"Power generation with love"

Traffic factory girl and mum-fan's maternal love

Abstract

"Mum-fan"： a phenomenon in Chinese fandom, stands for those who consider themselves to be their idol's mother. Mum-fans, range in age from under 18 to over 45, dedicate themselves to their idols' career shown through "maternal love" through various "daily baby-rearing activities". Most of these activities aim to increase traffic -a kind of quantified influence power – to their idols. Besides, these activities have specific and concrete processes and division of labour like a factory assembly line. Thus mum-fan is nicknamed "traffic factory girl" on Chinese internet narrative.

"Power generation with love"： was initially coined by environmentalists in Taiwan against nuclear power around 2014. Afterward, mainland Chinese netizens extended this phrase to apply to those who participate in activities with low or no profit. Now, mum-fans use it to describe their motivation and participation for voluntary fan activities.

This study aims to explore mum-fans' daily activities, trying to understand the motivations of their "maternal love" and build a relational model through participant observation. It turns out that mum-fans are profoundly involved in the Chinese entertainment industry. To some extent, they can determine an idol's (usually comes from specific backgrounds, such as competition shows) commercial value. As a result, they're empowered to decide who can, and in what manner, stand under the spotlight. Thus, the predetermined power between fan and idol has shifted.

Key words

01 Mum-fan

02 Traffic factory girl

03 Social media

04 China

Research methods

Participant observation ⟷ Unstructured interview

Preliminary findings

Daily Baby-rearing Activities:

- Baby milk money earning

1.Contribute internet/social media traffic to their idol by posting, sharing, commenting.

2.Gain (or buy) credit by being active on specific social media platforms (such as Weibo, Weichat, and other fan activity platforms). These credits can be used to vote for their idol on Idol Influence Ranks of these platforms.

3.Some professional agencies measure the influence and commercial value of idols based on traffic rankings.

- Philanthropic events

It aims to increase their idol's influence.

- Public voice domination

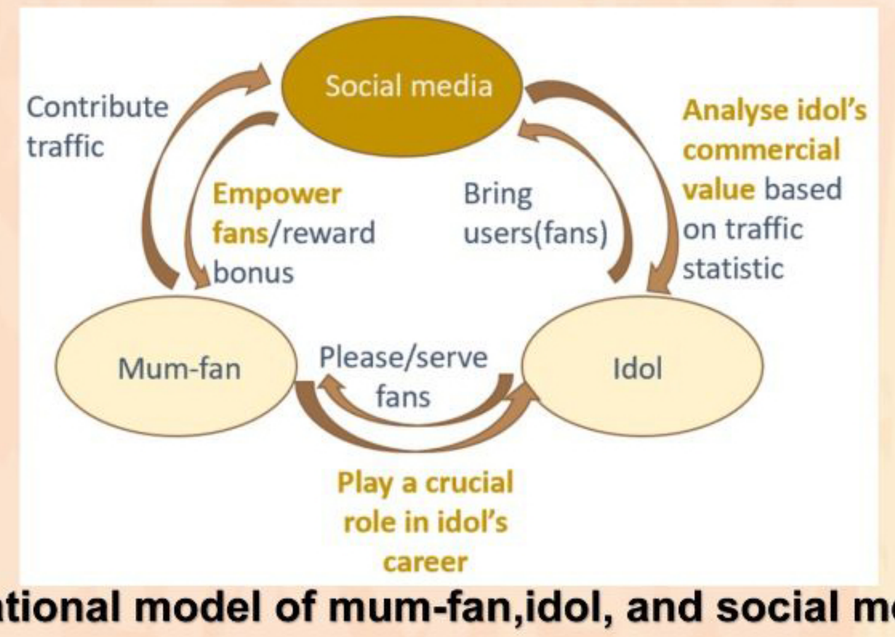
1.Fight against unfavourable online content about their idol.

2.Post fake reviews.

3.Set imaginary enemies.

4.Send spies to other fan clubs.

Hierarchy of mum-fan club



Relational model of mum-fan,idol, and social media

Conclusion

- Mum-fans have their specific fan club with clear identification. They clearly label their activities as baby-rearing and name their dedications and expenses for "baby milk money".
- Mum-fans fulfill daily tasks as "traffic factory girl "to support their idol's career.
- Mum-fans are unprecedentedly profoundly involved in the entertainment industry, which makes them feel empowered.
- Idol and agency build a deep connection with fan clubs.
- Social media restructured the relationship between fans and their idol.

Future concerns

1.Why does the "mum-fan" phenomenon only sprout in China?

2.Why does mum-fan tend to choose "mum" instead of other identities?

3.Further and deeper theoretical interpretation is needed.

Bibliography

1.Babbie E., 1998, "The Practice of Social Research. 8th ed.", Wadsworth Publishing Company

2.Cai Xunkun's mum-fan club, 2021, Daily baby-rearing list, Weibo (https://weibo.com/u/%20)

3.Dongnan, 2016, Love Taiwan and Power Generation, Zhihu (http://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/21335367)

Supervisor: Bertha LuPhin Chin

By:Li Ye,

PhD candidate, Faculty of Business, Design and Arts (PG)

E-mail: yli@swinburne.edu.my