice their own cultural attributes, diversity and differentiation.

Consumption and participatory culture go hand in hand, feeding the economy and reinforcing each other. Both Karl Marx and Marx Weber's theories explore the role of culture as a catalyst for economic development. For example, during the COVID-19 fandom girls, from January 23, 2020 to February 6, a total of 323 fan organizations,

initiated donations 413 times, with a cumulative amount of 8,861,000 yuan². According to iResearch, in 2019, 41% of "post-95s" spent money to support their idols, with an average spending amount of 1,365 yuan in the past year³. The market size of the fan industry has increased by nearly 200% in 3 years. According to Quest Mobile, from 2017 to 2019, the market size of fan industry grew from more than 20 billion yuan to more than 60 billion yuan (forecast value), an increase of nearly 200%. Among them, the proportion of fans "buying goods" has grown from 30% to over 50%, becoming the most "gold-sucking" item. This paper explores the new consumer era and the new cultural relationship by examining three aspects of what fan culture entails, the special qualities of fan groups, and the impact on the economy.

2 Literature Review

Exploring the relationship between subculture and economy in the Internet era covers the following: The first is what is subculture, also known as subculture, which refers to the non-mainstream, non-popular local cultural phenomenon corresponding to the main culture, which is in a marginal position compared to the main culture or integrated culture, reflecting the cultural self-identity of some "marginal" or "lonely" people who do not or temporarily do not enter the mainstream social system and get the mainstream cultural recognition, and is the product of the communication generation gap and social structure contradiction. Subcultures are the specific cultural forms, contents and values of a particular age, population, occupation, social circle, and state of life of a region or a collective. Subcultures also contain some values and concepts that are common to the main culture and can be incorporated and transformed into the mainstream culture under certain conditions. The subculture actually represents a kind of human exploration at the edge of society and is the birthplace of an emerging culture. The main body of practice is made up of a part of what we call the fan base.

According to Australian scholar Gelder, "The subcultures are a group of people who are unconventional or marginal in some way by their particular interests and habits, by who they are, what they do, and where they do it."⁴ In fact, the subcultural social groups that share the same values and emotional affiliations can have a huge impact.

Second, the relationship between subculture, mainstream culture and economy is explored. The inclusive and open nature of the Internet era has provided a good platform for the development of subcultures, eased the struggles and conflicts between the subculture and the mainstream culture, and laid a solid foundation for their development with positive meaning for the operation of society. In the Internet era, various subcultural circles meet people's needs for participation and form a unique characteristic and special cultural environment and atmosphere. Individuals guided by the interests are jointly reflected to pursue a sense of belonging and social right of speech, realize themselves in acceptance and creation, and write a new chapter of cultural prosperity in the new era.⁵

In daily life, people always consume or participate in cultural types under multiple systems unconsciously. Each individual is a carrier of multiple cultures. In different environments, there are different identities and behaviors with different cultural colors.

Third, current scholars have many research findings. For example, 1) Dick Hebdige pointed out, "When the form of subculture is too divorced from the mainstream culture and poses an impact on the mainstream culture, the mainstream ideology will inevitably adopt a variety of ways to integrate it".⁶The conflict between mainstream culture and subculture is essentially a struggle between the interests of a large group and the interests of a small group or a certain class. Since subcultures are social and psychological environments that directly act on or influence people's existence, the influence of subcultures in some organizations may be comparable to, and sometimes stronger than, the mainstream culture. Therefore, it will be an inevitable trend for subcultures to be improved and incorporated. There have always been struggles or conflicts between the subculture and the mainstream culture, which may have been discussed in the past.²) Since its development, subcultures have had a mutual relationship not only with mainstream culture, but also with commercialized behaviors and activities, advertising, marketing, etc. For the relationship with economic growth, it influences the formation of institutions in terms of religion, thought and ideology, and thus has an impact on economic growth. Just as Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*,⁷ Weber explained the role of culture in the economy within the framework of sociology, it is the diligent and present-oriented nature of Protestants that promotes the development of capitalism.³) In Karl Heinrich Marx's theoretical system, the economic subsystem is called the "economic base", the core of which is the technology required to determine the

4 Discussion

In the context of new consumption era and the theoretical framework of participatory culture, what exactly does fan culture consist of now? Why are there different fans from the past? Or why are there fan groups and fan culture with such characteristics? What exactly are the characteristics of such groups that are different from those of the past? What kind of impact does it have on the economy?

4.1 The Content of The Group Is Different

Our groups started out as villages formed by geography, then urban civilized community groups brought about by industrial development, or institutional groups such as enterprises, institutions and schools⁸. Nowadays, with the development of Internet technology and communication technology, different groups have been formed, and they provide more convenient technical conditions for groups to gather and act, as well as the convenience of wireless communication, data dissemination and network. Fan groups can be formed because of the existence of these technologies, and can provide different development paths and behavior patterns for the formation of these groups and cultures at the same time due to the existence of these platforms. 1) Different platforms have different classifications and different groups. For example, we can see that different platforms have different data. Taking Weibo's super topic as an example, according to the Weibo's announcement, since the super topic community was established in 2016, it aims to create a comprehensive interest community for Weibo users to communicate publicly. The super topic community is divided into many sections, including games, animation, TV series, public welfare, etc. It is also really a good place for many people to look for fellowship. According to the classification in 2022, it mainly includes popular, local, life, fun, stars, celebrities, film and TV, variety show, sports, games, beauty, animation, reading, business and public welfare. Each big section is also subdivided into small super topic, and the super topics ranking has a clear competition mechanism.

For example, if the Xiaomi phone or iPhone forum is searched through Google or Baidu, at least 40 million results can be obtained, such as "I love iPhone, and I'm a loyal user. Almost all the phones, pads or computers in our house are from Apple. I have been using iPhone and other products since iPhone SE, and my children also

draw with Apple products. It's really good, so I am a senior user." (Fan S, answering the question with emphasis, April 2022, FanNo.0711)

Table 1. Fan consumption statistics

Fan Category	Field Category	Number of Respondents	Consumption Category	Average Monthly Amount of Consumption and Range of Activities
Hanfu fans	Culture	30	Hanfu (including Ming dress, Tang suit, and side-line products of Hanfu, covering all seasons)	A set of Hanfu ranges from RMB 80 Yuan to RMB 500 Yuan.
Xiaomi and Apple fans	Electronics	30	Buy all electronic products and other products from Xiaomi or Apple, such as Xiaomi rice cooker, Xiaomi TV, etc.	The annual amount of consumption ranges from RMB 500 Yuan to RMB 5,000 Yuan.
Senior fans	Star's fandom	55	Buy products advertised by favorite stars or their magazines, all daily products are advertised by stars, or side-line products related to stars.	The monthly amount of consumption ranges from RMB 300 Yuan to RMB 3,000 Yuan, which is related to the price of the products advertised by the stars, while side-line products such as dolls are about RMB 200 Yuan.
Live fans	Live commerce or life	10	Buy products through live, and the products are daily necessities related to one's life, household needs, and personal skin care and makeup.	The monthly amount of consumption ranges from RMB 1,000 Yuan to RMB 10,000 Yuan.

2) A summary of the classification of current hot fan groups. The mind map on the left is a list based on some of the current hot fan groups, which are not listed here because of some limitations of the research subjects.

It can be seen clearly that there are many different fan groups. Unlike the previous entertainment stars or TV and movie stars, there are also some electronic products and Olympic champion mascots. 3) With some characteristics as follows: A. Wide range, from idols to animals, games and electronic products; B. Diverse forms, humans and animals in real world, some characters in animation or novels, virtual characters in virtual world, electronic products, and even transportation tools. Bing Dwen Dwen, the mascot of the Winter Olympics, has many fans as a cartoon representative work with many auspicious meanings. One of the fans interviewed showed all the pictures related to Bing Dwen Dwen and liked all the products about Bing Dwen Dwen. There was an outbreak at that time, and this fan was even enthusiastic about daily nucleic acid testing to collect Bing Dwen Dwen stickers, "Bing Dwen Dwen made the boring nucleic acid testing activities fun for me." (Fan W, answered in July 2021, fan number 0615) In addition, this fan was keen to discuss and publicize with others. The text descriptions about Bing Dwen Dwen can be seen in the videos and interviews of a Japanese journalist.

4.2 Fans Management And Operation Rules

When the number of groups reaches a certain size, there are internal rules for managing and operating specific groups. Each group has characteristics and habits that differ from other groups, as well as different types and language habits. Different groups may have different requirements and norms within them, and the different requirements and norms may be a reflection of the differences between fan groups. In any super topic of Weibo, the top posts about the rules can be seen. Depending on the different attributes of the super topic, there will be a team of moderators and super topic hosts that will set the rules for the entire super topic. Take a couple's super topic as an example, the super topic management team has nine people, three of whom are responsible for deleting the non-standard posts in the super topic, two of whom are the general administrators, and the remaining four are responsible for the daily management of the super topic. The division of work is clear, and the management team will also be renewed according to their respective situations. The replacement requires the active participation of the fans within the super topic, rather than

subjective selection, and the whole process is open and transparent. The access guide contains rules for managing and striking back anti-fans, as well as for official groups and centralized posting. There are detailed rules for publishing posts in super topic, such as no full name or name abbreviations, no mention of other unrelated third parties, no excessive concern for privacy, no authorization for second changes, etc. There are also a series of standards that include posting, blocking, and highlighting. The views of management rules post is not low, with 53,000 comments, 140,000 likes and 8,000 reposts (as data end of June 17, 2022)

Xiaomi fan groups and Apple forums are different from the emotional ties of general fan communities. Fan consumers are linked into a community through their consumption behavior. Such a "consumer community" provides a platform for fan consumers to demonstrate their similarities and differences with others, and the exchange of information within the community integrates the meaning they created into the society. By helping each other and sharing product information through this online platform, the online and offline community activities greatly satisfy the fans' sense of belonging, strengthen the relationship network among fans, and have an impact on the subsequent emotional consumption of fans.

Therefore, different fan groups have their different cultural attributes and rules of community operation, just like the characteristics of social operation in real life, everyone within each group need to abide by such rules and styles.

4.3 The Relationship Between Culture And Economy

The connection between subculture and mainstream culture, the economic function of participatory culture, the impact of subcultural groups on the economy and the relationship consumer culture.¹⁰

Participatory culture is a broad-based term that contains a wide range of activities performed by users in the digital age. Henry Jenkins has contributed significantly to the popularization of participatory culture and the absorption of theoretical frameworks. Some of the activities that users often perform, such as DIY music mix for identity creation, crowdsourcing, blogging, and fan culture, have shown the participatory culture. Jenkins defines the participatory culture as one that allows for the free expression of artistic talent and civic engagement of people who can share their creations with others. In this process, each person becomes a producer. Users

also build social connections with others by sharing their creations. Participatory cultures are productive, creative and collaborative.¹¹

We can see that the various fan groups, regardless of the category, are strongly characterized by participatory culture, which is different from the past, and thus the boundaries between mainstream culture and so-called subculture are changing, which has an important impact on the economy.

This new or participatory cultural group is also practicing the economic impact of the subculture while forming a subculture. We can see the economic impact of fan economy or Internet celebrities and idol economy through some data.

1) The fan effect of Internet celebrity economy and brand economy. Fans participate in activities, and the data also reflects the attributes of subculture. The characteristics of different cultural groups generate matching and diversified economic models, such as live streaming, IP industry and creative cultural products. The live-streaming fan groups consist of women, housewives, and lazy people who have the characteristic of not wanting to think for themselves. Some of them have been at home a lot since the epidemic and started following the two TikTokers when they were restricted from going out, while others were addicted to lipstick because they followed Li Jiaqi on Taobao and then switched to Tik Tok to follow all the products they sell. They just watched at first, but could not control themselves later. "I felt that if I did not buy something, I would not be able to match the vibe of the live, especially when I heard Li Jiaqi's 'Buy it' and felt that I must buy something." (Fan T, housewife, March 2022, Fan No. 0403) "Then I started comparing whether there was any difference between Li Jiaqi's and Viya's products and who had more advantages. After that, I followed their live every day." We can clearly see that the economic model has shifted from the past where people regularly went to supermarkets to purchase items and compare the prices in different supermarkets, to a supermarket app for home delivery. Li Jiaqi and Viya seem to have moved away from their personal characteristics and attributes and transformed into huge shopping malls with them as the brand concept. All suppliers have changed from working with supermarkets or sales merchants in the past to working with such people. The daily sales figures have been even more amazing. According to the data of Double Eleven in 2021, the final sales of Li Jiaqi's live reached RMB 10.653 billion Yuan, Viya Live's sales were RMB 8.252 billion Yuan and Cherie Live's sales were RMB 930 million Yuan. China Chain Store & Franchise Association (CCFA) released the "Top 100 Chinese Supermarkets in 2021". 100 companies had sales of RMB 907.638

billion Yuan. These figures are calculated in years, and the daily live views is 10 billion. Better Life, the "King of Retail" in Hunan Province, ranked 10th in China's supermarket ranking, with annual sales of RMB 19.366 billion Yuan.

2) The subject of production has changed, from consumers consuming goods of producers to consumers participating in the process of making and producing products.¹²

There are some portraits of fans because of the study of fans, and then conduct the economic marketing through fan portraits, and there is also vertical marketing for the promotion targeting user portraits. Food, pets and other tracks are clear. The consumer's initiative was further exploited, and even when ERKE was on the verge of difficulties, it grew again and sold out through the power of its fans. ERKE also catered to their tastes and needs. (Fan I, a fan of live commerce, No. 0405) She also participated in the ERKE's live. During the live, many netizens just said, "Sell quickly. We accept anything, we don't care about the style." ERKE's Weibo account only had a hundred replies to a post at the beginning, but increased to nearly four or five thousand replies to a single comment from netizens, and then trended first on Weibo. ERKE didn't even have a Weibo membership, and netizens have been buying it for over a hundred years. As of July 1, 2022, ERKE has reached 18.85 million followers, with a total of 19.96 million video views and 46,000 followers in the super topic.

In the context of fan economy, it can be divided into idol-centered star economy and IP-centered economy. The idols are not limited to traditional actors and singers, but include three categories of stars (actors, singers, hosts, etc.), KOLs (official media, personal media, etc.) and brands (ERKE, Mixue Ice Cream & Tea). Under the idol-centered model, there are three main types of realization: 1) Direct consumption behavior related to idols, purchasing idols' works or albums, singles, film and TV works, merchandise endorsements, magazines, reports and other derivatives. 2) Fans' collective purchase of albums, block booking for films, etc. 3) Fans collect money to buy advertising space, birthday gifts, and other support activities for idols. In recent years, the variety shows have spawned support by following the Korean talent shows, with *Idol Producer* having about RMB 20 million Yuan of support funding and *Produce 101* having about RMB 40 million Yuan of support funding. Another type of fan economy is centered on IP, such as novels, anime and TV series. It is mainly about the development of other multi-cultural products such as online literature, games, and side-line products for popular works, images, and characters. The creation

of film and TV works used to be closed in production, filming and post-production, while the current production method has also changed. Famous IPs are chosen as scripts, that is, novels or online works with a huge fan base, then to characters, actors and even post-production dubbing and special effects. The power of participatory subcultural groups is also influencing every step. (Fan P, fan of entertainment industry, No. 0306) "I started to focus on the entertainment industry's talent shows, variety shows and celebrity activities from a book fan. I followed Liu Yuning's talent show, and a lot of changes happened from the beginning to the follow-up. Fans contributed a lot to Liu Yuning's debut as well as his business value, not only emotions but also money." (Fan H, star's fan, No. 0310) "I'm a fan of Xiao Zhan, and I'm very supportive of him no matter what happened before "227 incident" or after. I still have products advertised by him, such as Kaixiaozao and home sweeping robot." Recently, Nars officially announced Xiao Zhan's endorsement and the figures are quite amazing. Its official Weibo account rose 210,000 followers, the store rose 170,000 followers, and the single platform turnover reached RMB 79,459,753 Yuan, ranking first in the brand industry, increasing by 50 places, with a trading growth of 20,741.14%.

Through the observation on TikTok, it can be found that some TikTokers may have just a few tens of thousands of followers. There are several representative TikTokers taken in the following table, the same conclusion can be obtained. First of all, from passive to active, there is also the right to speak and the initiative. Many TikTokers cannot ignore the opinions and driving force of their fans in the process of flow realization.

Table 2. Representative TikTokers

No.	TikToker	Previous Industry	Later Industry	Follower	Number of Works
1	Feifan Business (Forced to Change the Profession)	Vegetable digging, chestnuts	Woodworking - native products - bench - bamboo basket - bamboo shoot	3.5w	105
2	Xin'gan County Xiao Li Studio	Making food, food vlogger,	Selling pots (iron pots)	8.9w	462

	(Iron Pot)	fried rice noodles			
3	Liu's Bamboo Weaving	Bamboo basket	Cat nest, bamboo products, cat bag (all kinds of pets)	7.9w	2311
4	Hanmoji Original Hanfu	Hanfu	Pajamas	7.9w	474
5	Sugar Water Loves to Plant Flowers	Foreign trade	Garden renovation	4.8w	612

It can be seen from their Tik Tok account, No. 2 used to make food, such as fried rice and fried noodles, with only 30/40 views, not more than a hundred. Since the iron pot was seen in a video, the views increased to 3,800 and even more than 24,000. This TikToker changed from selling rice noodles to selling pots, and even the account name was changed to Iron Pot. Some have switched to other industries because of the advice of netizens, and the flow and products have been paid much attention.

The following data can be found on Tik Tok by searching for the key words "TikTokers who were forced to change their professions on Tik Tok", "TikToker who was forced to change the profession to selling pot" and "Internet celebrities who were forced to change their professions".

Other influences are more on the social level. There is also a cultural level of influence, where the subcultural subjectivity of fans has demands for culture and for public welfare behaviors to create value for the society. During the epidemic and major events, for example, the group buying leader in Shanghai played a different role than before. Bing Dwen Dwen, the mascot of the Beijing Winter Olympics, has the most obvious cultural attributes. During the Beijing Winter Olympics in February, Bing Dwen Dwen trended almost 100 times on Weibo, and the #Bing Dwen Dwen hashtag had 3.42 billion views, generating 1.07 million discussions. In addition, Bing Dwen Dwen also has its own super topic, ranking No.1 in the super topic of sports for a long time. The demand for Bing Dwen Dwen exceeds the supply, resulting in its price being constantly elevated. Taking the 20cm stuffed toy as an example, the price of scalpers has risen to RMB 1,500 Yuan, with a premium of nearly 8 times; the non-spot price is RMB 800 Yuan, and the delivery period is nearly 20 days. In order to buy Bing Dwen Dwen, there are too many people willing to spend money for it, even the gold Bing Dwen Dwen priced at 33,950 Yuan has been reserved. "In order to

collect a set of Bing Dwen Dwen, I not only snatched up the flagship store in Taobao, but also do not miss the Bing Dwen Dwen stickers when doing nucleic acid." (Fan T, anime fan, No. 0510) In addition, there are creative cultural products of the Forbidden City, with creative cultural products as the core of revenue items of the Forbidden City. In 2017, the annual revenue of the Forbidden City's creative cultural products reached RMB 1.5 billion Yuan, and the media said it exceeded 1,500 A-share listed companies. Before 2007, the Palace Museum's main source of revenue was tickets. Even in 2012, the revenue of creative cultural products was only about RMB 150 million Yuan. Now, the Forbidden City is the new benchmark for traditional cultural innovation and one of the most valuable commercial IPs. The architecture of the society is shifting from industrial organization and organized behavior to a flow-based communication model, where new product launches or purchases or power are gradually influenced.

5 Conclusions

As the economy changes, corresponding subcultures are created and transformed into a kind of strong cultural force with the economic development. At present, the definition and scope of fans, fan groups, corresponding subcultures and subcultural groups are changing from roles, rules and behavioral laws due to economic development, and generating scale effects.

Such a fan scale is almost equal to the structure and number of netizens, thus becoming the correspondence between the real world and the virtual world. Together with the improvement of network technology, crossing from 2G to 5G and 6G, the rapid development of smartphones and the Internet has brought such a technological change, which has changed politics and economy, turning the scale of fan groups from a small cultural scale influence to a scale almost equal to the population of netizens. The changes in subculture are reaching into all areas of society, politics and economy. For example, the rise of cultural products from the Forbidden City and the hot topic about classical dance brought by Henan TV are a kind of positive guide.

Therefore, on the one hand, it is appropriate to facilitate the gradual transformation of subcultures under the impetus of capital and new media, or to actively approach mainstreaming and popularization, which can drive the development and growth of subcultures and gradually form the emerging culture and cultural groups in the new Internet era. On the other hand, it is also a positive attitude for mainstream culture to

face the challenge of subculture by transforming in tolerance and guiding in sublation. By acting on such a culture and the laws of cultural groups, we can re-establish the main role of the mainstream media, and turn the so-called negative influence into the phenomenal cases from loss to profit, such as Chinese brand "Baixiang" and "ERKE". The final effect will be on the economy and society, which can achieve the healthy development of whole society.

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