

New Media and the Carnival of Fans in China

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Abstract: Microblogs, post bars and other new media platforms have become main places for fans to idolize their stars in China. New media have the characteristics of interactivity, virtualization, hypertext and networking, which makes it a carnival square. The current fan culture in China has the characteristics of carnival culture. In the new media platform, fans and stars, fans and fans can get rid of classes and identities in daily life, and realize the equal and intimate communication. The fan community in new media is an imaginary community. These characteristics are not possessed by fan culture in the traditional media era.

1. Introduction

With the change of media forms, the way of fans idolizing stars is also changing in China. Compared with that in the traditional media era, what is the difference in fans' behavior in the new media era? How do the characteristics of new media affect the culture of fans in China? What are the characteristics of China's current fan culture? This paper will discuss these problems.

2. New Media and Characteristics

In the 1950s, Marshall McLuhan published *The Electronic Revolution: the Revolutionary Influence of New Media* at the American Institute of Higher Education. "In the long run, media can be regarded as the message," McLuhan said. "So when the society develops a new medium (such as printing, telegram, photo and radio) through collective action, it wins the right to express new information... Printing wiped out word of mouth education, which was built in the Greek and Roman world and passed down in the Middle Ages by alphabetic writing and manuscripts. Within a few decades, printing ended the 2500 year educational model. Today, the monarchy of printing is over, and the oligarchy of new media usurps the 500 years old monarchy of printing. In oligarchy, every new medium has the same strength as printing and conveys the same message... "[1] The new media he said is a relative concept. Professor Chengyu Xiong of Tsinghua University is a supporter of the new media "theory of relativity". Professor Xiong said that new media was a relative concept. "New" is relative to "old". For newspapers, radio is new media; for broadcasting, television is new media; for television, the network is new media. Today's new media is a medium form based on computer information processing technology. However, with the development of science and technology, media form also develops, and new media form can appear after the digital media. [2] According to "the theory of relativity" of new media, We-media in Web2.0 era, such as microblog and wechat, are new media compared with network media in Web 1.0 era. The new media in this paper refers to media platforms built based on digital technology and network technology, including post bar, micro blog and so on.

As *New Media: a Critical Introduction* expressed, the characteristics of new media include interactivity, hypertext, virtualization, networking, etc. [3] Interactivity is an important feature of new media. Interactivity means that audiences can participate in the media text more deeply, use the media more personalized and get more choices. This view which emphasizes the interactive value of new media draws lessons from the popular discourse of Neo-liberalism. The aim of a Neo-liberalism society is to commercialize all kinds of experiences and provide more refined services to consumers. Under the influence of this discourse, new media can provide consumers with maximum choices of media text. The hypertextual feature makes access real-time; every data

location has many links that can immediately access other locations. Hypertext allows for discontinuous writing. Compared with mass media, new media is networked. Networking not only refers to the difference between the server technology in new media and traditional media, but also refers to the relaxation of media market regulation in the new media environment. From the perspective of consumption, we can see the increase, segmentation and personalization of media usage. From the production level, the location of media text production is increasing and spreading; consumers can expand their activities in the media to the actual production field. In the new media environment, the virtual world, virtual spaces, virtual objects, virtual environment, virtual reality and virtual identities are ubiquitous. New media technology produces virtual things. Virtualization is often regarded as a feature of the post-modern society with advanced culture and technology. In this society, many aspects of daily life are simulated by technology. In the view of French philosopher Deleuze, virtuality is not the opposite of reality; it is a kind of reality in itself, and it is in proper opposition to the “actual” reality. In a world full of virtual things, we can switch between reality and the virtual world more and more frequently. [4]

3. Carnival of Chinese Fans in the New Media Era

In the new media era, star idolizing has become an open carnival for fans. In the era of traditional media, fans and stars interact through private and non-public ways such as telephone calls and correspondence. The new media provides a platform for the direct interaction between fans and stars, which makes fans' behaviors move from the backstage to the front stage. “Electronic media make public all the information that used to be in private contact,” Merowitz said.[5] Fans express their feelings to their idols through the microblog and other new media platforms. In the era of traditional media, the behavior of “three or five” friends idolizing stars has developed into a carnival of many fans in the new media era. On Sina Weibo, relevant issues can be found in most searched hashtags quite often. New media make the information exchange between strangers convenient and frequent, and makes star idolizing become the daily behavior of the whole people.

New media is a carnival square. The carnival square mentioned by Bakhtin is a place where all kinds of people get together and communicate. It is the stage of carnival performance and the symbol of all citizens. In the carnival square, people can have intimate contact without scruple. [6] Kitaoka Maehara said that the four categories of Bakhtin's carnival include breaking away from the system, breaking away from the convention and making jokes, opposing marriage and being subservient, as well as vulgarization. To break away from the system means to break away from the hierarchy order in daily life, and to break away from various laws and prohibitions. They temporarily get rid of fear, respect, admiration and politeness in interpersonal communication, and use frank languages and unrestrained expressions to conduct free and casual communication. Breaking away from the convention and making jokes mean, people are liberated from their classes, ages, identities, properties and genders in real life, forming a new way of communication, and using languages and behaviors out of the convention. Opposing marriage and being subservient means to unite opposing values of “sacredness and vulgarity”, “loftiness and inferiority”, “greatness and insignificance”, as well as “wisdom and stupidity” in traditional society. Vulgarization is the degradation of high things to vile languages and actions related to “productivity” and “reproductive capacity”, as well as sarcastic maxims. [7]

Traditional media cannot be the carnival square. Only the new media is the place for all people to get together and communicate, and only in new media can people communicate freely and intimately. Traditional media such as radio and television are “mass media”; they are characterized by centralization and standardization. The content is produced in highly capitalized places, such as film studios; the distribution and production are closely linked; consumers listen to the same radio and watch movies broadcast by the same TV station; there are clear differences between producers and consumers.[8] In the era of traditional media, most fans accept the information from idols unilaterally, and there are few opportunities for the interaction and communication between fans and idols. Fans can only worship or look up to idols.

The interaction of new media makes the communication between people more intimate and equal.

Compared with the passive consumption of traditional media, through the interactive new media, fans can directly intervene and change the text they use, and use the media more personalized. [9] With the interactive function of new media, idols can also join in the carnival activities of fans. In July 2019, during the microblog traffic war between Jay Chou's fans and Xukun Cai's fans, a fan told Jay Chou that they were hitting the charts for him under his Instagram account, saying, "brother, do you know how hard we are in learning new skills for you on Weibo?" He got the reply from Jay Chou. The new media not only realizes the equal dialogue between fans and idols, but also empowers fans to take the initiative in communicating with idols. Xianhua Liu made phone calls to his fans during the live broadcast of his birthday. After being mistakenly hung up by his fans, he was rejected by them one after another. Another example is Zhennan Zhou, who was "dominated" by fans at an activity. Fans yelled, "Zhennan, posting the microblog" at the scene, and Zhou had to post a microblog to his fans. After that, "Zhennan Zhou was dominated by fans" became a hot topic in microblog most searched hashtags.



Fig.1 Jay Chou Responded to Fans on Instagram on July 21, 2019.



Fig.2 Xianhua Liu Called Up His Fans and Was Rejected, October 11, 2019.



Fig.3 Zhou Zhenan Was Dominated by His Fans in Posting Microblog, November 3, 2019.

The anonymity of new media enables people to get rid of their class and identity in daily life. They do not fear or respect others any longer, and wantonly use abusive languages. On the Internet, fans use virtual identities, which can hide real personal information, like age, gender, occupation and social status. The relationship between superiors and inferiors in real society is also shelved temporarily because of the anonymity. Therefore, the relationship between people in the cyberspace is relatively equal. Anonymity will weaken people's sense of responsibility. When fans express themselves in the cyberspace, they are more bold, vulgar, frank and less considerate. The language of carnival is playful, vulgar, grotesque and exaggerated, full of swears and slang. Only in the network new media environment, can this habit which subverts the traditional language spread so widely. The anonymity and hypertext of network new media make fans express themselves freely on the Internet. All kinds of swearing words, expressions combined English with Chinese, abbreviations, wrongly written characters, intimate appellations, coquettish modal particles, sick sentences, doggerel, short essays, and dialogues are widely produced and disseminated by fans. They are humorous, provocative or satirical. For example, some fans refer to idols as “cubs”; fans use “ah ah ah ah ah” to express their love for idols. Chinese fans have created a set of “fan circle terms”; “cooking” is the homophony of Zhengzhu, referring to fans' favorite idols; “cloud chasing” refers to idolizing stars on the Internet; “poisonous cake” refers to resources that are not conducive to the development of idols; “foot washing maid” refers to artists who rank at the bottom of the portfolio or even have no standing position; “as quiet as chicken” means that fans should shut up sometimes. Nbc is the abbreviation of nobody cares; hyh is the support association; RS is the abbreviation of personal attack. [10] Only “the network language is the standard and the most thorough Carnival language; it is the ‘rebel’ of traditional language.” [11]

The virtual nature of new media enables fans to build their own imagined community. According to Zygmunt Bauman, community is “a group or organization with various levels existing in society and being built based on subjective or objective common characteristics (such as race, concept, status, encounter, task and identity) (or similarity), including small-scale communities like spontaneous organizations, and higher-level political organizations. It can refer to the highest level community of state and nation, that is, the national community or the state community. It includes both tangible and intangible communities.” Benedict Anderson said, “all communities larger than the primitive villages in which the members had face-to-face contact (perhaps including such villages) are imagined.” Baidu Post Bar, micro blog fan station, wechat and QQ fan groups are all imaginary and virtual communities established by fans. Members of these virtual communities may not meet in real life; but they can share hobbies, knowledge and values, vent their emotions and find a sense of belonging through the virtual community.

4. Conclusion

Bakhtin's carnival culture emphasizes the unofficial view of the relationship between people and the world. The ranks, status and identities of individuals are put aside; people return to the pure, equal, intimate and humorous relationship. The characteristics of carnival culture include universality, subversion, equality and ritual. The features of new media comply with these characteristics of carnival culture. Only in new media can the fan culture become carnival culture. In traditional media, fan culture is difficult to form carnival culture. McLuhan said that in the era of electronic media, human society has become a "global village". People have returned to a new era of the equal and free "tribalism" with no center. People are able to get in close contact with others and return to the decentralized state of existence, which is similar to that in the tribe era before written characters appeared. The carnival of fans in new media is the carnival of the "global village".

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