

# Study on the Misconduct of the Fandom under the Control of Capital

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**Abstract.** With the development of the network and idol culture, “fandom” culture has gradually emerged. However, in this era of consumerism, strong involvement of capital has manipulated fandoms with an invisible hand, causing many chaos and seriously affecting the social order. Some undesirable phenomena been commonly seen in other circles of society, bringing life impact to others. To solve the negative problems in fandoms, we must find the root cause behind the proliferation of the problem, collaborate to establish rules and boundaries, cut off the illegal industrial chain behind “fandom” culture, and then build organized fan clubs and show positive energy in society.

**Keywords:** Fandom Culture; Fandoms; Capital; Fans.

## 1. Introduction

The entertainment industry continues to expand along with the development of the Internet and social media, new members constantly flooded into the fans group. Brainwashing marketing has become more important and other chaotic phenomena in fans groups have aroused widespread concern in society. So, the question in this article is, what is the root cause behind the proliferation of negative issues in the fans group? How to make concerted efforts to establish rules and set boundaries to cut off the illegal industrial chain behind the fandom culture? This is what we need to think about and analyze in this article.

## 2. The Current Situation and Impact of Fandom Culture

### 2.1 The Meaning and Characteristics of Fandom Culture

The term “fandom” is a generic term used by fans to describe followers of celebrities who are just like them, for example, Chinese words like “fan” and “fandom” are both originated from the English word “fans”. [1]

It is generally believed that 2005 was the beginning of China's star-catching culture. Each contestant in the talent show was able to attract a large number of fans, who actively organized large-scale campaigns to help their idols to gain more attention and exposure. The fandom and fandom culture began to emerge. [2]

Due to the development of the Internet and the change of mass media, fans began to communicate through social media, forming groups through various QQ groups and WeChat groups, and some well-organized fandoms slowly expanded in size. As members of an organized and disciplined group, most of them have unified group names, unified slogans, unified souvenirs to support their idols, and so on. Fans also change their nicknames and personal signatures on social media by using something related to their idols in order to be recognized and affirmed by other group members, and they also believe that supporting their idols financially like donation or buying those superstars' albums is a good way to show their loyalty in their group.

### 2.2 The Two Sides of Fandom

Fandom culture is not harmful always. Some fans will follow their idols to participate in public welfare activities. For example, during the Covid-19 epidemic in 2020, many domestic fan organizations and individuals donated money and materials to contribute to public welfare field and

convey positive energy. [3] Despite the good side of fandom, it is sad to note that with the involvement and operation of capital, fandom ecology has begun to develop in an uncontrollable direction. The increasingly deformed fandom culture and crazy fan behavior not only bring disturbance to individuals and some families but also may cause damage to the social order, bringing negative effects to other fields in our society and seriously make a difference in other people's lives.

The major social media platforms have also become a place of revelry for fandom, also because under the influence of fandom culture, contents shown on many social media platforms and comments below are unpleasant, namely attacks and conflicts happening between different fandoms. They do not accept any counterviews about their idols, even if the criticism maybe justified, what is worse, there are always unpleasant slurs and jaw-dropping cyber manhunt, which affect the network environment. In addition to online mutual abuse and attacks on disinformation, some fans, through different channels, invade celebrities' privacy by following cars to chase and intercept the stars, reserving the same hotel as the stars, going to airports and stations, causing traffic jams in airports and stations because of crowding together to see the stars, forming groups and making loud noises. Their behaviors truly disrupt social order, interfere public safety, and violate public order and moral standard.

Fans continue to invest money and time, driven by the talent show competition system and capital. Most of the fans are teenagers, and fandoms are going out of balance. The capital stipulates by sending a message that the exposure is an important basis for measuring the idol's career development, while the fans spend money to support the idol and buy the products it endorses. In 2020, the sales of a new star's album were 100 million in just 4 days after the single was released, and it revealed afterward that some underage fans swiped their parents' credit cards to buy 700 albums.

It can be seen that in this network medium where all the people revel in, fandom shows its two sides in terms of culture. One side is constructing, while the other side is deconstructing; one side is building, while the other side is destroying. What is particularly serious is the deformity that fandom brings about by this destruction, such as interference with the ecological environment of the network, the illegal invasion of stars' privacy, which challenges the bottom line of social laws and morals and distort the consumption and values of young people. All these phenomena manifest the deformity of fandom, and through the superposition of behavior and online and offline tandem to bring about a chain of negative effects.

### **2.3 The Negative Impacts of Chaos Made by Fandom**

With the development of the entertainment industry and the popularity of fandom culture, other industries are influenced accordingly, which presents similar patterns as fan clubs. After the Tokyo Olympics, Chinese Olympic athletes gained more popularity among audience, especially Ping Pong players like Ma Long, Fan Zhendong, Wang Chuqin and swimmer Wang Shun who have gained a large number of fans after the Tokyo Olympics because of their strength and handsome faces, but they were also troubled by this sudden fame. Some fans are not concerned about the athletes' performance because they are just attracted by those muscular bodies, more badly, athletes are just like film stars in their eye. They travel thousands of miles to the airport to see these athletes, which causes numerous safety concerns as for the airport security. Such misconducts of crazy fans can be regarded as the main negative impact of the current fandom culture.

For example, after the Olympic Games, gold medalist swimmer Wang Shun met a large number of fans at the airport, and an aunt forced Wang Shun to wear a hat. Middle-aged fans are also obviously influenced by fandom culture, thinking that their support will be very helpful to their idols. They have crossed the boundaries. The success of idol stars cannot be achieved without the support and help of fans, but the success of athletes most fundamentally relies on their own efforts to achieve step by step. Too much exposure is not good for their career development.

Table tennis player Fan Zhendong has also repeatedly issued articles opposing fandom culture, which has been a serious invasion of privacy by special means to track athletes' private trips, flood into the airport, and show no sense of proportion. Those crazy fans just want to pry into their idols'

life even if they know it may not be correct. Not only the sports circle has this bad fandom culture, various circles are more or less affected by the fans' thinking patterns. People who are affected by fandom culture do not allow dissenting views, they attack people who disagree with their opinions. Between fans' groups, phenomena like vie, controlling comments and shipping two celebrities who cooperate with each other before, which is under the influence of the over-entertainment fandom culture.

The "net violence" and "catfight" that frequently occurs in groups of fans is also becoming more frequent in other areas. Even Olympic athletes such as Yang Qian and Zhang Jiaqi, who won gold medals at the Olympics, were unable to avoid the "rebuke" of netizens, and several athletes were attacked verbally by numerous netizens for posting videos on social media following the games. This illogical and violent out-of-context commentary has circulated to all corners of the social media platform, and netizens are slowly losing their ability to think autonomously and instead, opt to pursue public opinion blindly without comprehending the reasons or consequences.

The appalling culture and thinking of fandom has reached to other circles of society, causing a negative impact on them all. Thus, we need to discover the driving force behind fans' misconduct and the decisive factors that cause fandom to be deformed. Only from the root of the problem, can the negative impacts of fandom be changed and improved.

### 3. Analysis of the Causes of the Fandom Chaos

The chaos is made not merely due to the emotional expression of fans' crazy obsession with their idols, but also by the manipulation of capital rules. Capital advocates a flow-oriented business model, while idols are the commodities they create, and the different fan groups are the party that pays for the commodities, so there are deviations from the usual track, such as supporting lists, crazy fund raising, paid "data brushing", and vicious attacks on the Internet, aimed at increasing the commercial value of idols, and finally capital reaps enormous benefits.

#### 3.1 Capital and the Fandom

The CEO of Beijing Jingfu Culture Media Co., Ltd. stated in an interview, "From the current situation, almost all 'top stream' stars have strong capital consortium support behind them, and the success of idols who stand out through variety shows are inseparable from the operation of capital, from packaging them and paying copyright fees for them to smashing money to vote and paying for trending topics on Weibo, the biggest capitalist requirements for the brokerage company and the idols is to obtain the maximum commercial value, while the traffic economy and fan economy is the most profitable model with low cost and high revenue on the entertainment industry chain" [4]

Capital construction has catalysed the fans group, which is manipulated by capital. Having been influenced by Korean fandom culture, China's entertainment industry expanded by leaps and bounds, endorsing the expansion of an entire industry chain inclusive of diverse brokerage companies, packaging teams, advertising companies, marketing companies, and so on. Due to the advancement of technology and development of the Internet, many more people had the opportunity to see these artists and idols, and a prototype comparable to fandom began to appear. After capitalists realise they can utilise fandom culture to gain a profit in the entertainment industry, they brainwash these fans with marketing, all kinds of announcements and publicity to consolidate the ideal image of idols in the fans' minds, which deepens the fans' love for their idols. These idol-obsessed fans as expected, get together to fight for their idols, and they also do the anti-blackness, publicity, comments control and fund raising in order to make their group enormous and make more people notice their idols.

By spending money, resources, and paying for trending topics, even a person with barely average qualifications and professionalism can become a top-stream star with the aid of capital and platforms. Most of the flow star idols get the help and operation of capital behind their first appearance. If the capital discontinues the promotion and operation of these idols, they will gradually fade out of the fans' view, losing traffic and heat, a great number of fans will abandon the idol without heat, and the

idol's fans group will gradually begin to go downhill. Consequently, the capital behind the idol must be strong and his fans group should be highly developed and increasing. Otherwise, when the capital abandons the idols, their fans' groups will lose support and will soon disappear and fall into the deep abyss of the network.

### 3.2 Capitalistic Flow Theory

Many capitals regard "flow" as the king, so the size of the artist's fans group, its organised and disciplined operation and the number in it are the source of the idol's flow and the innate standard for different capitals to calculate the flow of the artist. Capital makes celebrities and idols into a commodity, and utilises the traffic they get to judge their value. High traffic, huge numbers of fans, faultless data on diverse websites, and high clicks can accrue enormous benefits and profits to capital, and while fans are treated as tools for capitals to make money, their money bags are continually harvested by major brand sponsors, Weibo and other promotional platforms, entertainment companies, and other capital.

The traffic attained by idols is reflected by the number of clicks and plays on their related articles, pictures and videos on key platforms, the number of thumbs and comments, and the number of times they are on the hot search, the ranking of diverse lists, and so on, and there are special formulas and methods to count their traffic data. The fans group organisations and fans are the major contributors to these data, and they frequently discover a sense of belonging and identity in the procedure of producing data, as if they have realised their self-worth and enhanced their sense of happiness and satisfaction. Capital takes advantage of this fan psychology to pay more attention to the traffic, making artists into faultless idols, spending money to drive them to the hot search, publicity and marketing, and exhibiting them to potential fans. Fans always become aware of these perfect idols on major platforms, becoming crazily obsessed with them. A few commercial platforms also take this opportunity to set up trending topics, urge fans to produce data and increase traffic as a way to increase the flow of their idols and improve the data index and ranking of their idols on key platforms. In addition, the platforms also use this to make profit.

For capital, the high flow rate of these stars and the high support rate of their fans means a high monetising rate. In the case of renowned star-making variety shows, the capital operation utilises the idol's face and talent to attract fans, so that they can impulsively take part in the fans group organisation's voting activities. To gain high interest and high returns, the manipulation of these activities by capital has also shaped abnormalities. In the voting activities of the third season of "Youth with You", fans needed to buy a specific brand of milk, to get at the vote channel, which is the QR code inside the cap of the milk bottle. With this type of voting mechanism, fans poured 270,000 bottles of milk to scan QR codes in an attempt to stop their idols from being eliminated from the show. The milk money also flows into the pockets of capitalism.

The idols supported by the capital and who have already attained a huge number of fans can use their high traffic to obtain advertising endorsements after their debut, and the capital will again call on the fans' group and fans to pay for the products approved of by their idols, and the capital and brands behind the idols can benefit. Capital can also utilise the flow value of the idols to help them get involved in the film and television dramas with sky-high salaries, so that capital can make a profit again from the film.

The production of an idol is a perfect win-win closed profit loop for capital. Idols need to enhance their exposure by hot searches, marketing and publicity, and the main promotional media platforms profit from this. When idols are seen on their shows, sponsors and entertainment platforms can make profits. Idols officially debut, a given endorsement shooting, economic companies can make a profit, and capital completed a round of harvest. The great enthusiasm of the fans and the robust appeal of fandom make available conditions for the harvest of capital. Fans are the objects of capital harvesting, and become tools to be used at will and in the dark by the capital in this closed loop of interests.

### **3.3 The Fandom under the Theory of Flow-only**

It is under the influence of capital's Flow-only viewpoint that fans consider the data of their own idols as tremendously important, and this is where the fans' group constructs a competitive mechanism. For instance, if an idol has 1 million followers transmitting their idol's post and another idol of the same kind has only 100,000 followers transmitting their idol's post, the followers of the second idol will make concerted efforts to transmit this post to 1.5 million, exceeding the former. Dissimilar fan groups frequently fight with each other due to the resources and positions of their idols. When one side makes unsuitable comments, the other side will fight back, resultant in communal scolding and injuring the network environment. In the final analysis, the game of fans is also because of the problems of the idol's position and resources, which is also the quintessence of the value of their idol traffic.

So long as a group of people like the identical thing, a circle will be created, and as long as the flow is large enough, the circle will expand. Today's fandom philosophy has taken root in the minds of countless people under the spread of the network and main platforms. Much of the language and behaviour on the network is a subconscious copy and paste of fandom terminology and thinking, due to admiration of each one's idol, so it will create a closed frenzy, resulting in a quantity of brainless behaviour, causing harm to them all and the resentment of passers-by.

## **4. Countermeasures for Constructing a Clear Fans Group**

### **4.1 Industry Capital Needs to be Responsible**

For major broadcasting platforms such as advertising companies, economic companies, marketing agencies and other capital, profit-seeking is their nature. But in the business world, they cannot lose conscience, ought not to breach public order and morality, abuse the market order, ought to abide by business ethics and take social responsibility to guide fans to the right star. The major platforms ought to correct all types of lists, crack down on fans' comments that tear into and abuse each other, and remove accounts that forge data and create rumours on the platform. [5]. Platforms and other capitals should not utilise "flow" as the only factor to measure the worth of idols. It is the single, untrue and unfair criterion that results in conflict between diverse fandoms and bedlam in the network order, and also inters numerous powerful and socially valuable artists. For those reasons, platforms ought to establish a diversified idol appraisal standard system to positively assess an artist's value to society, the entertainment industry and fans through their professional ability, works, whether they can bear social responsibility, and whether they can serve as a role model. Economic companies ought to also instigate long-term planning and acceptable operation strategies in the process of star-making and idol cultivation, cultivating idols' professional abilities whilst improving their professionalism and assisting them to institute correct values and ideas, so idols will be able to speak with strength, works and character as soon as possible, and enable the cultivation and output of idols take the road of sustainable development.

### **4.2 Society Together to Guide the Fans Group Fans to Form a Positive Pursuit**

Fan following ought to be based on the basis that their behaviour will not affect their own lives or the lives of others. Forming positive idol worship necessitates the combined efforts of government, schools, media and even the entire society.

Relevant government departments ought to strengthen management, using administrative means to control and improve relevant laws and regulations. Schools ought to act in response to pop culture and supply accurate enlightenment and guidance to students' psychology, values and idolatry. Mainstream media ought to actively promote positive energy and transmit a truthful value orientation to fans.

Society ought to tolerate, accept and regulate the development of the fans group culture, guide fans to take those positive, sunny and connotative artists as their idols, and positively guide fans'

enthusiasm for pursuing stars, so that they can be inspired to "become better" by benchmarking the good qualities of their idols.. For the fandom, it is also essential to form a contract on the basis of consensus within the group, to sternly prevent any illegal or disorderly behaviours, to control themselves, to pay attention to their behaviours and language, and to always keep in mind that star-catching behaviour ought to be logical and language ought to be civilised, so that a healthy fan culture can be created.

## 5. Summary

The swift growth of the fandom culture has ingeniously influenced the culture and cyberspace construction of diverse social circles and the development of youth. In current years, the state has also started to take "clean action" against the "chaos" in fans group, but to totally cut off the gray industrial chain behind the fans group culture, the joint efforts of society are still needed. We look forward to the establishment of a more competent and sustainable regulatory system altogether, and correction of the capital source from platforms and enterprises, so as to encourage the benevolent development of the fans group culture and make it a constructive factor for social progress.

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