

# *Research on the Influence of Fan Culture on Teenagers' Psychology and Behavior*

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**Abstract:** Chinese fan culture is a diverse and complex phenomenon, constantly evolving along with social, economic, and Internet development. Fan culture is also a multi-layered and multi-dimensional cultural phenomenon, covering personal emotion, social interaction, commercial value, and cultural creativity. Fan culture not only brings optimistic emotional value but also boosts economic development. However, research on the effects of fan culture on adolescent psychology and behavior remains inadequate. This paper analyzes adolescents' participation in fan culture in the age of social media, focusing on the problematic representations of adolescents' psychology and behavior. The article analyzes that fan culture not only brings positive emotions to teenagers but also brings the problem of excessive consumption, which affects the thinking mode and physical and mental health of teenagers. Based on this, this paper puts forward suggestions to guide teenagers to actively participate in fan culture from the aspects of social media, star organizers, teenagers and parents, and social atmosphere.

**Keywords:** Fan Culture, Participatory Culture, Teenager, Idolization, Social Identity

## 1. Introduction

In today's social media era, the rapid development of new media technology has contributed to the growing prosperity of the Internet world. New media technologies in China, such as WeChat, Weibo, TikTok, and Little Red Book as links, have brought more possibilities for communication and contact between people today. The use of new media technology is gradually integrated into the user's life and has become an indispensable part of daily life. Teenagers, as the main user group of new media technology, spend more and more time on social media, which is the main way for teenagers to socialize and receive information. Entertainment news and star information are some of the most noticeable topics in the era of social media, and it is also the main conversation among teenagers.

Fan culture formed by fans refers to the pursuit of fans for a certain star, group, film, television, and book works, as well as the communication and interaction between fans. Fan culture, as a cultural phenomenon in the entertainment industry, has created an invisible online world that allows fans to find a sense of belonging and participate in the production and dissemination of entertainment information. Teenagers, as a huge group of fans' culture, can socialize in the production and dissemination of culture and find a sense of satisfaction and belonging, but at the same time, teenagers also easily lose themselves in this invisible online world. For example, being addicted to social media software such as Weibo affects sleep, forms a thinking mode that should be paid for their favorite

stars, and spends too much money to buy stars' official products. Under the condition of teenagers, have not yet formed a complete and proper mode of thinking and transaction processing as independent individuals. In the era of social media, the influence of entertainment and social media on the formation of teenagers' modes of thinking and behavior should not be underestimated. Therefore, the application and impact of social media in youth groups is a topic worth discussing today. The article will mainly discuss and analyze the image of Chinese teenagers in the fan culture, including the behavior of teenagers in the fan culture and the research on the problem representation of the Chinese entertainment industry and fan culture on Teenagers' psychology and behavior.

## **2. Development of Fan Culture in the New Media Era**

### **2.1. Connotation and Concept of Fan Culture**

Fan culture usually refers to a group of people who have unique and dedicated love and interest in a particular celebrity, game, or film. Fan culture is a subculture composed of fan groups, objects of worship, and interactive content in social media. Fan culture is a broad term, and different groups of fans often form distinct, independent groups with unique cultural connotations, depending on the fans and their idols. In fan culture, everyone can find their place [1]. Some fans are responsible for the production of copywriting, pictures, and videos of idols. Some fans are responsible for forwarding and making data; Some fans are in charge of management. Some fans are responsible for participating in the activities of offline idols [1]. Fan participatory interaction helps to enhance fans' sense of participation and social satisfaction. The most important common idea in fan culture is to make their idols better and more popular [1].

### **2.2. The Nature and Development of Fan Culture**

The essence of fan culture is a participatory culture. This concept was first proposed by the famous media scholar Jenkins to describe the new form of consumerism under the background of the Internet [2]. In fan culture, fans are usually the recipients of entertainment social media information, as well as the creators of content production and dissemination, which serve as interactive content in fan culture. In the early 1980s, when China's entertainment market was just beginning to take shape, fans could only passively accept information from idols due to the unidirectionality of popular culture dissemination, and their behavior was limited to unilaterally following idols [3]. However, fans have a dual identity, both as recipients and as creators, and this pattern stems from the development of new media technologies. For example, Weibo, like Facebook or Instagram, is a very important and widely used social media in China. Users can share content posted by other users, which gives Weibo content the potential to go viral. This content can be the original content of the first hand or the content of the second creation of the forward. In the context of fan culture, new media technologies such as Weibo provide and create a space for fans. In this online space, fans can post photos or videos about their idols, as well as repost related content. Photos, videos, and other content posted by fans can bring publicity and influence to their idols, which will bring economic benefits to the idols themselves and their companies. The idols' continuous business and work are received by the fans, thus forming the dual identity of fans as creators and recipients of entertainment content. The culture of fan participation gives fans more and more power [1].

### **2.3. The Influence of Fan Culture**

The formation and operation of fan culture also drive and influence economic development. Fan cultures form separate groups with distinct cultures, and when that content is commoditized and marketized, it generates economic benefits. In today's society, fans are increasingly willing and able

to spend more money on their idols [3]. Talent companies will use fan culture to develop commercial reach to achieve revenue. For example, holding concerts and selling artists' official products have not only brought direct benefits to companies but also positively affected the development of regions and related industries. The sales of artists' official products by companies can be reflected in the establishment of some exclusive applications and applets. Many talent companies will create exclusive channels for their artists to sell their products, such as the establishment of a WeChat mini-program mall or the creation of special applications. In these exclusive sales channels, fans can buy artists' official products and albums or view artists' photos and videos. This kind of exclusive sales channel can promote more intimate interaction between fans and idols and create an exclusive sales platform that can also bring maximum economic benefits to the company. Talent companies can also promote the development of local economies and related industries through concerts. Under the extensive influence of celebrities, concerts can often promote the development of local tourism to a great extent. Fan support clubs often set up a lot of support punch points in idol concert cities, such as support posters in bus stations and subway stations, large screens in shopping malls, or set up idol human-like signs for fans to take photos. The setting of these punch-in points can attract fans and bring publicity effects to idols. Fan culture can call on both fans who have concert tickets and fans who have not bought concert tickets to go to the city to support their idols. In addition to the concert ticket expenditure, the consumption of hotel housing, dining, shopping, and travel can bring great economic benefits to the local city.

### **3. The Problem Representation of Fan Culture on Teenager Psychology and Behavior**

#### **3.1. The Positive Influence of Fan Culture on the Psychological and Behavioral Development of Teenagers**

In the fan culture, the number of teenagers accounts for the most significant proportion. Statistics show that 42% of middle school students have been chasing stars since primary school, and 52% of middle school students have more than 3 years of star-chasing experience [4]. According to a survey of 6,480 Chinese primary and middle school students, 69.2% of primary school students, 70.9% of middle school students, and 62.7% of high school students participated in fan culture [5]. The survey shows that in recent years, a large number of teenagers have become addicted to celebrity worship and have even formed a unique and mature organized and hierarchical fan culture [5]. The influence of fan culture on teenagers can be reflected in forming broad awareness, bringing guidance, and creating a sense of social belonging. According to Xia's research, 3.5% of teenage respondents said that their admiration and affection for celebrities were influenced by others [6]. The group promoted by fan culture can bring a sense of social belonging to teenagers because they can find their sense of belonging and value in the group. This sense of social belonging often appears in various subcultures because these cultures enable teenagers to constantly explore and negotiate their identity, social status, and group belonging. Teenagers' fans can easily find a sense of belonging in social networks and social media since these virtual relationships meet teenagers' needs for friends and attention, and teenagers find understanding and recognized emotional support [7]. At the same time, when watching photos or videos of idols or content related to movies and TV dramas, fans often get optimistic emotional value and bring a happy mood.

#### **3.2. The Problematic Representation of Fan Culture on the Psychological and Behavioral Development of Teenagers**

The problematic representation of fan culture on adolescent psychology and behavior can be reflected in overconsumption, the impact of thought patterns, and physical health. Since idols are commoditized and marketized to a certain extent, fan culture plays an important role in driving

economic development and bringing benefits to entertainment companies. Teenagers in fan culture are easily influenced by idols and group pressure [4]. For teenagers, they are easy to produce competition and obedience psychology under the guidance of fan culture to overconsume, such as buying idols' official products and spending money for idols. Companies commercialize and market idols and stimulate fans' consumption by using fans' love for idols. In this process, overconsumption is easy to occur. Many agencies link the success and status of idols to the efforts of fans, who prove the status of their favorite idols through spending money, buying membership, purchasing official products, and making support and data. In the fan culture, different fan groups have formed a competitive psychology of competition, and fans continue to spend more money on idol-related products to support their idols.

### 3.3. Cause of the Problem and Underlying Logic Analysis

The fundamental reason for the influence of fan culture on young people's behavior is that there is a thinking mode of "fans need to show their love for idols through spending money for them" in fan culture, and the idea of "being a fan needs to pay for idols" is constantly instilled into the fan group by capital, which is deeply rooted in fan culture. Companies take advantage of fandom to bring in bundles, or they take advantage of fandom to get free data. Talent companies link the status and success of idols to the efforts of fans, and the number of fans and the amount of fans' purchases affect the ranking of each member of the idol group. This bundling inspires fans to consume and pay for their idols, which is often not conducive to setting the right values of money and consumption for teenagers. In fan culture, "how much you pay for your idol" is gradually linked to whether you are a "loyal fan". Capital and companies know exactly how to turn fans' "love" into actual "money," and companies know what to do to maximize profits [8]. As Douglas Rushkoff mentioned, teenagers are addicted to the digital world, but the truth is, that most of them don't know what the digital world is. Douglas Rushkoff believes that the key to understanding interest connections in the digital world is to figure out the relationship between "likes," "companies," "youth," and "consumers." As the capital side, the company hopes to convert fans' "love" for celebrities and idols into "money", The company hopes the conversion process will work like magic for viewers [8]. The data produced by fans converts "love" into real money. Data generation depends on the audience's participation, such as the number of videos played, product sales, post browsing, and likes. The purpose of the company is to maximize the benefits. Therefore, the company will make an effort to let the audience, that is, the fan group, participate and interact to the greatest extent to generate data [8]. For example, Ceili's star-chasing experience in Generation Likes, as a loyal fan of The Hunger Games series films, Ceili has been constantly interacting and posting comments on The Hunger Games website. Gradually, she became the first fan of the website. Ceili's forwarding and posting will bring a lot of economic benefits to the film company. She may not know that her behavior is to work for the film company for free. Even if she knows, she is willing to continue, because in the process, she has gained a sense of satisfaction and identity, and she has the title of "Number One Fan" [8].

In addition, the formation and operation of fan culture are closely related to the spread of new media. Teenagers create and obtain entertainment information using social media and constantly participate in fan culture. The negative effects of fan culture on teenagers' physical and mental health include sleep problems and anxiety. Due to the commercialization of mass media and entertainment, the new media era has brought more entertainment life to teenagers and expanded entertainment choices [9]. Heavy use of social media by teenagers can have negative effects on their physical, mental, and moral development, such as depression, anxiety, jealousy, and comparison [9]. As a transitional stage, teenagers do not belong to the stage of childhood and have not yet reached the stage of adulthood, so they often do not have the cognitive ability and discrimination of adults and do not have the responsibility of adults. Although entertainment can bring teenagers a lot of happy emotions

and help them find self-worth and social recognition, the negative effects of entertainment cannot be underestimated. With the development of new media and communication technologies, media has become lighter, smaller, more wireless, and more accessible [10]. Aaron D. Fobian notes that greater media use is associated with reduced sleep time and increased fatigue. Aaron D. Fobian also pointed out that historically, the mainstream media that affected sleep duration and quality was watching TV. However, with the development of new media technologies, it is necessary to consider that the situation is changing and the media sources that affect sleep duration and quality are becoming more extensive [10].

#### 4. Suggestion

In the context of Chinese fan culture, fan culture can have a positive and negative impact on the psychology and behavior of teenagers. To guide teenagers to participate in fan culture in a positive and healthy way, suggestions can be put forward from the aspects of social media, star organizers, teenagers, parents, and social atmosphere.

Social media should manage and guide the published content and strengthen the review of the content to avoid the spread of excessive negative news and comments. Avoid negative content affecting the mental health of teenagers. Social media should actively promote positive energy content, such as public welfare activities participated by idols.

Star organizers should first establish a positive image of idols. The company should actively display the positive energy of idols and convey positive values to fans. And more efforts should be made to manage the order and norms in the fan culture. For example, it is prohibited for fans to gather for help or pick up aircraft on private occasions, including preventing teenagers from excessive consumption and addiction. The company should create a healthy fan culture.

As for teenagers' self-reflection and self-management, parents should play an important guiding role. In the process of young people's transition to adulthood, raising children will affect some of their decisions, and the results of these decisions have laid the foundation for their future life history and mental health [11]. Parents can understand their children's emotional needs and guide correct values by enhancing communication with their children, which can help teenagers form a rational thinking mode of chasing stars. Parents should provide support to encourage teenagers to participate in correct activities related to idols, such as concerts, and encourage teenagers to participate in fan culture correctly.

Finally, in the social atmosphere, society should strengthen the mental health education of teenagers through schools or media channels based on promoting healthy idol images and star-chasing values. The above comprehensive suggestions can better guide China's fan culture so that young people can have more positive experiences in the process of chasing stars and reduce the negative impact on young people.

#### 5. Conclusion

In the context of the new media era, although the development of fan culture brings optimistic emotional value and can promote economic development, with the increasing participation of young fans in fan culture, fan culture also affects the psychological and behavioral problems of teenagers. The negative impact of fan culture is reflected in the problem of teenagers' excessive consumption, which not only affects teenagers to establish correct values of money and consumption but also affects their physical and mental health. To guide teenagers to participate in fan culture positively and healthily, the article provides suggestions from the aspects of social media, society, and parents, and calls for creating a positive fan culture. Fan culture should not only bring pleasure to teenagers but

also guide teenagers to establish correct and positive values, and to form self-awareness and social identity in this process.

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