Double identity and double mission of information activities in serious leisure: A case study of idol fans from China

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Abstract

Introduction. *As an accompanying growth demand, fandom culture has attracted more and more attention in Chinese society. The poster aimed to study the characteristics of idol fans' information activities in the context of serious leisure.*

Methods. *Based on Hektor's daily life information behaviour model, questionnaire and semi-structured interview were used to investigate the information activities of core fans of idol Z's fan club.*

Analysis. *The information activities of core fans as individual fans as well as members of fan club were analysed with contend analysis method.*

Results. *Core fans have information behaviour including seeking, gathering, communicating and giving, as well as information activities including searching & retrieving, browsing, monitoring, unfolding, exchanging, dressing, instructing, and publishing. As members of fan club, fans also have other information activities such as information storage and information evaluation.*

Conclusions. *This work showed that the Hektor's model had strong applicability in describing the information activities of idol core fans, but it needed to be supplemented with activities such as information storage and information evaluation. Core fans had the double identity as information users and providers. Their serious leisure information activities were not only aimed at pure entertainment, but also exhibited problem-solving goals similar to those in learning and work context.*

Keywords*: serious leisure, China, information activities, idol core fans, social media*

Introduction

Chasing idols, as a leisure activity, is accompanied by rich information behaviour. Core fans are responsible for the management of fan club and providing services such as resources transportation and translation (Ma & Lin, 2018), and their information activities are the richest in the fan club.

Stebbins (1982) outlined six qualities of serious leisure activities among which related to information behaviour are quality (2) to have careers in their endeavours and quality (3) significant personal effort based on special knowledge, training, or skill, and sometimes all three (Stebbins 2009, Mansourian 2021).

Hektor's (2001) model is suitable for this work. First, this model focuses on the information behaviour in the digital environment and incorporates rich information activities. Second, it fits with the context of serious leisure. Hartel et al. (2016) verified the applicability of this model with three types of serious leisure activities. Last, it has been proved to be a viable model to characterize the information behaviour of pop music fans (Mcmullen, 2018).

Problem Statement

Fandom has increasingly become a hot topic in China society. Core fans of idol, as a group with a large amount of information behaviour and activities in the digital environment, has not been paid attention to by research on information behaviour in the context of serious leisure in China. So, what are the composition and characteristics of idol fans' information activities in the context of serious leisure?

Idol Z participated in a Korean idol raising program, and her fans in China formed a Z fan club during the program's broadcast. Information about Z is in Japanese, Korean and English, leading to language barriers in obtaining information. But it also enriches the information activities of fans. By taking the core fans in Z's fan club as a case study, this work reflected the information activities characteristics of the hotly debated group in the Internet age.

Significance and Relevance

Fan club is a hierarchical group that is divided into top-level fans, core fans, and edge fans (Ma & Lin 2018), and the ability to collect information is one of the core fans' skills (Ju & Yang 2019). Besides, fan clubs are becoming increasingly functional, with a clear division of labour (Hu 2020). Information behaviour of fans has received increasing attention, such as the creative behaviour of online literature of fan groups (Price 2017), the information behaviour and needs of pop music fans (Mcmullen 2018).

This work can provide reference for the marketing strategy of information service and entertainment industry. Since chasing idols usually occurs in the youth, it also provides inspiration for information activities researchers who focus on the youth in the context of serious leisure.

Methods

This work used mixed methods. Hektor's (2001) model and Mcmullen's (2018) questionnaire were used to guide the design of a 32-item questionnaire. Part A collected demographic information. Part B collected information activities of chasing idol, including information channels, resources, motivation etc. According to the information activities of each position in the fan club, interview guide was designed and then five core fans were invited to conduct a 1-hour interview. In addition, content analysis method was used to analyse the data by eight information activities in Hektor's model.

Results and Discussions

General Information of Participators

The average age of 25 participators is 23, with half students and half the employed. Participators spent about 3 days a week searching, collecting, communicating or providing information about idol Z.

Information Activities of Individual Fans

Searching & Retrieving. Information posted by fan club, idol or idol's company was considered as the most useful information sources because it was easy to access, fast to update and reliable.

Browsing. Fans often browsed information through social media such as Sina Weibo, QQ group, Twitter and Instagram, as well as video sites such as Bilibili and YouTube.

Monitoring. The information channels that fans followed were Sina Weibo, QQ group, Bilibili, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube.

Unfolding. Fans mainly supported their idol online. They paid more attention to idol's works, such as singles and stage performances, than idol's past experiences, personal lives or recent activities.

Exchanging. Nearly half of fans had not exchanged messages with other fans. The frequency of communication between fans depended on the frequency of the idol's activities, and communication was often motivated by social rather than interpretive or creative motives.

Dressing. Fans information activities helped to cultivate skills, such as collaboration, creation, translation, painting, etc.

Instructing. Nearly half of fans believed that there was a hierarchical structure in the fan club, with core fans demanding or guiding other fans finish some tasks.

Publishing. More than 80% of fans shared information about idol, mainly through Sina Weibo, QQ groups and WeChat moments, including singles, stage performances and schedules. The reasons for fans to share idol information were showing love for idol and strongly recommending idol to others.

Information Activities of Members in the Fan Club

The mangers of Z fan club were responsible for fund raising, labour division, resource preservation etc., and they conducted information exchanging, instructing and publishing. They also conserved resources in the Cloud of the fan club, that is, information storage. Since the information about idol Z was in several languages, and not all translators in the fan club were professional, managers carried out information evaluation by assigning translators to mutual proofread translation texts.

The information activities of resource transportation fans were searching & retrieving, browsing and monitoring multilingual information about idol. Besides, they carried out reliability evaluation of information, usually by reference to information posted by idol and idol's company.

Information resources about idol Z were multilingual, and had to be translated into Chinese before information released. The information activities of translation fans involved unfolding and dressing.

Conclusion

This work discussed the information activities of idol core fans with youth as the main participators in the context of serious leisure, and found that idol core fans had the characteristics of double identity and double purpose. As individual fans, they mainly played the role of information users and their motivation for idol-chasing information activities was mainly pure entertainment. As members of the fan club, they acted as information providers and their idol-chasing information activities was task-

driven and aimed at solving problems. In the future, we can further study the information storage and information evaluation activities of fans, explore the role of social media in the information activities of fans, and discuss the difference between information behaviour of serious leisure for solving problems and information behaviour in the context of learning and work.

About the author

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Introduction

- Chasing idols, as a leisure activity, is accompanied by rich information behaviour. Core fans' information activities are the richest in the fan club.
- Stebbins (1982) outlined six qualities of serious leisure activities among which related to information behaviour are *to have careers in their endeavours* and *significant personal effort* (Stebbins 2009).
- Hektor's (2001) model is suitable for this work because it contains rich information activities in the digital environment, fits with the context of serious leisure (Hartel et al, 2016), and has been applied to characterize the information behaviour of pop music fans (Mcmullen, 2018).

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Problem Statement

- What are the composition and characteristics of idol fans' information activities in the context of serious leisure?
- Taking the core fans in Z's fan club as a case study, this work reflected the information activities characteristics of the hotly debated group in the Internet age.

Significance and Relevance

- Fan club is a hierarchical group with top-level fans, core fans, and edge fans (Ma & Lin 2018), a functional group with clear division of labour (Hu 2020). Collecting information is core fans' skills (Ju & Yang 2019).
- Information behaviour of fans has received increasing attention, such as the creative behaviour of online literature of fan groups (Price 2017), the information behaviour and needs of pop music fans (Mcmullen 2018).
- This work provides reference for the marketing of information service and entertainment industry and inspiration for information activities researchers who focus on the youth in the context of serious leisure.

Methods

- Hektor's (2001) model and Mcmullen's (2018) questionnaire were used to guide the design of questionnaire and interview guide. 25 core fans participated in questionnaire and 5 core fans in a 1-hour interview.
- Content analysis method was used to analyse the data by eight information activities in Hektor's model.

Results and Discussions

General Information of Participators

- The average age of participators is 23, with half students and half the employed.
- Participators spent about 3 days a week searching, collecting, communicating or providing information about idol Z.

Information Activities of Individual Fans

Searching & Retrieving	• Information posted by fan club, idol or idol's company was considered as the most useful information sources because it was easy to access, fast to update and reliable.
Browsing	• Fans often browsed information through social media such as Sina Weibo, QQ group, Twitter and Instagram, as well as video sites such as Bilibili and YouTube.
Monitoring	• The information channels that fans followed were Sina Weibo, QQ group, Bilibili, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube.
Unfolding	• Fans mainly supported their idol online. They paid more attention to idol's works, such as singles and stage performances, than idol's past experiences, personal lives or recent activities.
Exchanging	• Nearly half of fans had not exchanged messages with other fans. • The frequency of communication between fans depended on the frequency of the idol's activities, and communication was often motivated by social rather than interpretive or creative motives.
Dressing	• Fans information activities helped to cultivate skills, such as collaboration, creation, translation, painting, etc.
Instructing	• Nearly half of fans believed that there was a hierarchical structure in the fan club, with core fans demanding or guiding other fans finish some tasks.
Publishing	• More than 80% of fans shared information about idol, mainly through Sina Weibo, QQ groups and WeChat moments, including singles, stage performances and schedules. • The reasons for fans to share idol information were showing love for idol and strongly recommending idol to others.

Information Activities of Members in the Fan Club

Management	• Core fans were responsible for fund raising, labour division, resource preservation etc. • Core fans conducted information exchanging, instructing and publishing. • Core fans conserved resources in the Cloud of the fan club, that is, information storage. • Core fans carried out information evaluation by assigning translators to mutual proofread translation texts.
Resource transportation	• Core fans conducted information searching & retrieving, browsing and monitoring in several language. • Core fans carried out information evaluation, usually by reference to information posted by idol and idol's company.
Translation	• Information resources about idol Z were multilingual, and had to be translated into Chinese before information released. • Core fans conducted information unfolding and dressing.

Conclusion

- This work discussed idol core fans' information activities with youth as participators in the context of serious leisure.
- As individual fans, they mainly acted as information users and their motivation for idol-chasing information activities was pure entertainment.
- As members of the fan club, they acted as information providers and their information activities was task-driven and aimed at solving problems.
- In the future, we can further study fans' information storage and evaluation activities, explore the role of social media in fans' information activities, and discuss the difference between information behaviour of serious leisure for solving problems and that in the context of learning and work.

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