Research on the Construction of ACG Virtual Community Group Identity Based on Network Field Method——Taking Baidu Conan Post Tieba as an Example

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Abstract: Nowadays, network information has penetrated people's daily life. An increasing number of community groups have broken away from the shackles of geography and turned to virtual communities linked by interest. Individuals take advantage of the Internet, through which they transcend the previous concept of time and space and construct broader and more complex relationship and identification mechanism, compared to the face-to-face communication. As an essential part of the youth subculture, the ACG fan group has its unique behavior and discourse system. This paper takes the Tieba fan group of the famous Japanese comic Detective Conan as the research object and discusses the construction process of the ACG fan group identity. A unique belief system or a specific discourse language system builds a sense of belonging among different members through communication both virtually and in reality, promoting more extensive multicultural communication and integration.

Keywords: Anime Fans; Group Identity; Network Field

Introduction

ACG is a compound word composed of the initials of animation, comic, and game. Through the input of domestic and foreign ideologies and the mutual interference of cultural diversity, a set of fan groups with unique discourse and cultural practices have been generated around ACG works. This kind of youth subculture is based on media and text consumption. It is not limited to the structural elements of gender, age, and class. Rather, it is based on interests, love for a particular anime. They have unique communication methods and are united by their belief in specific characters. Their textual content, transmission, popular mechanisms, and cultural practices derived from them together constitute such a particular group: ACG fans. Alan Dundee pointed out that a community formed for a reason must have some traditions it recognizes as its own. In other words, an exceptional group activity organization is constructed to express self-identity and seek a sense of belonging to the group. It takes an interest as the core bond, through which members share interests, resources, rules, and feelings. Together, it constitutes a "spiritual community."

1. Formation of Conan fan groups and the development of "Conan Tieba."

1.1 Rise of Conan fever

Detective Conan is a manga created by Gosho Aoyama. It was serialized in Shogakukan's "Weekly Shonen SUNDAY" in 1994 and it has not yet been completed. It was animated and started to be broadcast on TV in 1996 and it has been updated to 1105 episodes by June 2022. In the author's observation, most Conan fans began to contact this work mainly from broadcasts on various local satellite TVs in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Long-term activity has accumulated a large number of readers and viewers，In the Conan Post Tieba, there are also Tieba members who have posted statistics on the age of Conan fans:

211.137.59*Are there any college students in this Tieba? please come in; I still love Conan as a college student

God will show his omnipotence: I still love Conan as a graduate student

Msc222: I was also a graduate student. I watched Conan in the 2nd grade of elementary school at that time.[1]

This post was posted on May 17, 2010, and as of November 27, 2015, there were 119,268 replies on 109,960 floors, totaling 3,599 pages. This topic of starting to watch Conan's age resonated with most Conan fans. The work of Conan is a cultural symbol that accompanies their childhood into adulthood. The act of chasing after Conan is not only for entertainment but more of a feeling back to childhood. In recent years, due to the development of network resources, it has been hugely convenient for fans to watch anime and comics. As a work that has been spread in China for such a long time, both students who have just entered junior and high school, as well as workers have been fans for 25 years can be seen in the author's interview. One of the commonality of these Conan fan groups is that they can use Internet channels to watch the show and communicate with fellow fans, thereby attracting more fans to join this "big family."

1.2 Development of Baidu Conan Tieba

Baidu Tieba was launched as an online communication platform in 2003. Based on the concept of free expression and participation, and benefited from the low threshold entry mode, TieBa attracted many fans. In each virtual community, users can create characters that are entirely different from reality, crossing the limitations of class and region, and build their interest groups with strangers who share common interests. Under the influence of anonymity, netizens can express their opinions, and interact in different virtual communities without being restricted by morality and reality. The development of Internet and technology promote the integration of various media forms. In addition to the simplest form of text, all-around forms of expression such as images and videos are also sought after by the public.

Conan Tieba was established on November 29, 2003. As of August 2021, it had 4,427,746 followers and 93,219,443 cumulative posts. Among them, high-quality products need to be reviewed by the management members of the Tieba, which usually includes some excellent fan works and technical posts of animation discussion. The posts of the Tieba friends mainly focus on the prediction of the plotted trend, the reasoning of a specific case, the analysis of the music in the animation, etc. Flexibility in participation in the group further enhances the cohesion of organizational members.

In addition, there are also class divisions and power dynamics in the virtual community. The selection of Tieba members by the Tieba owner follows the identification rules within the fan group, and fans' understanding of the work and the Tieba's internal level is taken as the assessment content to ensure the organization's management to avoid anomie in the fan group as much as possible.

The maintenance of Tieba is based on the observance of the rules by the members of the community group. Therefore, a relatively stable population structure and relatively consistent group consciousness, restrained behavioral norms, and interactive relationships can maintain the stable development of the fan group. It can thus avoid disputes among fans over different roles, which can cause riots to break the internal balance within the group.

2. Mutual construction of ACG fan group culture and identity

What kind of people can be categorized as ACG fans? How should one's cultural "identity" be defined? since it can be quite different from the traditional concept of a fan group and has its customary identification system. Different ACG fans have varied definitions of fans. Given the questions of "what kind of people do you think belongs to the ACG fan group", different respondents also provide different criteria:

Answer 1: I think it is divided according to the degree. Like the general simple watching anime, he can also be said as a fan, but this is equivalent to a way of his entertainment. Those who like it more may learn about some stories behind each work and then be willing to join some fan club groups.[2]

Anderson proposed in 'Imagined Communities' that all communities are imaginary. They are a kind of 'cultural artifact'. The identity core of virtual community construction is built on some characteristics they share, thus forming a kind of "group belonging" and 'spiritual sustenance.' The definition of ACG fan groups by different individuals is generally based on the premise of 'watching anime'. On this basis, there are differences according to the degree of love. Some people may simply be interested in a particular work

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[1]https://tieba.baidu.com/p/773142777?red_tag=2213267889
[2]Interview from 'snow Shadow Angel'

but they do not consider themselves to be members of the fan group, some people may buy peripherals as entertainment in their daily life, Those who are more fanatical and obsessed with anime works may even be unable to distinguish between reality and virtuality. Different degrees determine the attributes of fans, and different people have different definitions of whether they belong to this group.

2.1 The mysterious "anime slang."

Different groups have their communication methods. For example, there are some slang adopted by the ACG fans like "Guzi/Baji" and "Mommy/wife". During the period of Chinese feudal society, various folk organizations created some evasive words to hidden meanings, and similes (a.k.a. slang) to serve various cultural customs or communication needs. At present, due to the development of Internet, some Internet terms are also called "Internet slang." Different circles have their own idioms, which is a kind of discourse system unique to the members of the group. They are used to realize or strengthen group segregation. Although this kind of Internet slang is different from the past in space and context, can also be classified into the category of linguistic folklore. During the author's questionnaire survey, it can be seen from the results that:

Do you think the words used in the anime fan group chat are different from the real communication

	Frequency	percentage	effective percentage	cumulative percentage
no	24	19.7	19.7	19.7
others	17	13.9	13.9	33.6
yes	81	66.4	66.4	100
aggregate	122	100.0	100.0	

81 of the 122 samples believe that the terms used by the ACG fan group in communication differ from those used in real-life communication, while content of chatting among ACG fans is regarded as a kind of "encrypted chat" by the outside world. Such kind of slang went through a dynamic process of spreading and inheriting. After being created in a group, it has been passed on by group members. It then gradually expand its scope of influence and became a threshold for entry. Therefore, later members will consciously search for the meaning of this for smoothly integrate into this group. For example, in the course of the Interview, there is a dream girl (refers to the female who fantasizes about interacting with the (male) character or star) of Kogoro Maori in the work of Conan, when asked where to find like-minded people:

'Tieba, we usually communicate in it, and there are also very powerful 'mummies' in it.'[3]

'Buy Gu' is a term for "Guquan," a homonym for "goods" in Chinese. It usually includes anime peripherals such as anime posters and PVC figures. The "Mummy" here is not a mother in the real sense of blood but refers to which character you like and whose peripherals you buy can be called the mummy of a particular character. Or it refer to the author who produces the fan work. Sometimes there is not much emotional content about couples in the official main line of many works, so fans will make the two characters as a couple according to their preferences.

During the Interview, the interviewees used these ACG slang words to communicate with the author very naturally, without considering that the author may not understand the meaning of this slang since this is a language habit shared by them all ACG fans in their mindset. Language itself has magical powers. Language is more ingrained than almost anything else in contemporary society, and nothing else is as effective as Language in connecting us emotionally with others. This is an intermediary that can only be understood within the same group, who can feel the presence of countless people who are "homogeneous" with them in such a special language system. At the same time and space, each member will have his sense of belonging in using this discourse system.   Tieba is an online medium with a low entry threshold. Its closedness and openness are relative terms because anyone can log in to Tieba, but this entry is only in the literal sense. It only belongs to a specific group of fans of a particular work because the various posts discussed are centered around the work, and it has a strong cultural divide. Bourdieu once proposed that people with the same cultural taste will

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[3]Interview from Yuriko's

come together, form groups, and separate from other groups. In the Conan Tieba we can often see that fan groups use this slang to show their familiarity with this anime:

Winter: Prove that you have seen "Detective Conan" in one sentence; I will come first. "This is the girl in black."

Kudo Yeyan: Ah le le?

Saotome Akane: This is what Shinichi's brother told me

The power of animation: I need to go to the toilet[4]

In addition, some members use their unique discourse system to divide strangers and friends in real life as secret codes:

He-yu: How to quickly recognize the one who has seen Detective Conan in the new class when school starts?

Togetsukyo Bridge: Is Shuichi Akai Dead?

Toshiro: I guess only hardcore fans know this; after the last time I asked a fan of Conan, he thought Hideichi Akai and Aiya Okiya were two people.[5]

Constructing and maintaining folk identities in such virtual spaces always takes place simultaneously in both virtual and reality. The language folklore constructed by ACG slang based on ordinary cognition condenses the familiarity and identity of fans to the works and absorbs the historical memory of the Tieba community. Through repeated narration and continuous creation of slang, the standard memory and sense of community of members turn the empty cyberspace into a real borderless community. The idioms of the fan group are fixed, which incorporates more individual fans into the group. The sense of community belonging of 'Conan fans' is born from this.

2.2 Special religious rituals—The emergence of the "Hang Conan" culture

For ACG fans, their love for a character often makes it difficult for them to distinguish the difference between virtual and reality. Sometimes, they think their favorite characters are genuine. This phenomenon is more evident among the younger age groups. The interviewee Yuriko is a first-year student. When asked if she felt that Conan's character exists in another world, she said:

'Of course, Kogoro is real; he is my spiritual support! Probably in the morning or at night, it feels like he is there for me, I think he is always there, but it feels more natural in the morning and evening. '[6]

The other interviewee, Snow Shadow Angel, a 27-year-old doctoral student, has a distinctly different view from Yuriko:

I especially like HaiTiebara Ai, I believe in her existence, but after all, it is just a childhood memory; now I have grown up and rationally know that it is a kind of creation.[7]

When the theatrical version of 'Scarlet Bullet' was released, some students posted on Conan Tieba that they could not watch Conan with everyone:

Silverghost270: I remembered the last time I was told in the group that Conan is only a part of life, not the whole; it is unfortunate; I said Conan, as a work that guides my spiritual thinking, affects me a lot; I do not know when this has been faithful, I can not give up their faith for others.[8]

The medium has the power to make ordinary audiences accept harsh realities, but it tends to remove the cruelty of those realities, with a degree of moral weightlessness, and gives stimulation without demanding responsibility. It involves us in a scene without exposing us to a complex reality. This is a kind of resonance that only people who live in the same cultural circle can feel. Most ACG fans regard their favorite characters as an act of faith and fill their spiritual needs through such fantasy behavior. This ideology also has different degrees of depth. In terms of age level, the older the audience are and the higher the education level they obtain, the more they realize that this is a fictional product, and the less robust they express their beliefs towards the characters.

Technical objects can also be embedded in traditional forms of witchcraft. When traditional language beliefs are combined with virtual characters, a culture belonging to a specific group emerges. 'Hanging Conan' is popular among Conan fans. It is to hang Conan image on the door of the room or retweet Conan on the Internet before the examination, with the homophony to achieve one's wish.

[4]From:https://tieba.baidu.com/p/7505461445
[5]From:https://tieba.baidu.com/p/7518269451
[6]Interview from "Yuriko"
[7]Interview from "Snow Shadow Angel"
[8]From:https://tieba.baidu.com/p/7298726246?pid=138754263856&cid=0#138754263856

'Hang Conan' has the same pronunciation as' do not fail'; many Conan fans are convinced of this ceremony and call Conan 'the God of Examination.' Every time before the exam, there will be a variety of Conan hanging posts in the post Tieba:

Ew orchid Karubin: History is dead, =. = I hung up on other things besides Conan. Next time, I will just hang Conan.[9]

In addition, in the Interview, many interviewees said that they tried the ritual of "hanging Conan" before the exam:

At that time, we all hung Conan to pass the exam. Probably when I was a freshman, it was viral to hang Conan. Because of the homophony, there were many course exams at that time, which is to pray for good grades, because everyone has an extreme sense of identification with this image.[10]

Whether "Hanging Conan" is practical or not, it is still a kind of spiritual comfort for fans. It is not only the power of language, but also a reflection of fans' admiration of virtual characters. This kind of belief is similar to the traditional belief in witchcraft. That is, the cause and effect of events are often inferred from the effect, as opposed to the cause leading to the effect. It is a personal and prophetic form of prophecy. In such a psychological factor, Conan is abstracted into a symbolic deity, which becomes the object of worship for students. It is a means for adolescent fans to show their identity in cyberspace. Moreover, in this act, there is also a power of language, which is the primary medium of communication with the deity. In the traditional view, the name of a person or a particular language will become a symbol corresponding to the real thing. It means any force acting on language (including pronunciation) is entirely equivalent to the force acting on basic things, which corresponds to a primitive witchcraft idea that there will be a connection as long as there are homophones or homonyms.

In addition, to make the belief act of "hanging Conan" more effective, there are also a series of rituals when "hanging Conan" :It is not like kneeling on the ground, mainly bowing with folded hands. However, for the ACG group, this kind of worship does not mean you must follow a specific fixed ritual and action, but more to seek psychological comfort. Then they like it and are willing to integrate it, leading to the worship behavior.

The existence of this sense of ritual not only stimulates the fans' own identity and strengthens the authenticity of their beliefs but also enhances the fans' sense of belonging and identity to the collective. Fan groups are retweeting or hanging Conan on the door. Driven by their lack of skills before the test, people instinctively seek shelter from the outside world and turn to such a supernatural force. Such praying identity is public. That is, as a unique praying way for Conan's fans, those who wish to form an "imaginary community" at this moment obtain positive psychological hints.

3. Conclusion

With the intensification of population mobility, the physical boundaries in the real world have begun to blur. In the Internet era, the community formed by various interest groups has wholly abolished the restriction of physical boundaries, but this does not mean that virtual fan groups do not have boundaries. Rather, access mechanisms exist everywhere. The identity of the ACG fan group is mainly derived from the standard discourse system and belief mechanism. These enable fans to find a sense of belonging in the fan group to which they belong, construct and maintain the folk identity in the convention of daily behavior, and consolidate the power of the group. This identity identification mechanism needs various means to be maintained and expressed, whether virtual or real.

[9]From:https://tieba.baidu.com/p/980309722?red_tag=3471149571
[10]Interview from "Snow Shadow Angel"

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