Chapter 9

Diversity of Fans on Social Media: The Case of Entertainment Celebrity in China

Xinning Jia
Zhejiang International Studies University, China

Kineta Hung
Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong

Ke Zhang
Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong

ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the diversity of celebrity fans in China, including their motives, activities and processes of celebrity idolization. Based on a grounded theoretical approach, the authors traced and analyzed the user-generated content posted on Weibo that was prepared by fans of the singer/actor Wallace Chung. The analysis reveals five fan segments with different motives: casual fans (playful), fascinated fans (aspirational), devoted fans (sense of belonging), dysfunctional fans (identification with celebrity), and reflective fans (solid self-identity), thus demonstrating fans’ different characteristics. This chapter also outlines the typical developmental process as fans increase their investments into the celebrity. Variants of this process, given the fans’ different psychological and demographic characteristics, were also discussed.

INTRODUCTION

A celebrity is a human brand (Thomson, 2006) who, in the age of social media, has a robust network of fans that comprise the major group of purchasers, consumers, and ardent promoters of the celebrity. Celebrity fans are connected by social media to form a virtual community across regions. On the one hand, they exert influence in popular culture (i.e., celebrity fan culture), the economy (i.e., fan economy),

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-3220-0.ch009
Diversity of Fans on Social Media

and marketing practices (Huang, 2015). On the other hand, they provide dedicated support to the celebrity. Through individual and organized activities, the community of loyal and enthusiastic fans supports a celebrity directly through its consumption activities, such as attending a concert, watching a movie, and buying mementos, and indirectly via its consumption of celebrity-endorsed products. Further, fans create and share user-generated content (UGC) in the form of text, images, and videos on social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), thus providing free publicity to the celebrity. Given the importance of the fans’ roles in the consumption and promotion of the celebrity and related products, researchers and practitioners alike are interested in understanding fan segments and their motives for being a fan in contemporary consumer culture.

The availability of UGC provides researchers with the text to investigate the diversity of celebrity fans, their motives, and idolization processes and activities. In addition to the fun and entertainment that provide light-hearted enjoyment to the general public (Hung, 2014), some consumers take their fandom seriously and form intense parasocial relationship with the celebrity. This intense relationship, as described in the celebrity attitude scale, which is the most cited measurement instrument in this area of research, is irrational, fanatic, and borderline pathological (Maltby, McCutcheon & Lowinger, 2011; McCutcheon, Lange & Houran, 2002). Meanwhile, there is an abundance of ethnographic findings that point to a constructive form of parasocial relationship between fans and celebrity (Doss, 1999; Fraser & Brown, 2002; Hung, Chan & Tse, 2011). Terms such as positive energy, aspiration, trust, growth, hard work, effort, and friendship appear frequently in social media as fans express their relationship with and the inspiration they draw on from their celebrity-idol. These diverse views on fans point to the need for a systematic examination of fan segments, their respective motives, and idolization processes.

CELEBRITY AND FANS IN CHINA

The celebrity market is highly vibrant in China. As more and more brands compete for the consumer’s limited disposable income, celebrity endorsement provides a marketing communication tool for the sponsoring brand to stand out, grab consumer attention, and strengthen its appeal in this growing consumer market. According to the brand consulting firm Millward Brown, China has the third highest percentage of companies in the world using celebrity endorsements, with over 50% of the advertisements featuring one or more celebrities (Market Me China, 2015). The popular use of celebrity endorsement reflects consumer’s acceptance and positive response to this strategy. Indeed, compared to American consumers, Chinese consumers are significantly more receptive to celebrity endorsement. They perceive such advertisements as providing more valuable product information, more pleasurable to watch and they heighten their desire for the featured product (Schaefer, Parker & Kent, 2010).

Relatedly, fan culture is also burgeoning in China. Celebrities take pride in the number of fans they attract and the buzz they create, as these factors reflect their popularity in the entertainment industry and, at the same time, strengthen their earning powers both in their profession and as endorsers. Although an individual may attain celebrity status by leading a successful career in a variety of areas including sports, entertainment, business, and politics, in China they are the entertainers such as actors, actresses, singers, and musicians that are the most popular. Baidu and Weibo that index the popularity of celebrities in the country consistently rank entertainment celebrities among the top. Further, according to the 2015 Forbes China Celebrity List that ranks celebrities by income, all but one among the top 50 celebrities
Related Content

Modernism to Postmodernism: The Transdisciplinary Mode-2 Knowledge Production of Relationship Marketing
www.igi-global.com/article/modernism-to-postmodernism/83586?camid=4v1a

Exploring Consumer Empowerment in Consumption Communities Based in Social Media
www.igi-global.com/article/exploring-consumer-empowerment-in-consumption-communities-based-in-social-media/132512?camid=4v1a

Mobile Purchase Decision Support Systems for In-Store Shopping Environments
www.igi-global.com/chapter/mobile-purchase-decision-support-systems/54396?camid=4v1a

Retail and Social Media Marketing: Innovation in the Relationship between Retailers and Consumers
Francesca Negri (2014). *Handbook of Research on Retailer-Consumer Relationship Development* (pp. 426-448).
www.igi-global.com/chapter/retail-and-social-media-marketing/109704?camid=4v1a