

A Study of The Value of Emotional Labor in The Fan Economy

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Abstract. Based on the background of the booming era of fan economy, this paper conducts an extensive search and systematizes those theories regarding fan economy. This paper reaches the opinion that there are three factors allowing the emotional labor plays so essential role in the fan economy, which are time fragmentation, the considerable increase of fans' individual consciousness and the packaging of commercial companies. Actually, the emotional labor of fans increases the adhesion between stars and fans, which firstly promotes the development of the fan economy, and also drives the entertainment industry, fosters new business forms, and becomes beneficial to cultural diversity. However, while affirming the positive role led by emotional labor in the fan economy, the guidance of its values should be valued, because only in this way can we create a more harmonious and stable cultural and entertainment environment.

Keywords: Fan economy; Emotional labor; Entertainment industr; Network platform; Live commerce.

1. Introduction

With the continuous development of the Internet and the enrichment of people's entertainment ways, the "fan effect" has become one of the most important elements of the market economy and has a greater impact on the national economy and occupies more shares. Actually, fans dominate the development trend of the fan economy. According to the consumption data in recent years, if the brand spokesperson of a product is a popular celebrity, the sales of the product will increase dramatically both in online and offline platform. In addition, fans not only invest a considerable number of moneys, but also pour their emotions. This makes the fan economy grows with a fast rate, large output and rapid development. Emotional labor plays a pivotal role in the fan economy, because it can make the stars and fans build a monetary bondage and an emotional attachment. Thus, this paper is aimed to explore the reasons for the prosperous development of fan economy, features of emotional labor and the role of emotional labor in the value of the fan economy, which may help emotional labor to further promote the development of fan economy.

2. Literature Review

"Fan economy" is based on the brand community of fan participation, the social capital platform and business operation behavior formed from its trust relationship. [1] The fan economy first originated in TV talent show abroad, and the consumption behavior of spiritual culture exported therefrom, the main body of which generates economic benefits is the star characters including actors, singers, industry celebrities, etc., which is the main economic form of generating economic benefits in the entertainment and culture industry. Domestic fan economy emerged in the 21st century with the development of economic globalization and cultural diversification. Based on the rapid development of information technology and the industrialization of mass media change, it generated from all kinds of large-scale capital-led variety arts talent show. [2] In terms of the features of the fan economy, through the research recently, it is found that in the new media environment, there are many types of fan economy models coexisting. Some scholars have summarized that these types can be mainly divided into idol-centered star economy model, content-centered IP operation model and community-centered business partner model. [3]

In terms of the attributes of the fan economy, recent research has found that it can be interpreted as a form of trust agency and economic operation that optimizes the effectiveness of word-of-mouth marketing by enhancing user stickiness, so that obtaining both economic and social benefits. Or it

can be directly understood as “the economic benefits and values generated by loyal consumers and direct demanders”. In other words, the “fan economy” is actually an economic model that “gathers fans in a relationship of concern and attention and uses various ways to make profits”. About the essence of it, “fan economy” is essentially a kind of spiritual consumption. Fans can be generalized to represent loyal followers, firm supporters and advocates. The “fan economy” is to influence the user’s emotions, achieve their participation and dominate the effect of marketing, in order to ultimately realize the purpose of value-added. The so-called fan effect is to utilize the fans’ trust, confidence and faith in the brand to gain communication and economic benefits. Therefore, fans are essentially pursuing a spiritual and emotional appeal, rather than purely profit-driven. In short, promoting the development of “fan economy” is to utilize the emotion of fans for business, and also to generate commercial value and economic benefits through the development of content favored by those fans.

The concept of emotional labour was first proposed by the American sociologist Arlie Hochschild in his book *Emotional Finishing: The Commercialization of Human feeling*, which defined as follows: laborers engaged in service-oriented work need to spend a lot of time interacting with customers rather than machines, and their main task is to produce words and actions, and also to express their willingness to serve customers through non-verbal language in the form of “shallow performance” or “deep performance”.[4] With the emergence of social media, more and more members of the general public have been absorbed into the virtual space constructed by the Internet and became a new type of “emotional laborers”. Some researchers have classified the emotional labor in the Internet industry: (1) the expression of netizens’ emotions and their labor on social media platforms; (2) the production of knowledge and the appropriation of benefits on commercial information sharing websites; (3) the labor of fans and the capital multiplication of commercial companies [6]. In summary, in fan economy, emotional labor plays a crucial role, which makes the fan economy more adhesive and cohesive. Meanwhile, these existing findings becomes the steppingstone for this paper to show the value of emotional labor in fan economy more conveniently, which is vital for analyzing the development direction of fan economy in the future.

3. Reasons for the Emergence of Emotional Labor:

3.1. The more obvious fragmentation

The fragmentation of time is closely related to social acceleration, which includes three categories: the acceleration of technology, social change and also the pace of life [2]. Among them, the acceleration of the pace of life acts as an acceleration of social practices and leads to increased stress. Specifically, in order to improve time utilization, the public tend to choose multi-tasking handling in order to complete more tasks and obtain more massive information. In this process, time will be divided and calculated more accurately, so time fragmentation becomes more obvious.

But in any case, the time for public entertainment can only be reduced, not replaced. Because entertainment is an experience pursued and enjoyed by human beings, as an intrinsic motivating factor, it can drive individuals to complete the corresponding actions or behaviors, so that they can get satisfaction and mental relaxation [12]. This makes the public eager to take the initiative to use fragmented time for entertainment, catharsis of long-accumulated emotions, and release of stress. Additionally, the convenience of technology provides conditions for fans to use fragmented time to follow stars. For example, the smart terminal of cell phone provides diversified and convenient ways for the public to follow stars. The Internet era provides fans with a wide range of online fan social platforms, such as MicroBlog, Post Bar, Tiktok Fans and so on. In this way, there is a certain structure within the online community as a kind of social group, especially for the common purpose of action (such as to protect and support the object of fans), fans will strengthen the organization and normality of the community [4]. Therefore, emotional labor can be more directly affected by the fan economy and promote its development.

3.2. The dramatic increase of self-consciousness:

Fragmented communication can meet the audiences' self-centered construction of the information dissemination and acceptance system. Here, the audience's personal characteristics are highly valued, and each concept is measured by whether it meets "my" needs and preferences. The audience is subject to fewer constraints, and their ideas are more pluralistic and compatible. This makes the audience tend to express their preferences more intuitively and frankly, which is applied to the fan economy to promote emotional labor. Fan emotional labor actually includes three types: participation, consumption and production. Currently, the relationship between fans and idols is dominated by a two-way interaction, when the idol shows themselves in Tiktok, fans will imagine the intimate relationship with the idol and immerse themselves in it, and under the mobilization of this emotion, fans will spontaneously carry out free labor for the idol. Thus, there is actually a "free" or "voluntary" employment relationship between fans and idols. This is in line with Inglehart's view that "economic and technological development will lead to changes in people's needs and pursuits, and thus lead to a change in values." [4]. In the late stage of mass communication, the birth and socialization of the Internet has given the general public unprecedented media availability for autonomous communication. This has enabled every ordinary individual to possess their own voice, and to exert a sense of sensibility in the communication practice of networked self-expression and self-presentation [8]. For example, in the fan group, each fan will choose different types of emotional labor according to their own features,[6] and then the "employment relationship" mentioned above is reached, and the audience becomes a new type of "emotional laborer". A large number of fans as "emotional laborers" invest and do free labor, thus promoting the development of fan economy.

3.3. The establishment of the persona under the packaging of MCN:

Most of the audience cannot see the star himself to produce emotions and willing to consume for them, this passionate emotion is actually come from the packaging of the media platform. For example, on the one hand, MCN organizes the content creators and provides them with services such as content production management, platform docking, advertising agency, traffic diversion, fan operation, community maintenance and so on by utilizing its own resources, so that it can plough into content creation itself, but also realize sustainable and reliable commercial benefits; on the other hand, MCN agencies provide high-quality advertising agency and stable content output for advertisers and platforms, which builds a closed-loop operation mode with organic interaction of "content, channel, operation and audience". [9]

When looking at the deep relationship of the main body of the "fan economy" from the general commodity logic, it is easy to find that the relationship between fans, idols and commercial companies is interdependent and constrained in this chain. Commercial companies are the producers and operators of this chain, which is responsible for packaging idols into commodities that can meet the needs of fans; fans are the end consumers of this chain, whose preferences and requirements become the key considerations of commercial companies, and these fans pay for the products and services of the idol industry. Currently, with the emergence of social networks like Tiktok, fans constantly help to increase sales and the heat, and it has become the norm of "fan economy" on the Internet.[6] Taking the Tiktok blogger Pad Bottom Hot Kid as an example, the blogger attracts a large number of fans by creating beautiful clothes from simple clothing materials. When designing the packaging of "Paddy Hot Kid", the commercial company attracts the curiosity of the audience by creating such a contrast between the appearance of Paddy Hot Kid before and after the costume change, so that they can obtain more consumption with spiritual meaning from the audience. This is in line with Baudrillard's idea, which is "The prevalence of consumerism has made the body the most beautiful consumer product, becoming a salvation item, and even completely replacing the soul of the individual in society." In the case of the popular "Transformation" short videos on Tiktok, the performers also use the costumes designed by commercial companies to display their bodies in a way that conveys to the audience the connotations of clothing, the importance of makeup, fashion, etc., and brings the audience sensory experience and physiological stimulation.[12] This has led to the development of consumerism,

which is the concept of consumerism. [12] Meanwhile, this makes the audience inclined to pay for their moral and economic support, thus achieving the ultimate goal of commercial companies to achieve capital realization.

4. The Impact and Inspiration Brought by Emotional labor

4.1. Emotional labor can promote social and cultural diversity.

One of the characteristics of the fan economy is that it has a strong bandwagon, which can attract audiences to explore different cultures and form corresponding cultural circles under the directed guidance of emotions. Under the environment of public discourse space, the audience further concludes the cultural circle based on emotional labor. Thus, the diversity of social culture is realized. Taking the example of the popularity of national tide culture, many local governments will take advantage of the emotional labor of fan economy and invite celebrities to promote Chinese intangible cultural heritage in order to inherit and develop Chinese excellent traditional culture. For example, Huang Xuan and Han Dongjun have boosted genetic inheritance in South China Sea, resulting in sales of intangible cultural heritage products exceeding 600,000 dollars. Xu Jiao also launched her own Chinese element clothing brand-Weaving Feathers Collection on Taobao four years ago, which has achieved impressive sales results under the celebrity effect: not only did it stand out from more than 200 well-known industry brands in China and Italy, winning the “China-Italy Outstanding Contribution to Culture Award”, but also gradually expanding its business and set up offline physical stores. Its monthly sales volume alone exceeded 20,000 pieces, with a monthly sales volume of 3 million; Zhao Liying also promoted the folk culture of the southern coast of Fujian Province in Quanzhou, and her “Zanhua Wai” styling aroused widespread attention.

The process of celebrities’ promotion of intangible cultural heritage not only injects new energy and promotes cultural diversity, but also lets the people learn more about Chinese intangible cultural treasures, so that they can actively draw on it and carry it forward instead of passively accepting it. When more and more intangible cultural heritage products come into our lives, it will ignite a trend of the times, and make our intangible cultural heritage much more valued and cherished; Chinese outstanding traditional culture will go out of the country, to the world, which undoubtedly also enhances China’s cultural soft power and the national cultural self-confidence and cultural identity.

5. Emotional labor needs to be guided by correct values.

In the fan economy, correct values not only make the whole society have a better cultural atmosphere, but also can enhance the people’s confidence in the country’s system; on the contrary, the wrong value guidance may make people gradually have the wrong ideas such as wastefulness, pandering to the outside world, depressed consciousness, vanity or gold worship. The development of social emotion driven by the logic of capital has shown a tendency of multi-polarization, and American scholar Mestrovic put forward the theory of “post-emotion”, i.e., emotions are not genuine, free, and yearning for a better life, originating from the inner world, but a kind of alternative, virtual, synthetic and manipulable emotions in the developed industrial society.

In this case, it is necessary to start with emotional education, guidance and governance. At the same time, the government must effectively guide and regulate the emotional labor in the fan economy. After scientifically analyzing the dimensions of creating value through emotional labor and recognizing the multiple alienation issues in the process of emotional labor, we can further standardize the practical behavior of emotional labor practitioners. [13]

6. Live commerce can become a new form of fan economy.

Nowadays, the emotional scene empowered by the mode of e-commerce is constantly upgraded, the anchor in the process of introducing the product through the output of personal charisma for

establishing an emotional support with the audience driven by the consumer relationship has become an emerging trend. The new era of live commerce is a social attribute of the transaction mode, the goods also involve the anchor's personal charm, professional level, the quality of goods and discounts and other meanings. Therefore, what is sold in the live commerce is not only a commodity, but also a kind of emotion. [13] In the live commerce, real-time interaction between consumers and anchors can be realized, and the scene is rich, which greatly enhances the sense of reality of the "face-to-face" relationship, and thus produces a quasi-social relationship. Meanwhile, quasi-social relationship is unprecedented amplification, and by the fans to give a lot of emotional labor, and ultimately transformed into marketing effectiveness.

The establishment of quasi-social relationship makes consumers, to a large extent, regard the media figure with whom they have quasi-social interactions as a trustworthy source of information, and under the superposition of multiple emotions of trust, infatuation, admiration, and obedience, the fans are more willing to trust and buy the brands or commodities that are endorsed or recommended by this media figure. [14] Such as Liuyan in Kwai live broadcast, thanks to her lovely looks, skillful ability to sell goods, their own fan base, just two hours they realize 15 million turnovers, of which only reward income up to hundreds of thousands. It can be seen that emotional labor has become a commodity and consumption object directly, providing emotional space for capital to make profits. Emotional labor in the fan economy plays the function of facilitator, it does not produce consumption itself, but consumption will be accompanied and affected by emotional labor. [13] It can also be seen that the deep root of emotional labor is the logic of consumption, and it is the consumption of goods in the fan economy that is the goal of emotional labor. Therefore, that's why emotional labor, as opposed to financial investment, is more likely to make the fan economy sustainable and enduring, driving it to a more sustainable future.

7. Conclusion:

In this respect, fan economy is centered on emotional capital, with fan community as the marketing means to add value to emotional capital. The main body throughout the fan economy is the consumer, and MCN will dominate the marketing means basing on the consumer's emotion and leveraging the power to achieve the purpose of adding value to the brand, which is in line with the fans' willingness to add value to the emotional capital of the stars. It can be seen that fans' emotional labor matters a lot in the fan economy.

Though the content of emotional labor is intangible, its own features can produce great potential value. There are some specific embodiments on the Internet platform. Firstly, fans make various efforts on the Internet platform to express their love for idols, form support groups, and organize fan group activities, and then, the fan groups are gradually scaled up and organized, and their influence is getting bigger. As a result, a new type of emotional labor formed between fans and idols appears and has become a powerful force dominating the fan economy. Actually, it is in the emotional factors of the fans, the fan economy will endure, more and more prosperous. But at the same time, we notice that the emotional labor of fans is easily influenced by commercialized factors and technologies, therefore, fans should also remain rational and never follow the trend blindly. the relevant departments should also strengthen the guidance of the "fan circle culture" and fan economy and develop a more harmonious and healthy entertainment ecology and network environment, so that it can develop further and further.

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