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More Than an Entertainment —

Cyberviolence in Digital Fandom Culture

MA Thesis

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Abstract

With the emergence of social media platforms, fan practices and discourses have entered into digital space. However, the misuse of technological affordances of social media together with the contested understandings on the normativities of contemporary fandom can lead to mass cyberviolence against both celebrities and fans. Inspired by the recent celebrity suicide cases in the K-pop culture, the current research explores the intersection between cyberviolence and fan practices. Through a digital ethnographic approach, the study delineates a landscape of various fandom-related (potential) cyberviolence behaviors on Chinese social media Weibo by paying attention to both the specific cultural and industrial dynamic of Chinese celebrity culture and the digital affordances of the platform. The study identifies six categories of prevalent cyberviolence behaviors, including the memetic uptake of celebrity image, the negotiation of celebrity image among fans, the toxic competition among fans of different celebrities, the conflicts among fans of different fan objects, 'bot' accounts as professional haters, and the offline consequence of cyberviolence. By analyzing the digital practice, linguistic features, technological affordances, and legal aspects of each case, this paper summarizes the general feature of fandom cyberviolence, and discusses their formation from both the cultural and technological perspectives. This study has caught up with one of the latest and most influential fan practices — cyberviolence in Chinese digital fandom, and may lay a foundation for future fan studies.

keywords: fan culture, cyberviolence, celebrity, idol, Weibo, social media, technological affordance

Chapter 1 Introduction

This study is about the cyberviolence phenomenon in the Chinese digital fandom culture. Fandom is the recognition of a positive, personal, relatively deep, emotional connection with a mediated element of popular culture (Duffett, 2013). However, fan communities in cyberspace can also enact violent practices towards celebrities and fans themselves. In October 2019, after suffering from long-time cyberviolence and consequent depression, two South Korean pop stars Sulli and Hara consecutively committed suicide at home.[1] This has also aroused intensive discussions on cyberviolence in contemporary digital fandom culture in China. Celebrities are not always celebrated, they can be also trashed and bullied by fans and wider audiences.

In China, the huge wave of negative comments and digital attacks towards a subject on the internet is labeled by popular discourse as cyberviolence. According to the academic definition, cyberviolence is an online behavior that constitutes or leads to the assault against the well-being (physical, psychological, emotional) of an individual or group (Herring, 2002). What distinguishes cyberviolence from traditional offline violence is that in the former case, some significant portion of the behavior only takes place online afforded by digital technologies, although it might then carry over into offline contexts. For instance, a report on Women's Aid survey from 2017 states that: 45% of women reported experiencing some forms of abuse online, including harassment, language abuse, and cyber stalking; and this consists of 12% who had reported abuse hard to convict and had not been helped (Clare, 2014). A similar concept is cyberbullying, which is often discussed in the studies of adolescent culture. Harmful bullying behavior can include posting rumors, threats, sexual remarks, a victim's' personal information, or pejorative labels, and hate speech (Smith, 2008). About 20–40% of all youths have experienced cyberbullying at least once in their lives. Evidence suggests that victimization is often associated with serious psychosocial, affective, and academic problems, while the psychology of perpetrators still remains complicated (Tokunaga, 2010). To summarize, cyberviolence and

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[1] See BBS News (2019) on K-pop star Suli's death, http://news.bbsi.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=956754. Viewed on the Jun. 24, 2020.
See BBC News (2019) on *K-Pop artist Goo Hara found dead at home aged 28*, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-50535937. Viewed on the Jun. 24, 2020.

cyberbullying define harmful and unpleasant online practices from different perpetrator-based perspectives. The former refers to violent practices of general online users, and the latter focuses on teenage bullies originated from school bullying culture.

Whereas previous studies mainly focused on cyberviolence against women and adolescents, considering them are important participants of fandom culture as well, the current study, regardless of the demographic variables on age and gender, explores a specific type of violent practice that is embedded in the dynamic of digital fandom culture.

It might be difficult to connect the enthusiasm and identification in fandom culture with the toxic phenomenon of cyberviolence. Jenkins (2008) defines fandom from five perspectives: a particular mode of reception, a set of critical interpretive practices, a base for consumer activism, a form of cultural production, and a form of an alternative social community. This early conceptualization emphasizes fan agency and cultural creativity. The development of digital media has accelerated participation by affording fans with cyberspace and technological possibilities of cultural production and community formation. Reiterating to Duffett's (2013) in a more general manner, fandom is mostly positive, personal, and emotionally connected with a mediated element. If the mediated element is a person, the fans are celebrity-followers. Nevertheless, it is exactly because fans are included in the creation and dissemination of commercial cultural products, a feature of participatory culture defined by Jenkins (2008), that they have a venue to express all forms of opinions towards celebrity figures on the internet. While the previous theorization of fandom practices mainly focuses on the affective investment and creativity, this study explores how digital technology and fandom dynamic also afford malicious fandom practices.

According to ElSherief's (2018) research on linguistic analysis of hate speech in social media, 60% of Internet users said they had witnessed offensive name-calling, 25% had seen someone physically threatened, and 24% witnessed someone being harassed for a sustained period of time. This statistic implies that hate speech — speech that denigrates a person because of their innate and protected characteristics — is a highly visible formation of cyberviolence. A preliminary observation on Chinese digital media also reveals that hate speech, defamation and other forms of verbal abuse happen most frequently.

The current study aims to first delineate the scope and forms of cyberviolence practices in China's digital fandom by resorting to the cultural and legal discussion of fan practices. There is not yet a stable lexicon or typology of cyberviolence offenses from legal perspectives that can fit the newest fan culture repertoires, especially one of the most prevalent cyberviolence practices — verbal abuse, and many of the existing cyberviolence categorisations are interconnected with or overlapping a combination of acts. In this case, the current study attends to the the infrastructure of all digital practices — technology affordances (Hutchby, 2001) and its derived social media logic (Van Dijck & Poelle ,2013), and analyzes fan practices from a new angle so as to categorize fandom cyberviolence into six type of representative fan practices noticeably happening in Chinese cyberspace, with attention on its rights violations, technological affordances, digital practices, and linguistic features if it appears in the form of verbal abuse.

Therefore, the current study raises the research questions: *What are the cyberviolence practices in Chinese digital fandom culture? How do technological affordances enable these fan practices? Relatedly, how to understand these cyberviolence practices from a perspective of fandom culture and social media logic?* To answer the research question, the study analyzes 1) The technological affordances of the social media platform Weibo, 2) The communicative practices on Weibo among fans and between fans and celebrities, 3) The emerging fandom practices online which have the potential to cause cyberviolence towards celebrity figures and fans. 4) How cyberviolence is eventually conducted by technology-afforded fandom practice throughout the logic of social media and fandom culture?

The study adopts a digital ethnographic approach. In specific, I will carry out an online observation on several highly noticeable and controversial fandom cyberviolence practices emerged on Weibo from May 2018 to May 2020 to capture the contextualized and situated understanding on how and why cyberviolence happens.

Following this chapter, I review previous studies on fandom culture and introduce Chinese social media Weibo and its affordances as well as its working logic. In chapter three, I explain digital ethnography as the methodological approach. Chapter four delineates the identified six categories of fandom cyberviolance behaviors including the memetic uptake of celebrity image, the negotiation of celebrity image among fans, the toxic competition among fans

of different celebrities, the conflicts among fans of different fan objects, 'bot' accounts as professional haters, and finally, the offline consequence of cyberviolence. Each category is illustrated with cases focusing on aspects of digital fan practices, the platform's affordances, the legal references, and the linguistic features of digital users' communicative practices. The analysis also explains how those elements above contribute to cyberviolence throughout the logic of social media and fandom culture. The main research findings are given and related to previous studies in the conclusion and discussion chapter, which shows the general cultural and technological feature of cyberviolence and explains the formation of cyberviolence.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

Fandom is a prevalent phenomenon on a global scale. Tracing fandom's origins to modern capitalist society, electronic mass media, and public performance, fandom studies have gone through several stages. To review the focal points of fandom studies and connect the latest development of fan practices with the theorization of cyberviolence, this chapter is composed of six parts: a brief history of fandom, fan practices and influences, fan-celebrity relationship in Asian idol culture, the diversity and the dark side of fandom, the affordance of Weibo and social media logic, and finally cyberviolence and its legal discussion.

2.1 A brief history of fandom culture

Throughout the human histories, fame, an ancient mechanism, has always been an everlasting pursuit. When and wherever the act of chasing fame and reputation happens, followers exist alongside, which makes the very beginning of fandom. Not being highly noticed in earlier ages as a cultural phenomenon, the existence of fandom started to catch attention in late seventeenth-century England, where the word 'fan' firstly appeared as a common abbreviation for 'fanatic', a religious zealot. Duffett (2013) concludes that before the nineteenth century, when institutions like royalty, organized religions, or formal politics were in the domain of public horizons, fandom was an object which well-known people were able to achieve fame, reputation, and merchandising goals from.

Later in the nineteenth century, together with the thriving inventions of electronic media infrastructures such as sound recordings, cinemas, and airwave broadcastings, vast audiences were invited to the fandom field. This resulted in a swift conceptual shift of fandom and celebrities from a sacred, noble to a secular, general stratum. In the twentieth century, fandom and the publication industry were both going through its fast development, during which the star system was born due to the public demand. Celebrities were exposed more frequently in the mainstream text-based genres including books, newspapers, journals, tabloids. Other media genres such as pop music, comics, and radios obtained prominent followers too. Meanwhile, some of the first fan clubs emerged around this time. With the mass adoption of domestic

technological facilities (CD/VCD players, VCRs, televisions) in the late twentieth century, fans were largely engaged in popular culture, making it a globalized activity.

The year 2000, according to Duffett (2013), is a turning point in the development of fandom as a shared social experience. New fandom activity venues as online forums and social media are introduced, with the emerging new celebrities like online influencers, traffic stars, and virtual idols. Jenkins (2008) describes the digital fandom as 'fandom writ large', which means fandom has turned into more mainstream, visible, and normal due to the domestication of social media platforms and mobile devices in the first two decades of the new millennium, where fans are able to exchange ideas and create digital fan works.

This genealogy so far has historicized the development of fandom before 2000, and its tendency of being a highly participatory, highly digitalized cultural phenomenon. With such knowledge, this study can keep exploring the connection between fan practices and fan identification to the current fandom cyberviolence.

2.2 Fan practices and influences

In contrast with Duffett's perspective, fandom was regarded by the public and some academic fields as a negative phenomenon from its very inception as a mistaken enthusiasm. Stigmatized stereotypes attached to fans described them as brainless consumers, social misfits, infantile, emotionally, and intellectually immature (Jenkins, 2012). One visible fan practice is to obtain unrealistic intimacy with the celebrated objects, to be specific, it can be the participation and interaction with the fiction texts or celebrity figures. Like some of the Mary Sue fictions in which an inserted fabricated character can fulfill fans' unsatisfied desires of characters as well as the plots (Marie, 2003). Speaking in a defensible position, Jenkins (2012) argues that fans are active producers and manipulators of meanings. With the metaphor of 'textual poaching', he generalizes fan practices as an active assertion of fan mastery over the mass-produced objects by borrowing and inflecting context from the raw materials for fans' own cultural productions and the basis for fans' social interactions, whereas the objects can refer to textual, auto-visual, memetic contents, celebrity figures and other media genres.

Another common fan practice being considered as 'worthless and idle chatter' is fan gossip. However, it allows for the information exchange, judgments of moral conflicts, self-expression, and establishment of personal intimacy (Jones, 1980). In contemporary celebrity fandom, the topics of fan gossip cover all aspects of the celebrity's undisclosed information, including romantic relationships, marriages, personal characters, moralities, political stances and so on. From Jones' (1980) and Jenkins' (2012) perspectives, fan gossip should be de-stigmatized from the behaviors of gaining useless knowledge and wasting time talking about unrealistic things. Instead of being merely a communicative practice, the act of fan gossip bridged individual audiences from various perspectives, and is taken as a necessary identity bonding among fan communities. In Spacks' (1983) words, 'the relationship gossip expresses and maintains matter more than the information it promulgates' (p.6). The relevant concept 'poaching' well describes the everlasting legal discussion of how textual reproduction and fan gossip are considered as 'hunting' on somebody else's 'land'. This discussion raises consciousness of the invading and defamatory feature of certain fan practice, as contemporary media spotlight the private life of celebrities in scandals and affairs, 'poaching' behaviors can consider rights violations, which will be further discussed later.

Another fan practice that is highly relevant for the current study is fan activism. Jenkins (2012) introduces the notion as a positive way of utilizing the enthusiasm and empathy from fandom to raise awareness of social concerns. Even though fan activism firstly emerged to save fans' favorite media characters, a wide variety of contributions have been made by fan activists in the field of gender and racial equality, self-awareness, and charities (Jenkins, 2011). For instance, around the mid-20th Century, massive films, and propaganda promoting young working females were produced in order to reach female audiences and built up women's sense of independence from family and masculinity in the Western society. Fanclubs, in the meanwhile, played a significant role in social charities and donations, even though fan club members were only 'belief-bounded' rather than out of a solid responsibility. As Duffett demonstrates, fan club members of Fay Wray, the heroine of King Kong (1933), rallied a therapy fund spontaneously for a fan who lost his legs, showing a tight-bound in-group relationship.

In the field of celebrity following, how fandom contributes to identification has always been an emphasis on previous research, not only for a better understanding of celebrities' socio-cultural influences, but also a better understanding of fans' self-identity. Irish philosopher Burke (1998) describes identification as the ways of placing oneself as a person in the groups or as a reflection in the social mirror. Based on Burke (1998), Fung and Curtin (2002) examine how Faye Wong, a Chinese pop singer whose independence suggests alternatives to existing social constraints, becomes a polysemic icon for feminist projects; and how her life experiences and her atypical star persona against traditional fragile Chinese women operate as a site of significant cultural work in the realm of gender politics. Apart from that, when Lady Gaga made her entrance into pop music, her eclectic collection of characteristics has struck many audiences' concept of self-identification, arousing worldwide LGBT activism. Some fans mirrored Gaga and initiated the way she presented herself, therefore they are encouraged to identify themselves as the way they are (Click, et al., 2013).

So far, fan practices and influences have been talked about in a general manner, however, this does not fully accord with certain phenomena in China's digital fandom with its distinctiveness. To understand the fan practices and influences in China's context, it is important to illustrate the fan-celebrity relationship in Asian idol culture.

2.3 Fan-celebrity relationship in Asian idol culture

'Idol', first emerging in the 1970s, is a word used in Japan referring to highly produced and promoted singers, models, and media personalities. Treat (1993) defines idols as male or female media personalities who tend to be young, or present themselves as such. To differ them from celebrities in the general concept, idols are not expected to be professional in any one of the skills such as singing, dancing, or acting; instead, they are interchangeable and disposable commodities that 'affiliate with the signifying processes of Japanese consumer capitalism' (Treat, 1993, p.364). In the Japanese media system, idols are seen as objects of desire, which can cause 'mirror' reflection towards fans who are positioned as consumers, with deep affective or emotional meanings (Galbraith & Karlin, 2012).

Traditional idols' images were constructed by entertainment management companies, because they have to be stable and non-controversial to secure the corporation with sponsors as well as advertised products. However, the entertainment industry is deeply determined by consumers' purchasing power — whenever demands rise, strategies adjust to fulfill the needs. Therefore, the criteria of being an idol stays flexible, and idols' images become negotiable and can be demanded, if not decided, by fans. Shinshi and Yasuhiro (2011) describe the success of AKB48, a Japanese girls group, as a 'paradigm shift' of Japanese celebrity culture on account of its 'general election' mechanism — by using the voting power, fans take over the full control of the group members' selection from traditional nomination by entertainment companies. Thus, fans are turned into 'supporters' rather than followers in the idol ecosphere, and to maintain idol-fan intimacy is of great significance. Fan-celebrity relationship turns into a consumer-oriented investment intimacy that Grossberg (1992) reasons as "a fan gives authority to that which he or she invests in, letting the object of such investments speak for and as for him or herself" (p.59). In the Japanese entertainment industry, media intertextuality may necessitate the idol-fan intimacy in the forms of familiarity with the performance, interactive activities and even gossipy trivia. To fans, idol images are composed of the investment demand and shared idol knowledge; to wider audiences, their images are built by promotional public news and discourses. Thus, their images become so fragile that they can be easily manipulated by media discourse and public opinions.

The K-pop industry is largely influenced by Japanese idol model, but with its own characteristics. Fans dominate the commercial activities including album selling, stage performing, concerting. In Tinaliga's (2018) research, the empowered fans not only endow idols with fame and revenues but also bring them harm and profound damages. While philosophers have recognized in the past that beauty and aesthetics are rather subjective value judgments (Burke, 1998), as a cake to be tasted differently, the allowance of subjectiveness seems to be neglected when it comes to fandom. This also coheres with Johnson's (2017) notion of discursive hegemony in fandom where where the mediated object is an idol, dissimilar beliefs and interpretations become intolerable, and may be forced to correct thought certain toxic behaviors. Tinaliga (2018) demonstrates particular toxic behavior among K-pop fandom, which

includes the unveiling of hundreds of rigged votes, scathing tweets bashing groups with different beliefs, YouTube comments peppered with pledges of loyalty, heated arguments over the legitimacy and authenticity of highly public figures. All toxic behaviors above share an 'unhealthy' competitiveness owing to fandom's misdirected loyalty. Pointed by Tinaliga, this toxic competitiveness triggers intense fandom war among K-pop groups' inter-fandom, fandom-fandom, and fandom-outer audiences, and eventually ends up in various forms of cyberviolence against idols and their fandom.

One noticeable localization of idol culture in China is the datafication of idol's media publicity. The uniqueness exists in the visualization of idols' value by adapting it to a more calculable transitional object — 'traffic data', or 'data flow', which may not be converted into currency, but can still have influence to the commercial value of the object who carries the data, by simply implying audiences purchasing power (Yin, 2020). Again, Yin describes the data contribution as an immaterial labor which is generated from digital practice such as viewing, clicking, and interacting. However, as a neutral transitional object, data itself may be exploited as a way to promote visibility but ignoring the quality of information each data unit carries. Hence, in Chinese digital fandom exists many celebrities who gain their public exposure from creating controversy instead of positive news. This implies their success in duality — being liked and disliked simultaneously. Currently they are discussed in popular and journalistic discourses as 'traffic data stars', 'key opinion leaders', or 'celebrities with huge followings'. Briefly, I would define them as 'traffic stars': in contrast with the traditional stars who are valued by professional skills, traffic stars are commercially viable in generating traffic data flow on websites and media platforms in forms of both positive and negative public visibility. The data contributors are not necessarily to be fans but also anti-fans and wider audiences. This with no denying offers big welcomes to any form of fan dynamics and digital practices, in the meanwhile, toxic practices included.

2.4 The diversity and the dark side of fandom

Generally speaking, in contemporary celebrity fandom, fans are united with shared interests, but differentiated with beliefs. Those who own different beliefs, or are from a genre without showing

much interest in, are reminding researchers that fandom studies are far from monolithic and bring this study into deeper thoughts over the diversities of fandom that non-fans and anti-fans are as important as fans to fandom studies. Studies on this diversity explore the dark side of fandom which is closely related to the cyberviolence phenomenon happening in contemporary fandom.

Gray (2003) defines anti-fandom as a realm of audiences who are not necessarily against fandom in itself, but strongly dislike a given object or a genre, and may consider it pointless, immoral and/or unaesthetic. Previous anti-fandom practice proves that they can be organized and commercialized as their fan counterparts, and can even be conducted as alternative tactics of gaining attention because sometimes infamy is as important as fame (Gray, 2003; Widholm, 2014). Anti-fans have various personalized reception modes over a disliked object or a celebrity figure, while this reception mode seems unnecessary to non-fans. Again according to Gary (2003), non-fan audiences are a nebulous structure over a particular text which they do have certain knowledge of but are not intensively involved in.

The diversity in the different reception modes towards different fan objects, including telefantasy fandom, writing fanfiction, and coupling (CP) relationship should also not be ignored in this study,[2] because they are dragged in the over-generalized fandom culture where they never end up striving for their own discursive hegemony. For instance, the visible public homosexual performance and coupling behavior, captured by Galbraith and Karlin (2012), is explored as tactics in preventing heterosexual scandals as well as encouraging fans' interpretive flexibility in coupling relationship and productivity in homosexual fanfictions. However, the personalized reception modes of homosexual relationships and fanfictions may not be accepted by loyal fans of the celebrities themselves. This is related to the conflicts and violence stimulated by hegemony on different fan objects and will be illustrated later.

In the moment of profound and prolonged digitalization and transformation of star system diversities and toxic fandom pushed fandom studies further to its dark side. Proctor (2018) conceptualizes various practices and performances that are labeled as 'toxic fan practices',

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[2] Coupling refers to both fans' desire and celebrities' performance of two characters behaving like a couple and loving each other.

including toxic masculinity, female or queer toxicity, and other practices falling as long as it falls into the realm of bullying, racism, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia or other types of hominem attack based on identity politics and progressives ideologies. However, the summary does not cover all aspects of toxic fan practice, and does not keep up with the digitalization of fan practice of celebrity fandom afforded by Weibo. This inspires the particular angle of this current study — from a perspective of cyberviolence in fandom culture. Hereby, the technological affordances of Weibo, and the logic of social media must be introduced.

2.5 The affordances of Weibo and social media logic

The relationship between contemporary popular culture and mass media is critically interpreted by Corner (1996) in one point as the general public abandon 'macro' political issues but to pursue 'micro' pleasure and identity-construction; and in another point, mass media is the infrastructure that without it 'macro' politics can not be grounded. Likewise, social media are essential hosting foundations of the contemporary digital fandom. For the Chinese digital fandom, most noticeable fandom practices manifest in Sina Weibo, a social networking and microblogging service launched by Sina Corporation in 2009 known as one of the biggest social media platforms in China,[3] on which users can interact with textual-based messages, similarly as what they do on Twitter.

Hereby, it is important to introduce Hutchby's (2001) concept of 'affordances' which means the possibility of digital platforms offering action. Applying to Weibo, the affordances can refer to all the technological artefacts of the platform's performative and operational features on the basis of algorithmic calculation and datafication. Like other social networking and microblogging services, Weibo possesses regular functions in publishing, forwarding, following, commenting, searching and private messaging. However, Weibo has been innovating new functions, such as localizing Twitter's 'hashtag' into 'topic' and 'super topic' to achieve a communal and spatial feeling of a fan page. Technological affordances both enable and constrain Weibo users' online practices. On one hand, users are afforded with operational and

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[3] See Michelle & Uking (2 March 2011). "Special: Micro blog's macro impact". China Daily. http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2011-03/02/content_12099500.htm Viewed on 26 Jun 2020.

communicative possibilities; on the other, users' digital practices and communicative discourses are also shaped by their autonomy in exploiting Weibo affordances.

To understand how the technological affordances perform in influencing digital fan practices and contribute to cyberviolence, social media logic provides this study with a theoretical framework. Van Dijck and Poelle (2013) define social media logic as the strategies, principles, and practices through which these platforms legitimize themselves in processing information and interaction, and how they "channel social traffic" (p.5). Specifically, four significant elements contribute to social-shaping with interdependence in the logic of social media, including programmability, popularity, connectivity, and datafication.

So far, digital fandom has been data-ized and visualized as data, fandom practices are necessary to be discussed from an angle of algorithmic culture in line with technology affordances and social media logic, because fans navigate through the algorithms of Weibo and come up with economic ways of achieving tangible effect (Yin, 2020). Nevertheless, the technological affordances and algorithms of Weibo cannot be fully referred to since they are kept confidential for commercial purposes. Therefore, this study captures Weibo's most visible affordances in different cases, which include multimodal content composition, operational autonomy, real-time commenting, addressability, accessibility, algorithms-determined customization and recommendation, the capacity of sorting, reporting, detecting, anonymity and so on. And all these affordances are discussed under Van Dijck and Poelle's (2013) four significant elements of social media logic.

Weibo affordances are sometimes taken as ready-to-use tools of cyberviolence to manipulate fan practices and wider audiences' opinions towards celebrities, causing widespread socio-cultural influence and is now under legal discussions.

2.6 Cyberviolence and its legal discussion

The previous sections have shown that cyberviolence constantly emerges in celebrity and idol culture. In the J-pop culture, defamation of idols can be spread over contestants' supporting groups, attempting to influence the result of the general election. Unwanted needs of intimacy can cause privacy violations, in the forms of cyberstalking, keylogging, and sexual harassment.

Even the new term 'Sasaeng' in Korean is derived from K-pop fandom to describe extreme fans who stalk idols and invade their privacy with questionable methods.[4] What have been experienced most in Chinese digital fandom, are human flesh search,[5] defamation, and verbal abuse as a shared experience.

To distinguish it from objective criticism, verbal abuse mostly manifests as hate speech, bashing, trolling with weakly supported arguments. Pietrengelo (2019) defines verbal abuse as behavior that repeatedly uses words to demean, frighten, or control someone. He characterizes eleven different types of verbal abuse, including name-calling, condescension, irrational criticism, degradation, manipulation, blame, accusation, withholding or isolation, gaslighting, circular arguments, and finally, threats. Some characterized forms of online verbal abuse have got names in public discourse, some can relate to Pietrangelo's classification above. For example, celebrity bashing and flaming are similar abusive behavior which refer to a part of one fandom openly criticizing one celebrity, having some shared features with irrational criticism and hate speech. While celebrity trolling is the practice of an abuser causing discord in the fandom, "whose real intention is to cause disruption and/or trigger or exacerbate conflict for the purposes of their own amusement" (Phillips, 2016, p17). To affiliated similar lexicons, our observation shows that bashing and flaming happened both in fan-celebrity and fan-fan communication while trolling usually happens between different fan groups. However, in most situations, verbal abuse does not show up in just one single type, but with mixed abusive features that can be extremely harmful to the victim's emotional and physical status.

Some traditional forms of cybercrimes such as tracking and privacy leaking are supported by hacking techniques, yet some other less harmful privacy invasion acts can be easily approached due to the rapid development of social media affordances. For instance, Hou (2020)

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[4] See JYJ Sasaeng Fan Involved in Audio Recorded File Speaks Up About What Really Happened. (2020) Soompi.

http://www.soompi.com/2012/03/10/jyj-sasaeng-fan-involved-in-audio-recorded-file-speak-up-about-what-really-happened/. Viewed on Jun. 24. 2020.

[5] Fei-Yue et al. (2010) explains human flesh search as an action of information gathering through both online and offline channels. In fandom culture, it often begins with information acquisition, and processes by a group of investigators voluntarily crowdsourcing their knowledge.

explores online gravedigging based on Phillips' (2015) idea of doxing/doxxing towards celebrities. They are synonyms but differ slightly: doxing refers to the general publicity of private information about an individual, while gravedigging specially aims at shameful information in order to shame or embarrass an individual in public occasions (Phillips, 2015; Hou, 2020).

As netizen perpetrators keep discovering new methods of cyberviolence, some of the cyberviolence cases can hardly be convicted by law. This is because evidence in cyberspace can be easily deepfaked and even revomed, and the damages are mainly intangible that needs to be carefully appraised. Until this moment, China does not have a separate law or regulation addressing all aspects of online civil rights and cybersecurity, but an upcoming civil law *Civil Code of the People's Republic of China* has been enacted by National People's Congress on May 28, 2020 with emphasis on civil rights, and will be in effect on January 1, 2021. By then, civil rights in cyberspace might be one future direction of China's law construction. Hence, this study discusses the legal aspect of cyberviolence from the aspect of five fundamental civil rights, including rights of name, reputation, privacy, portraits, and rights of personal dignity. Whereas specific cases will be referred to China's *Regulations on the Ecological Governance of Online Information Content* March 1, 2020.

Chapter 3 Methodology

This study adopted a digital ethnographic approach. According to Varis (2016), digital ethnography is a methodologically flexible approach which enables researchers to gather online information by being a participant or an observer in the online environment. Digital ethnography studies both online practice and communication and offline practice shaped by digitalization. Applying to the current paper, I examine digital fan practices and communicative discourses online which have been or are potentially being acknowledged as cyberviolence cases, and also take the offline results caused by online practices into consideration.

3.1 Research design

Being an experienced Weibo user myself and knowing its significance towards Chinese digital fandom, I define my digital ethnographic field as the sections of Weibo where fan practices and communications emerge. I adopted a sampling criteria to select the most impressive and influential cyberviolence events arousing public attention from May 2018 to May 2020. I selected eight cases according to Emerson's (2011) contempt of 'key incidents', which refers to events or interactions with an intuitive and theoretical sensitiveness that attract a particular field researcher's immediate attention. In this study, cases were chosen with the features of representing fan practices and communications that are timeliness, controversy, publicity, and diversity, in coherence with the features of the fan-celebrity relationship in Chinese fandom. To achieve this goal, I employed Weibo hot search lists. Even though Weibo hot search updates daily, all the old events on the list still exist in the form of a hashtag. Once users enter the event's hashtag page, description and data of the events still remain visible. In this sense, the time frame of my observation was not synchronous with the time of the events. I observed the digital practices of fans and celebrities so as to reconstruct the discursive events.

      The observation focused on the content of the public visible posts, operational and communicative practices among fans and general Weibo users in the comment section. Through the analysis of digital fan practice and communication key incidents, I have identified six types of practices that violated or are potentially violating celebrities' five conspicuous rights of name, reputation, privacy, portraits, and rights of personal dignity that are mentioned in the previous

chapter. This included the memetic uptake of celebrity image, the negotiation of celebrity image among fans, the toxic competition among fans of different celebrities, the conflicts among fans of different fan objects, 'bot' accounts as professional haters, and the offline consequence of cyberviolence.

Not all screenshots were made directly from Weibo, but also from Instagram. This is because Weibo may remove some extremely aggressive posts and comments that this study needs according to its regulation on maintaining a good online environment. For this study, some Weibo contents are sourced from other social media platforms (See Silli's case on Instagram and Xiaozhan's case on AO3 in Chapter four) with similar technological affordances which do not affect my analysis.

3.2 Ethical concerns

The participants of this study are defined in general as Weibo users who have actively posted contents or left comments in the cyberviolence events that I have observed. Measures have been taken to protect participants' privacy. On the one hand, aiming to observe the textual-based fandom practices rather than human subjects, this study does not collect participants' personal information. On the other, Weibo's user accounts policy determines two kinds of network anonymity, one is technical anonymity measured by objective personal information disclosed on the Internet; the other is perceived anonymity shown in the subjective perception of agent's anonymity (Chen et al., 2016). This means that even though there is not personal identifiable information revealed in the field of my observation, the participants are still 'known' and live a social life with their screen names. Therefore, I anonymized the screen names, profile pictures and account verification status of the data collected through online observation.

Chapter 4 Data Analysis

This chapter analyzes fans' digital practices in toxic fan behaviors on Weibo considering cyberviolence or potentials in a form of case study. Eight cases are given in total sorted by six distinguishing fandom behaviors, and detailed analysis are attached to each case as well, from the aspects of digital practices, technological affordances, legal discussion, and linguistic features if they contain verbal abuse.

4.1 The memetic uptake of celebrity image

Many fans are also meme users and are nomadically moving between the context of celebrity cultures and memetic communication. Therefore, in the intersection of those two digital cultures, celebrities are made into memes and widely spread on Weibo.

4.1.1 The memetic uptake of image macros

4.1.1.1 The widespread Erkang memes

Erkang memes have gained large popularity on Weibo for years since 2016. Fu Erkang, cast by Zhou Jie, was a lead character in a 1998-1999 Chinese television costume drama *My Fair Princess,* which was once considered the most commercially successful Chinese language series in history. This drama has achieved a large number of old and new audiences as being a regular 'summer vacation release' from Hunan Broadcasting System. Erkang was reproduced by young audiences into image macros owing to the actor's iconic exaggerated facial expressions in the drama — an anxious face and an open hand, attached with the text "Ziwei (name of one female lead), wait a second" (Chiung-Yao, 1998) (See Figure 4.1.1.1.1).

Figure 4.1.1.1.1, Erkang being made into meme to express 'wait a second'

Being used in a general sense to ask someone to hold on for a second, this meme immediately reached massive users on Weibo, and was reposted by Weibo users and shared on other communicative social media such as WeChat and Tencent QQ.[6] Online users appropriated the meme in their own local communicative context in everyday messaging, and then developed derivative fan arts such as the cartoon picture, identifying the characteristic of the exaggerated facial expression: the nostrils (See Figure 4.1.1.1.2).

Figure 4.1.1.1.2, Erkang being made into rhinoplasty commercials

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[6] Wechat and Tencent QQ are both Chinese multi-purpose messaging, social media apps developed by Tencent.

Such semiotic resources and trending nature of memes are exploited for not only digital communication but also commercial gains that, in rhinoplasty commercials, were used for advertising nostril reduction surgery, which made the actor feel the rights of his portrait, and personal dignity was damaged. Zhou Jie criticized the mass spreading of Erkang memes as "an impolite, disrespectful behavior, a representation of an ugly mindset, a mutant of immorality" for two reasons: firstly, the misinterpretation with added texts and inappropriate context disrespects the original meaning; secondly, it is a violation of rights if the general publication of other person's works and portrait obtains no permission from the holder.[7] Unfortunately, his right-protecting declaration was rejected by many netizens for over-protecting his personal image, ignoring the inherent ambiguity between celebrities' public exposure and portrait right.

4.1.1.2 Malicious image memetic uptake as portrait right violation

Memes, according to Dawkins (1976) are small culture units with image macros featuring a picture and superimposed text, existing in everyday online communication. The prevalence of Erkang memes exemplifies how fans appropriate memetic culture into communicative practice, by selectively poaching the original texts from *My Fair Princess*, and reproducing new meaningful units with their cultural context. However, meme creators and users do not necessarily need to be fans of the actor, instead, they could be non-fans who have limited but sufficient understanding of the meme's semiotic implication; they could also be anti-fans who intentionally stigmatize the actor's image for personal disapproval or dislike. In addition to this, they could be wider audiences like advertisers to achieve personal or commercial purposes. Thus, the perpetrators of insulting celebrity memes are not always limited in anti-fandom, but can also be general netizens with various reasons.

Weibo with its digital affordances, on one hand has provided meme creators with technology-afforded possibility of multimodal content composition for celebrity image reproductions. On the other it has enabled general meme receivers with strong user-to-content, in- and cross-platform connectivity for sharing and spreading. In Weibo's algorithm, every user

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[7] See detailed discussion in http://ent.163.com/19/0314/10/EA7K61VE00038FO9.html. Viewed on June 23, 2020

participation such as liking and reposting Erkang memes is counted as traffic data. The more traffic data this meme creates via users' participation, the more likely Weibo algorithm will be auto-updated to code Erkangs memes as potential attractions, and then to promote them with visibility among users in Weibo hot search or personalized discovering page, finally reaching its popularity in communicative effect.

When the effect is extremely negative and offends the actor's personality or commercial interests, celebrity meme-making can be concerned with serious rights violations against portraits and personal dignity. According to articles 100 and 101 of *The General Principle of Civil Law* (1986), the right of image and personality shall be protected by law. It is forbidden to use one's image for commercial purposes without gaining permission. However, some meme users are disputing on whether images from drama should still be protected by law, and if a celebrity should yield to violation of personal images for the sake of visibility. The law suggests that portraits are visual images that reproduce the appearance of a natural person on a material carrier through artistic forms such as painting, photography, and film. With no denying, performance images from television works are also a part of the portrait because it's easy to relate the performance image to the performer's real appearance. Celebrities are always endowed with the right to maintain their own portrait right as long as it's necessary, however, there is only a thin line between playful memetic communication and malicious image uglification or illegal commercial use. If not taken seriously, this memetic practice may deteriorate into a portrait violation. For a long time, celebrity meme-making was paid little attention in the law field, but Zhou Jie's indignation gave a warning to the potential harmful effect on celebrities by inappropriate use of celebrity memes. Moreover, celebrities can also be made into verbal memes and spread widely in cyberspace.

4.1.2 The memetic uptake of verbal memes

    4.1.2.1 'Zhazha Hui' as an internet slang

'*Zhazha Hui*' is an internet slang getting popular in Chinese cyberspace from June 2017, which is a mishearing of a Hong Kong actor's name Zhang Jiahui (Nick Cheung). This is because most Cantonese speakers have less proficiency in pronouncing Mandarin, and so does Zhang Jiahui. In

this case, when he was endorsing an online video game and introducing himself to the audiences, his words "I am Zhang Jiahui" was misheard into "I am Zhazha Hui". However, 'Zhazha' is a very derogatory term implying low quality or immorality, which created a hilarious effect among Mandarin-speaking netizens who have seen this endorsement.

Regardless of how Jiahui would feel when his name was mistaken in a disrespectful way, netizens and media then started calling 'Zhazha Hui' in news headlines, fan works, variety shows, and informal interviews, so as to catch up with the memetic trend (See Figure 4.1.2.1.1). The self-introduction was intentionally taken from the original endorsement and was made into new video clips and gif. images. Many Weibo users would like to share the hilariousness with others by addressing their screen name in the comment section and reposting the meme clips to their personal pages. Netizens' practices were not only limited online, Jiahui was also expected to introduce himself as 'Zhazha Hui' on purpose with poor mandarin on many offline occasions to amuse audiences as it has already become a disrespectful nickname. Even worse, more Hong Kong actors were asked to create such hilarious effects by introducing themselves in a comical way as well. Furthermore, 'Zhazha Hui' becoming trendy implied stereotypes of general Cantonese speakers' incorrect Mandarin pronunciation, while providing them with hilarious public exposures possibilities, at the same time, the rancorous requirement was considered potentially rights violations.

Figure 4.1.2.1.1, 'Zhazha Hui' becomes an internet slang

Jiahui personally showed great tolerance to netizens' nickname-calling action though. In 2018, Zha Jiahui posted a lawyer's declaration on Weibo, accusing the mobile game *I am Zhazha Hui* of violating his rights of portrait, name, and reputation because the game was not authorized or permitted to use Jiahui's image and name in its commercials. In this case, the illegal commercial use of the nickname is beyond fan practices but merely a rights violation. In Jiahui's subsequent rights protections, he registered the exclusive trademark uses of '*Zhazha Hui*' in 45 full categories to defend future intellectual property rights.[8]

4.1.2.2 Verbal memetic uptake and intellectual property rights violation

Nicknaming is always one prominent fan practice, representing fandom reflections over the targeting celebrity, which endows a negotiable duality of the name from positive to negative. In many situations, close audiences such as fans and anti-fans hold the interpretive flexibility in creating and understanding a nickname. For example, fans and anti-fans of Zhang Jiahui may perceive the nickname differently that for the former, '*Zhazha Hui*' is a self-deprecating humor, while for the later, it can be a malicious taunt. Nevertheless, for most of the wider audiences like non-fans, '*Zhazha Hui*' detaches from a fan practice and grows into a memetic fad and sensation where they get amused by incorrect pronunciation.

Similarly to the memetic uptake of Erkang's photo, the wide spread of '*Zhazha Hui*' was afforded by Weibo's multimodal content composition that posters can add video sources to supplement their posts. While connectivity is a major reason why commercial use wants to reach high spreadability by taking advantage of the traffic data that a popular content contains. Owing to Weibo's algorithm design which promotes the virality of memes, the hilarious effect of '*Zhazha Hui*' can reach more audiences and even incur discrimination on non-native Mandarin speaking actors/actresses. This may bring harm to the victim celebrity's name, reputation, and commercial gains.

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[8] See detailed discussion on https://tech.sina.com.cn/n/k/2018-08-10/doc-ihhnunsq6388981.shtml?_zbs_baidu_bk. Viewed on July 20, 2020.

According to *General Principles of the Civil Law of the People's Republic of China 1986* issued by National People's Congress, interference with, usurpation of and false representation of personal names may violate the right of name and the requirement of respecting the name, and unauthorized commercial use of name concerns intellectual property rights violations (Civil Law of the People's Republic of China,1986). However, as a celebrity, Jiahui knows how to up-take audiences' practices. Unlike how Zhou Jie rejected Erkang memes in extreme emotional rampage, Jiahui never had head-on collisions with meme creators. Instead, he has resigned himself to adversity and benefited from the trending nature of digital memes for more frequent appearance and broader exposure in public vision.

4.2 The negotiation of celebrity image among fans

Another prominent fan practice is the negotiation of celebrity images. When it comes to idols, what qualifications or criteria they should meet has been intensively discussed, with disputes roughly varying from professional skills, idols' romantic relationships, and personal characters on moralities (Treat, 1993; Karniol, 2001).

4.2.1 The negotiation of professional skills

4.2.1.1 The discussion over Yang Chaoyue's success

Yang Chaoyue was a highly visible figure in the field of popular entertainment in 2018. After finishing third in Tencent's girl group survival show *Produce 101*, she debuted as a core member of Rocket Girls 101, but was questioned for her success. This show is noted for having no panel of judges but empowering audiences participation to make decisions on picking 11 survivors out of a large number of competitors to debut as idols. At one point, she gained a large number of supporters ranging from teens to seventies because she had a lovable personality that naturally appealed to viewers, which brought her over 139 million votes to rank top 3 among all candidates.[9] At another, she was severely criticized for not having qualified performing skills

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[9] See "WJSN's Meiqi And Xuanyi Announced As Final Members Of Chinese "Produce 101" Group".

during the competition process. In an acceptance speech of the show, Chaoyue attributed her success to her fan community by saying "I deserve sitting there because my fans voted for me" (See Figure 4.2.1.1.1).

Figure 4.2.1.1.1, Yang Chaoyue attributing her success to fans' votes

The unmatched ability and voting results thus cause huge controversy making her on top of Weibo hot search.[10] Consequently, Chaoyue's anti-fans and non-fan audiences emerged in all aspects of Weibo practice to degrade her stage performance and her personality. Hateful comments such as "out", "you are so bad on it", "I'm not your anti, but you are acting too much

https://www.soompi.com/2018/06/23/wjsns-mei-qi-xuan-yi-announced-final-members-chinese-produce-101-group/. Viewed on 24.06.2020.

[10] See "Singing competition contestant under fire for 'poor performance'". Sino-US. June 13, 2018.

https://web.archive.org/web/20180808234007/http://www.sino-us.com/120/10570696637.html Viewed on 10.07.2020.

sweet and silly. This may work on guys but not on us girls. We vote for capability. I'm being honest, don't hate me" were left under her page. Many fans of other competitors felt their idols were treated unfairly since other competitors performed much better than Chaoyue but still ranked low. An antagonism among candidates together with their fans was thus aroused in the competition, leading to digital discourses and practices that are defaming Chaoyue for the manipulation behind the scenes. For instance they posted "Don't cheat in the show". Some anti-fans anonymously reported Chaoyue to the Ministry of Culture, claiming that she violates the core socialist values because of not having any singing or dancing talent but is allowed to debut in Rocket Girls 101(See Figure 4.2.1.1.2).[11]

[11] See "standards for chinese pop idols beauty or competence". The World of Chinese. June 10, 2018. Retrieved Jul. 10, 2020.

http://www.theworldofchinese.com/2018/06/standards-for-chinese-pop-idols-beauty-or-competence/
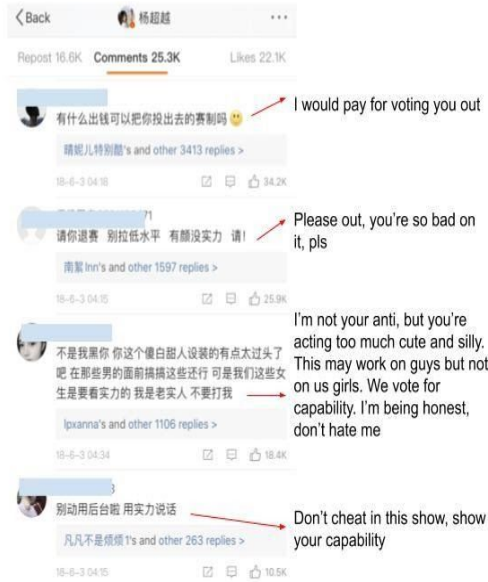
Figure 4.2.1.1.2, Chaoyue being verbally abused

Moreover, Chaoyue's easy success has made her into a widespread internet meme with sarcastic meaning as a 'lucky fish' praying for successes. For a time, Chaoyue's meme was encouraged to repost by general Weibo users with the text "repost this lucky fish, your things will get done with no efforts" attached (See Figure 4.2.1.1.3).

Figure 4.2.1.1.3, Chaoyue being mocked as a luck fish

4.2.1.2 Idols as products of fans' demands

What happened to Chaoyue's debut was a complex case of cyberviolence and considered potential portraits, reputation and personality rights violations. The motivation may originate from the negotiation over the qualification of being an idol and the potential of antagonism among fans of different candidates under the show's surviving mechanism. Anti-fans have exploited Weibo's affordances in real-time commenting, and creating multimodal memes to propagate disapprovals against Chaoyue, with a disrespectful and defamatory language feature. The capacity of public real-time comments and reply firstly affords users with possibility and visibility to produce summonses addressing Chaoyue by leaving comments under her own page, to ensure that Chaoyue can receive the hateful comments. Secondly, once textual-visual memes

are produced with hashtags, users are able to share and repost to expand the effect of the malicious memes. Although Chaoyue did not talk about the overall impact of the cyberviolence against her in public situation, current knowledge points at the fact that the impact of online hate speech and malicious meme does not differ much from violence in real life that both affect victims' basic rights in portraits, reputation, personal dignities; additionally, self-esteem, and career development — debut or not, as a special impact towards an idol candidate as Chaoyue.

Two fan practices here are highly relevant to the prevalence of cyberviolence, and these practices are derived from the particularities of Asian idol culture. One is the negotiation of idol criteria, another is the antagonism-caused toxic competition. The former one is explicated here, while the later will be discussed with other cases. As to the design of the show, two selling points are especially emphasized — producing and surviving. On the one hand, audiences are able to see how idols are trained and produced before they are manufactured into skillfully accomplished idol products, which acquiesces the disparity of skills among candidates. On the other hand, the survival of the game should always be the fittest rather than the best in consumer demands, which explains that Chaoyue's success is not solely valued by her capability in any of the performing skills. Relating to Galbraith and Karin's (2012) argument, personal charisma and good appearance of idols are also attractions to audiences. For this reason, Chaoyue stands her out from other candidates.

In an era of the line between celebrities and idols still remaining ambiguous, audience's expectations can hardly reach a consistency. Chaoyue undoubtedly breaks audiences' deep-rooted standard of evaluating a celebrity by his/her expertises. Besides, there is even a new impact on the current idol criterion that singing and dancing skills are no longer a necessity for an idol serving in group forms. Instead, the fitness of consumers' demand determines whether an idol can debut or not. To explain it from a consuming perspective, Grossberg's (1992) suggests that fandom holds the discretion power of what fans invest for, no matter time, votes, and affective attachment, but this discretion only exists inside one particular fandom product. When audiences negotiate the criteria of idols, they are negotiating the applicability of idols in the entire entertainment market, therefore, approval and disapproval co-exist when one specific product does not fully satisfy different consumers' expectations. Except for performing well,

idols have been moralized as well. Therefore, idols with controversial behavior are becoming targets of bashing and flaming.

4.2.2 The negotiation of personal characters

4.2.2.1 Discussion on celebrities' moral values

The cyberviolence-caused suicide rate among K-pop stars is incredibly high. Most of them suffered depression and had no choice but to kill themselves. As was mentioned in the fist chapter, the death of Sulli and Hara reflected the moral standards that the public has put on celebrities. Sulli's death also incurred huge public backlash in China on Weibo. Netizens' hateful comments firstly appeared on Instagram when Sulli posted her images not wearing bras, as well as personal photos which were claimed conveying sexual implication. Photos were uploaded from Instagram to Weibo by Chinese netizens that put Sulli into morality interrogation where not wearing bras was considered as a slutty behavior and could cause bad influence. Hateful comments on both platforms shared certain linguistic features in criticizing and sexual harassing, for example, anti-fans and non-fans saw it inappropriate and asked "Why don't you wear a bra?" Some commenters used eggplant and banana images implying male genitalia to express penetrating intentions (See Figures 4.2.2.1.1). This interrogation was once generalized to her other posts that more personal photos and video stories were maliciously interpreted, and badly influenced Suli's mental status and turned her into a tragic victim from widespread cyberviolence.
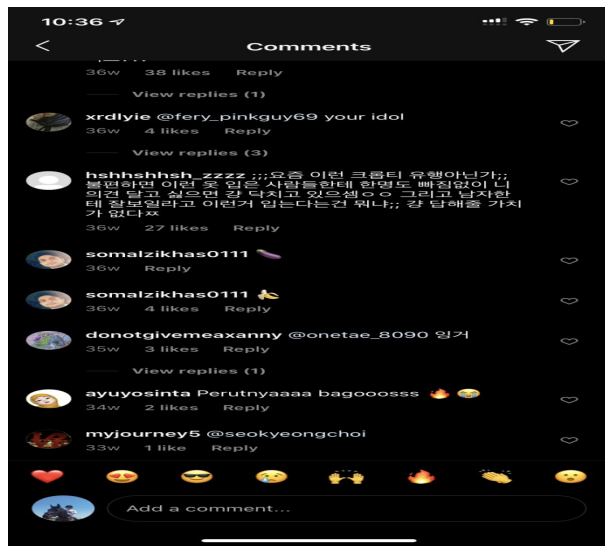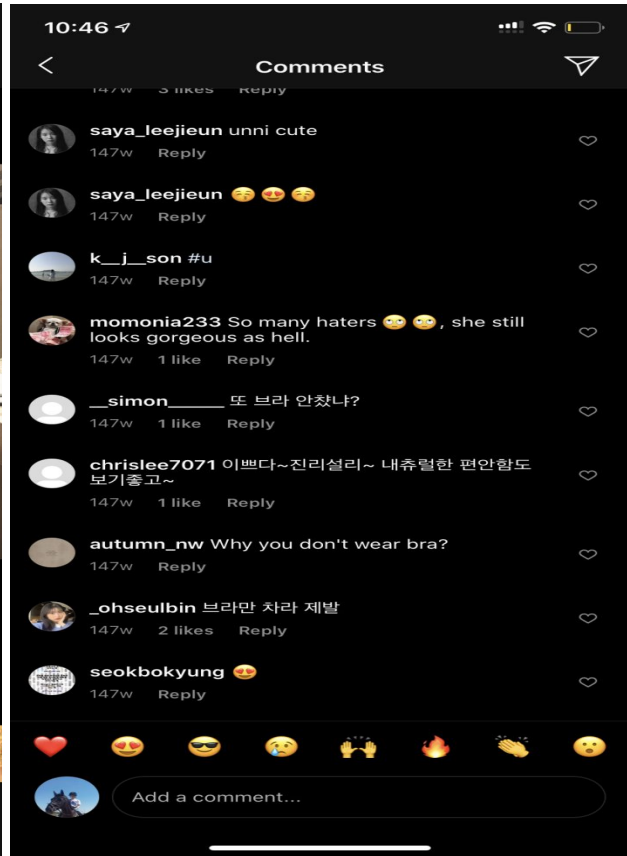
Figure 4.2.2.1.1, hate comments towards Sulli on Instagram

Except from Sulli, Hara were suspected to kill herself as well due to depression caused by anti fandom criticizing her appearance and the revenge sex videos exposure with her ex-boyfriend. Anti-fans' discourse was mainly pointing to a dissolute private life as a female

idol. Lately, Hana Kimura, a Japanese female professional wrestler, for a long time has been posting self-harm images on Twitter and Instagram while sharing the online criticism and discrimination she received pointing to her female wrestler's identity and mixed ethnic heritage, until she was eventually found dead by suicide in her apartment in Tokyo on May 23, 2020.[12]

Although what truly caused their depression still remains doubtful, traces of toxic fandom practice such as harassment, hate speech, discrimination, trolling, and other forms of cyberviolence remain solid. Even when these female victims publicly clarified their sandals and rejected hateful comments, more serious criticism followed.

4.2.2.2 Female celebrities as objects of moralization

This case focuses on the language features of hate speech against female Asian idols for behaving 'inappropriate' in the public's view on normativities, where they more often receive comments with sexual implications and comments questioning their unqualification of being a female public figure satisfying the norms and standards for women. We can see that celebrity culture is inevitably gendered and audiences' reception are moralized.

Digital practices mainly manifest in the form of verbal abuses afforded by the platform's possibility and visibility in addressing and summoning a target celebrity figure by leaving comments under the celebrity's personal page, which is in line with Chaoyue's case. Besides, for oversea celebrities who barely use Weibo to interact with their fandoms, Weibo users will transport information form other platforms to feed other Chinese audiences. So far, the intertextuality is created by fans by utilising Weibo's inter-platform connectivity, which familiarizes wider audiences with celebrities' controversial behaviors on separate media platforms, and inevitably puts celebrities into more widespread cyberviolence situations. This abuse eventually becomes a case of cyberviolence because it has three serious impacts on female celebrities. Firstly, in an individual health level, their rights of mental and physical health was

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[12] See Stedman, A. (May 22, 2020). "Hana Kimura, Pro Wrestler and 'Terrace House' Cast Member, Dies at 22". Variety. https://variety.com/2020/tv/news/hana-kimura-dead-dies-terrace-house-wrestler-1234614910/ Viewed on May 22, 2020.

threatened, which can cause low self-esteem, anxio-depressive disorder and even lead to suicide. Secondly, on an economic level, hate speech can have a long term effect on female celebrities' rights of reputation and portraits, which is tightly connected to their future careers and costly consequences such medical treatment and reparations. Albeit fan practices have been celebrated for its activist features and its ability to challenge socio-cultural normativities, the current case shows that Asian idol culture is still constrained by conservative gender politics.

When talking about the general phenomenon of negotiating female idols' images, most fans and wider audiences are not only expecting skillful performers, but also demanding characters with good modeling figures in virtues and morality that they must match the mainstream values that their society holds. As Galbraith and Karin (2012) have discussed, celebrities and idols are the 'mirror' of fans' self desire, to some extent, reflecting the majority of society. Celebrities can be badly verbally abused when they display rebellious ideologies or inappropriate behaviors. It is not a coincidence that female idols and celebrities are more likely to become the objects assessed by social norms and moral standards: In the realm of Asian idol cultural, dressing properly is a must; a slutty private life is not allowed; being employed in a male-dominating job can be rather discriminative. And many language abuse can easily turn into sexual harassment. This shows a patriarchy ideology entrenched in Asian idol culture that uncovers the long-time discrimination against female idols. Being a famous artist brings female idols considerable wealth and fame, yet their personal characters and behaviors become the object of moralization in a patriarchal entertainment culture. Although the negotiation on female celebrities' morality is relatively more, we should not generalize celebrity image negotiations into a mere feminine case that the discussions are not constrained by either the gender or the region of a celebrity.

Another finding is that many celebrities who have experienced or are now experiencing cyberviolence lamented that for the sake of this profession, they have been expected to accept hateful comments and stay mentally strong all the time as an intrinsic duty of celebrities. Sometimes, giving responses to hateful comments brought them into suspicion of being acting hypocritically. Together with Zhou Jie's case, the redundant tolerance towards criticism is seen

as more than the duty of a celebrity. We can argue that the status of being a celebrity may be used as an excuse for malicious internet users to conduct cyberviolence.

4.3 The toxic competition among fans of different celebrities

Tinaliga (2018) introduces three toxic fandom competitiveness (inter-fandom, fandom-fandom, and fandom-outer), of which fandom-fandom toxic competitiveness are most widely influenced on Weibo. This can lead to severe cyberviolence practices.

4.3.1 Toxic competitiveness among Asian idol group fans

4.3.1.1 The fandom war between BTS ARMY fans and EXO-L fans

Currently the competitive fan practices among Asian idol groups are turning into a negative scene. A highly visible fandom-fandom competitive antagonism on Weibo is between K-pop boy groups BTS and EXO, as they are considered as competitors of the top boy groups in the third K-pop generation. Toxic fandom competitive practice covers both groups' commercial results, idol group images and fandom reputation. For example, BTS's ARMY fans and EXO's EXO-L fans were allegedly responsible for hacking into competitor fandom's voting account to cause inconvenience in the voting systems. Apart from that, ARMY fans and EXO-L fans spread rumors and defamation against their counterpart groups, usually in the form of massive well-coordinated paid-posts that visible anti slogans were set as the posters' profile picture, and the contents consisted of hateful commentary, malicious nicknames of the group and group members, and uncertified defamatory remarks. Posters' names and profile pictures are insulting words targeting each group. Usually, posts were also attached with multiple hateful hashtags as well as reinforcements of anti slogans in squared pictures as semiotic propagandas. As it showed in the observation, their defamatory accusations indicated disrespect to China's national dignity and territorial integrity such as "ARMY fans kneel to a K-pop cult which insults Chinese nationality". Likewise, ARMY fans counterattacked with reputedly love scandals and dissolute private life: "EXO hires prostitutes in Japan", and "Pregnancy before marriage". Aggressive and sensitive words are given in the textualized propagandas that contain political, national, sexual sensitivity in contrastive colors. To obtain greater visibility, some anti accounts gained Weibo

VIP verification through special methods that their content will be algorithmically recognized as more valuable and more data-attractive and be primarily promoted in the discovery page (See Figures 4.3.1.1.1).

BTS dies without a burial place

Water injection equals BTS

注水等于防弹少年团
7-8 14:14 from OPPO超视野全面屏R15

#ARMY fans kneel to a K-pop cult which insults Chinese nationality#

#ARMY fans will die if they stop being bitches#

Abusive words towards each BTS member

#EXO everlasting crisma#

#EXO idol textbook#

BTS
Carries condom and hooks on fans
Famous for being water injected porks
Cult idols
Cooperates with Korean government
Grows rice(acnes)

Figure 4.3.1.1.1, abusive posts from ARMY fans and EXO-L fans

  Fandom of both groups united up to attack each other in verbal and even physical abuse moving to the offline world that caused widespread fan-fan conflicts and destroyed both the fandom's and the idol groups' images. These conflicts once were perceived to occupy too much public resources as the public believe that media space and public attention should be devoted to more serious public affairs. BTS and EXO have both been reported to regulatory authorities, and finally they have to make public apologies to the inconvenience caused by their fandom, while

their fandom will also ask for forgiveness by giving an apologizing announcement on the official fan sites.

4.3.1.2 Defamation and fandom nationalism as weapons of toxic competition
In this toxic competition among fans of different celebrities, well-coordinate defamatory discursive and semiotic practices together with fandom nationalism in the form of politicalized charges are widely used as harmful weapons which not only bring harm to idols but also fans themselves. In a general sense, defamation in cyberspace means that celebrities' personal information in which love affairs, marriage, family members, political opinions, and moralization of idol personalities become easy targets of public discussion.

As Weibo is afforded with multimodal posting ability and hashtag connectivities, defamatory contents with huge amounts of information can be expressed in a compact manner within one post like figure 4.3.1.1.1. Profile pictures, accounts' names, textual and semiotic content can all convey important information. Hashtags and addressivity markers @ can contextualize readers to other resources and evidence to enhance the discourses' credibility. Consistent with Hutchby (2001), the words detecting mechanism also shapes anti-fans digital practice especially in the way they present their textual content by visualizing into pictures to avoid censorship from Weibo, thus the practice maximizes its capacity of containing information. This leads to a standardised digital semiotics practices in the format of: "abusive words in profile pictures and name + #supertopic + #hashtag + @relevant account + insensitive text with more than 15 characters + sensitive content in squared pictures". User agency in applying Weibo affordances also manifest in the phenomenon where Weibo VIP verification mechanism and algorithms were exploited by toxic fandom as a way to enhance accounts' weight and visibility and to promote hateful posts for expanding negative impact, instead of functioning as an identity authentication of public figures and official accounts.

Consistent with Tinaliga's (2018) arguments, the toxic competitiveness between ARMY fans and EXO-L fans emerging in online and offline activities puts themselves in risks of maintaining a positive image of both the idol groups and their fandoms. One thing to notice is that the toxic competitiveness no longer targets idol's music or performance, but turns into

demeaning or directly attacking their counterpart idols or fandoms due to the misalignment of interests and beliefs.

Also importantly, it is a highly visible phenomenon that fandom in Chinese cyberspace has been avoiding sharing opinions on domestic political problems. In this case, some defamatory remarks were intentionally politicized to provoke public backlash towards the target. Be awaring of the long-existing conflicts between China and South Korea on ideological, social, cultural issues and historical remains, a common fan practice here is the fabrication of a nationalistic or an anti-socialistic political stance towards a celebrity or his/her fandom, to place the celebrity and his/her fandom to an opposite sides of the socialism and patriotism dominated Chinese social ideology. Thus, it can generate metaphorically a sort of 'genocide' in a socio-cultural level; delegitimize the celebrity as well as one the fandom as a whole. In China's case, victim celebrities are often charged with upholding Hongkong or Taiwan's independence. Consequently, their fans are accused of supporting political rebel idols. For those who have been proved as dissidents, their commercial activities will be stopped by the Ministry of Culture.

Contemporary fandom culture is paying much attention to celebrities' stories, thus, rumors, gossip, defamation, and controversy are created to feed the general public's demands. Fans can actively select, interpret and reproduce the cultural products as a new way of constructing nationalism to fulfill their own needs (Chen, 2017). This is a case of intertextuality where ARMY fans and EXO-L fans strived to disqualify the other fandom with a political justification. Although international fan practices can hardly refer to Chinese laws, the rights violation of reputation and portrait can still be widely recognized. Socio-cultural influence of fandom nationalism and cyber chauvinism can cause psychological and physical damages to celebrities, and finally, it can become a noticeable cyberviolence phenomenon in Chinese digital fandom.

4.4 The conflicts among fans of different fan objects

Another category of cyberviolence in fandom is a result of the conflict among fans of different fan objects, usually among celebrity fandom and fandom of narrative texts and visual arts.

4.4.1 The conflicts between celebrity fandom and fanfiction fandom

4.4.1.1 Xiao Zhan '227' incident

On February 24, 2020, an homosexual erotica fanfiction *Fall* from a fanfiction website AO3 coupling Xiao Zhan and his co-star Wang Yibo from Chinese TV series *The Untamed* was shared on Weibo.[13] Many of Xiao Zhan's fans were irritated because the author used their idol's name and characterized Xiao Zhan as a prostitute with gender dysphoria .

One noticeable fan practice here is the reporting and politicization behavior of Xiao Zhan's fans. Fans believed such fanfictions had an insulting nature, and insisted that the author was against Xiao Zhan's rights of name, portraits, and reputation. Soon the fanfiction together with its author and AO3 website was reported to officials for obscene content "against socialist core values" by Xiao Zhan's extreme loyal fans. This action resulted in the taking down of AO3 in mainland China, leading to discussion on censorship over fanarts sites.[14]

However, this reporting practices have been generalized as a tool to eliminate wider homosexual fanfictions contents, websites and readers. Xiao Zhan's extreme loyal fans provided general Weibo users with step-by-step instruction to encourage and guide them to use their citizen surveillance power (See Figure 4.4.1.1.1). Additionally, these extreme loyal fans started policing 'black sheep' who read Xian Zhan's erotic fanfictions or defended such fanfictions. These extreme loyal fans empowered themselves from nowhere and punished those less loyal fans by revoking their fans' identities to exile them from being recognized as Xiao Zhan's fans, in a way of exerting in-group isolation, verbal abuse and doxing.

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[13] Archive of Our Own (AO3) is a nonprofit open source repository for fanfiction (fic) and other fanworks contributed by users created in 2008, and Fall is a fanfiction novel coupling Xiao Zhan and Wang Yibo serialized by an AO3 author 'MaiLeDiDi'.

[14] See Global Times. (2020). How irrational fans ruined fan fiction site AO3 and their idol too.

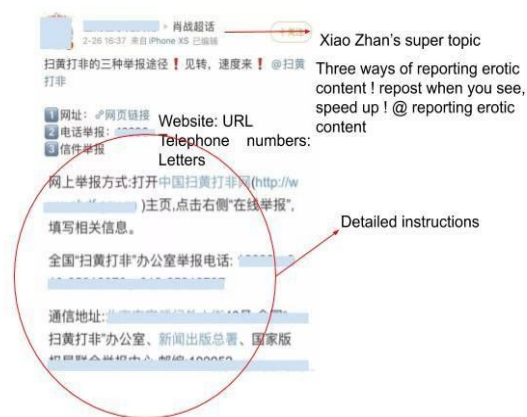https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1181942.shtml Viewed on July 20, 2020.

Figure 4.4.1.1.1, a step-by-step guidance to report

Another conflict is the flame war between Xiao Zhan's fandom and fanfiction fandom in the form of collective verbal abuse. Some extreme person-to-person flamewar even went offline and became real-life violence. In specific, one type of abusers' communicative practices were straightforward containing cursing and sexual words in order to start a flame war between Xian Zhan's fans and Xiao Zhan and Wang Yibo's CP fans, by saying: "Fans of the couple Wang Yibo and Xiao Zhan all go to hell. You lost your moms at birth. I fuck you all. Did you hear that" (See Figure 4.4.1.1.2). Some of the screenshots are even impossible to make because the contents were too aggressive and have been immediately removed from Weibo. Another type of discourses is seemingly persuasive by justifying their acts with law, for instance: "We are doing nothing wrong, and we are still doing it. We are doing right in reporting erotica. We are doing right in maintaining social justice. We are doing right in reporting bugs. We obey the national law. And we are fulfilling our civil obligations", but these abusers rejected receiving information in the first place, and do not give chances for further debates (See Figure 4.4.1.1.3). Discourses

with such features are simply unarguable, because the result seems less important than how abusers enjoy the action of irritating others. On the contrary, defenders from the fanfiction's side have been using classics to support their arguments, seeing "*Nana* by Émile Zola, *Decameron* by Giovanni Boccaccio, *La Dame aux Camélias* by Dumas fils, *Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo, *Butterball* by Guy de Maupassant all contains prostitute figures. Go and report them". This can be understood as fanfiction defenders creating a rational image in the flame war in order to contrast themselves to irrational Xiao Zhan's fans, thus they are more likely to gain support from wider audiences (See Figure 4.4.1.1.4).

Figure 4.4.1.1.2, cursing and sexual words from Xiao Zhan's extreme loyal fans

Figure 4.4.1.1.3, Xiao Zhan's fans' self-justification

Figure 4.4.1.1.4, fanfiction fans defending by giving examples

Correspondingly, Xiao Zhan's anti-fans formed up a '227 historical moment' super topic page on Weibo gathering telefantasy fanfiction defenders to protest against Xiao Zhan and his fandom. In the comments section, defenders regulated their protest slogans by simply copying and pasting, and each comment insisted on using the addressivity marker @ to reach influential Weibo accounts and Xiao Zhan's commercial cooperators (See Figures 4.4.1.1.5 and 4.4.1.1.6).

227 historical moment super
topic page

‹Back

227 历史时刻

227

384 k followers
2.69 billion
views
314 k posts

帖子　精华　相册

简介: 有关于2020年2月27日的恶性举报事件后续

Top

The follow-up report of
227 incident

from 227历史时刻超话 Edited

私信告诉我说227历史时刻超话内部出现大量违规
帖子，要求主持人处理，否则将在24h内邮任
OK，本主持倒是可以处理
那你到是告诉我到底是哪类帖子违规了啊
@微博客服

问客服，客服说自己不知道... Full Text

Texts and screenshots
adressing Weibo
customer service about
contents under 227
super topic page

Figure 4.4.1.1.5 and 4.4.1.1.6, '227' super -topic page and comments under that page

      As a result, this widespread fandom war caused huge damages to all parties: Xiao Zhan was then boycotted by many netizens and was required to take responsibility for his fans' doings. Still, major brands such as Olay, Estée Lauder, and Unified Enterprise revoked commercial cooperation with Xiao Zhan. Fanfiction sites AO3 and LOFTER were removed from Apple Store China.[15] Toxic fan practice even moved from online to offline and caused severer results that extreme fans conducted human flesh search to dig out personal information of factions, causing offline stalking, school bullying, and other physical harms.

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[15] LOFTER, is a light blog service developed by NetEase. The target audience are relatively less-mainstream literary readers and artistic youths.

4.4.1.2 In the fear of the reporting power

Toxic fan practices in this case are conflicts among Xiao Zhan's extreme loyal fans, coupling (CP) relationship fans and fanfiction readers. Their digital practices include online reporting, the policing of diverse reception modes within a fan community, and fandom flame war in a collective form.

Fan's agency in appropriating digital affordances in Weibo's reporting function as a tool to punish and eradicate dissidents is shown in this case. The reporting mechanism on Weibo, in the first place, was a supervisory mechanism created to maintain a good online environment. However, it is now being squandered by toxic fandom to attack competitive stakeholders, and to discipline fans with different opinions within the same community. A slight push on the reporting button can put a fandom conflict to the level of social justice, and the charge of "against socialist core values" can place a less-mainstream fandom culture into cultural and political incorrectness. In the sense, Weibo's reporting affordance is being misused to conduct 'political cleaning' in their own fandom niche, and is putting everyone in the danger of being reported. Wherever the haunting fear stays online or offline, it can stimulate widespread cyberviolence such as bashing, trolling, human flesh search and physical violence. Connectivity is also possibilities afforded by Weibo to bring different contents and users together in the way of providing URLs, hashtags, and addressing users with @ markers. In line with section 3.1.3, a commenting template coordinated by peer fans is also an economical way of exploiting Weibo's connective affordability to convey a message and anticipate a response from the addressed users.

When it comes to the flame war, most verbal abuse happens in a collective form, not targeting a specific person but an entire fan community. The linguistic feature varies from person to person, but mainly depends on its intention. For instance, if the discourse is aiming to simply abuse and irritate others, the use of cursing words, sexual words and insulting words is more frequent; while when the discourse is given to justify an argument or persuade the other sides, the languages are more logically constructed.

Moving on to the conflicts between different reception modes of different fan communities, it should not be ignored that celebrity fandom is about the identification with an ideal idol image. Fans assume they know how the idol is manufactured and represented on media

as they 'own' the idol (Galbraith & Karin, 2012). They have more assumptions and expectations. However, fanfiction writers work along the logic of imagination. The image of idol thus has different ontological status among different types of fandom. This is where the conflict comes into play.

From this observation, I found that most fans agree in an unwritten way that they should keep their specific values of fandom in their own fan community, instead of interfering with others. For instance, coupling relationship fans who couple Xiao Zhan and Wang Yibo are allowed to produce and enjoy their home-grown homosexual fanworks, but never interfere with Xiao Zhan's extreme loyal fans to promote any of their ideologies. In a similar manner, Xiao Zhan's extreme loyal fans are requested to respect other fandoms as well as the fandom's cultural products. For a long time, fandom has maintained peaceful in its ecosphere of literature reproductions that three parties compromise to gain their benefit. On the one side, celebrities welcome public opinions for exposure. On another, the hosting service (platform) offers a place with limitations for art production. Last but not least, fanwork authors follow the platform's rule and create their works. But Xiao Zhan's fandom damaged the fragile balance of the ecosphere and put themselves in fire with all fanfiction readers.

From the legal perspective, some lawyers see Xian Zhan's fans' accusations as reasonable because the name and photo from the fanfiction are highly identifiable, and can be easily associated with Xian Zhan the natural person. However, some lawyers hold the opinion that in this case the author had no intent to insult Xiao Zhan and did not cause any physical harm in real life, therefore the offense should be invalid. AO3 also explains with terms of service that:

> It's an author's responsibility to tag and rate and warn their fics appropriately.
> It's the reader's responsibility to read those tags and ratings and warnings and
> decide whether or not they want to read the fic. Anyone who isn't willing to do
> their part probably shouldn't be using the service (Archive of Our Own, 2020).

Although Xiao Zhan is a shared key figure in all relevant fandoms, he does not unite all fandom's ultimate beliefs. Thus, once a particular fandom intends to regulate dissimilar ideologies, it actually expands its jurisdiction towards other spheres, which is considered a transgressing behavior and will not be approved by others. Even Xiao Zhan himself did nothing

wrong in this case, he can still be a target of fandom's flamewar, together with those fans and fan-fiction readers involved in this case, the cyberviolence is no longer limited to Xiao Zhan's portraits and reputation rights violation, but a widespread harmful phenomenon threatening digital users online participation.

4.5 'Bot' accounts as professional haters

The cases above illustrate individual or collective toxic fan practices, however, many anti-fans and haters are getting more professional and interest-oriented, and have become professional anti accounts.

4.5.1 Hating like a robot

4.5.1.1 'Chaoyangqu bot' and Zhang Yixing

The emergence of 'bot' accounts on Weibo has been attracting netizens attention. 'Bot' is the suffix of 'robot'. Accounts ending with 'bot' in digital culture on social media generally refer to robot accounts which are not operated by real human users. In Chinese context, 'bot' accounts on Weibo are often used as a disclaimer of responsibility for its posts, which may include unauthorized information and anonymous submission for the aim of gaining traffic data or interests. In other words, these accounts are not really operated by robots, but human beings. The connotation of algorithms and bot automation are recontextualized on Weibo as an alibi for the controversial and negative comments towards celebrities.

In 2018 and 2019, Zhang Yixing (Lay of EXO), who is often nicknamed as '*little sheep*' or '*Yixing*' on Chinese social media, sued a number of organized 'bot' accounts and individuals, including *Sunyixing bot, Xingfei* for serious personal reputation and dignity insults and eventually caused these accounts' closure.

Bot accounts are usually not single-handed microbloggers. Instead, they may have mutual following relationships in a network of bot accounts on Weibo. Now *Chaoyangqu bot* is considered the existing biggest anti-fan bot account against Yixing, where a large number of defamatory remarks and misinterpretation on public statements of Yixing and his fans are listed in the account's front page. The account's screenname is a sarcasm over Yixing. In specific,

'*Chaoyangqu*' is a pun that, for one, it refers to Chaoyang district in Beijing where citizens are well-known for their reporting and citizen surveillance power. For another, 'Chaoyang' literally means 'mock sheep', thus mocking Yixing. In this sense, '*Chaoyangqu*' can be interpreted as 'a page where users can mock at Zhang Yixing'.

Chaoyangqu bot has become a hall of Yixing's anti-fans, because it has provided antis with well-organized sources of information that contextualizes all Yixing's negative news and abusive memes. In detail, *Chaoyangqu bot* used a star and a bulb emoji to categorize Yixing's alleged copying behaviors, weird public performance, embarrassing moments, and well-known memes. Noticeably, the microblog author replaces characters with the pronunciation of 'yi', 'xing (in Chinese means stars)', 'yang (in Chinese means sheep)' with their homophonic characters in Yixing's real name and nickname. Through this means, the author adds another layer of indexicality to an ordinary phrase, transforming them into sarcastic puns criticizing the celebrity. Under each sub-category, headlines were provided with linkage to an independent page which detailedly illustrated the specific case (See Figure 4.5.1.1.1).
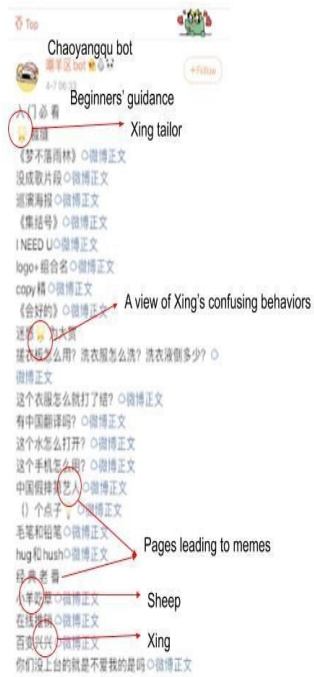
Figure 4.5.1.1.1 Chaoyangqu bot's front page)

Gaining experience from previous anti-fan accounts which lost in lawsuits, *Chaoyangqu bot* has changed its way of presenting anti-fandom practices from revenge photography and

direct verbal abuse into euphemisms and sarcastic puns, avoiding providing hateful images or using insulting language. Still, *Chaoyangqu bot* camouflages itself from being recognized by Weibo cyberspace's sensitive words censorship, staying in the gray area of the platform's supervision.

4.5.1.2 'Bot' accounts as a products of technology affordances

What is presented in this case is the active professional anti-fandom accounts mastering the Weibo affordances and algorithms to defame celebrities. There are three strategies that shared by Yixing's professional anti accounts begin with firstly enormous information collection, that negative news on Yixing were collected in a large scale and were listed in the table of content which formed a hateful encyclopedia, where newcomers are immediately contextualized with unfamiliar texts. This associates with Gray's (2003) point that anti-fandoms can be organized as their counterpart fandoms. 'Bot' accounts are new developments from traditional anti-fandoms.

The second strategy is mastering Weibo affordances and recommonation algorithms so that audio-visual sources are well-inserted in individual hateful posts, and were linked to the table of contents page via URLs. In the way of exploiting algorithm boosted customized recommendation, the bot account itself has a homogeneous following base that are mostly Yixing's anti-fans and other bot accounts. Readers viewing history will be coded by Weibo algorithms and then derives a customized preference, thus, similar bot accounts and hateful contents will be recommended to the reader, causing an algorithmical cluster of anti-fandom filters or 'bubbles'.

Thirdly, camouflage could be found in the accounts' profiling and language features to avoid being detected by Yixing's legal staff, Weibo or non-fan Weibo users as a professional anti account, but creating a feint of being a 'natural hater' not for commercial gains. No obvious offensive words such as cursing or insulting words were observed from *Chaoyangqu bot*. Instead, ordinary words are endowed with special meaning in contextualizing with Yixing's idol knowledge. Thus the meaning of the discourse can, in one hand remain ambiguous in interpretations that voiding sensitivity censorship and potential lawsuits; in another, build up a playful threshold for its readers and keep this account staying low-key. We can attribute this

homophonic adoption of abusive language to technological affordances' shaping power on socio-cultural practice, which echoes with Hutchby's (2001) view point.

As an obscure development of cyberviolence, this case is hard to detect or to convict. Even though the rights of name, reputation and portrait are turelly threatened, the form of offences come in an irresponsible way from both the names of the accounts and the discourse it gives, which is growing as powerful as their counterparts fan sites.

4.6 The offline consequences of cyberviolence

Last but not least, cyberviolence can also cause offline consequences.

4.6.1 The offline consequences of '227' incident

4.6.1.1 When cyberviolence transforms into school bullying

As derivations of cyberviolence, some bullying behaviors were moving from online to offline world that school bullying caused by *227 Xiao Zhan's boycott* illustrates this. Alleged victims claimed that they received threats from Xiao Zhan's fans when they defended Xiao Zhan and Wang Yibo's fanfictions that they would be attacked in real life.

Extreme loyal fans of Xiao Zhan spared no effort on gaining the target personal information: in one way, they entered the target person's online social media account, and scrolled down to the earlier posts and histories to dig out visible information such as the images, online discourses, and even school information can be brought back into public attention, which leads to personal information invasion. One fanfiction writer has claimed that Xian Zhan's fans dug out her personal information from the fanfiction site, and identified her as a student. They anonymously reported the writer to her school for the reason of writing erotic literature, and asked punishment from shcool. In another way when extreme fans had no access to the person's account, they would conduct human flesh search by sharing their social network in real life to achieve the person's information such as names, locations, contact numbers which helped to identify the person in the offline world. Finally they entered the school and conducted both verbal and physical attacks (See Figure 4.6.1.1.1 and 4.6.1.1.2).

Public

227 历史时刻超话
3-1 04:55 from vivo 智能手机

+Follow

227 历史时刻超话肖战粉丝网络暴力证据确凿，侵犯当事人隐私权，《中华人民共和国治安管理处罚法》第四十二条有偷窥、偷拍、窃听、散布他人隐私行为的，处5日以下拘留或者500元以下罚款；情节较重的，处5日以上10日以下拘留，可以并处500元以下罚款 @大民日报 #3月起明令禁止网络暴力人肉搜索#

227 historical moment super topic page

Relevant law articles

@people's daily #banning human flesh search from March#

Dictations and evidence from the writer as a victim of Xiao Zhan's fans' human flesh search and privacy invasion

Figure 4.6.1.1.1, 4.6.1.1.2 Xiao Zhan's fans conducting human flesh search and school bullying to adolescent fanfiction readers

Consequently, cyberviolence moved into schools and neighbourhoods that the target person may face bullying from Xiao Zhan's fan peers.

4.6.1.2 Privacy invasion as an approach

The current fandom culture is highly digitized thanks to social media and smartphones, and meanwhile, online and offline fandom practice is also highly connected. Extreme fans explored easy-achieved ways of gathering information with no hacking skills needed — human flesh

search engine and doxing. In this case, the aim of the human flesh search is not to gain a celebrity's information, but ordinary people which are fanfiction defenders. Additionally, doxing in this case, is an easy-conducted social media depending information-gathering approach. Once their information has been dug out, they are not only embarrassed or abused online, but also potential harmful behavior can happen offline in forms of school and neighbourhood bullying, threatening their psychol and physical health. For youth fans' particularity, cyberviolence and school bullying can cause huge impact to their self-esteem, self-confidence and school/peer/digital participation in their social development.

What is worth mentioning is that from March 1, 2020, China's *Regulations on the Ecological Governance of Online Information Content* has been implemented to clarify the users and producers of online information content services, platforms that shall not engage in online violence, human flesh search, deepfake, flow fraud, account manipulation, etc.[16] While doxing, online gravedigging are comparatively harmless to one's privacy in fandom culture, and can not even be called a crime, but still, they are against rights of privacy and protection of personal information, and can be approaches to further life and health violation.

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[16] See detailed information on

http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2019-12/21/content_5462826.htm Viewed on 29.02.2020.

Chapter 5 Conclusion and Discussion

This chapter is a conclusion on previous findings and analysis of the conduction of cyberviolence in Chinese digital culture. To sum up, this study has investigated four major questions. There are: the technological affordances of Weibo, the communicative practices on Weibo among fandoms and between fans and celebrities, the emerging fan practices online, and finally, the conduction of cyberviolence throughout the logic of social media and fandom culture.

5.1 The technological affordances of Weibo

The first question is the technological affordances of Weibo. As the biggest Chinese digital fandom social platform, this study finds that Weibo endows users with a wide variety of capabilities, including multimodal content composition, operational autonomy, real-time commenting, addressability, editorial accessibility and visibility, algorithms-determined customization of recommendation, the capacity of sorting, reporting, detecting, anonymity and so on. This is in line with Hutchby (2001) that in one way they enable Weibo users with multiple operational possibilities to achieve the goal of conducting cyberviolence; in another they constrain and shape users' digital practices, steering fan perpetrators to explore new forms of cyberviolence.

5.2 Communicative practices on Weibo among fandoms and between fans and celebrities

The second research question is the communicative practices on Weibo among fandoms and between fans and celebrities. Verbal abuses, according to this study and also in line with previous investigations, are the most widespread forms of fandom communicative practices. One major finding is that the linguistic feature varies from the participants, aims, and venues of the communicative discourses in its wording, sentence pattern, and logical process, which echoes to some of Pietrangelo's (2010) model of verbal abuse. Therefore, the language feature cannot be generalized or detached from its cases. However, there is a trend of using homophony, sarcastic puns, and endowing ordinary words with new meanings to avoid sensitive words censorship and

online reporting. Verbal abuse is being thought as a transformative process from straightforward to obscure, and may need more intercontextuality to be correctly understood.

5.3 The emerging fandom practice online

Thirdly, to answer the question of what are the emerging fandom practices online which have the potential to cause cyberviolence towards celebrity figures and fans, this study lists eight Weibo cases considering cyberviolence potentials. Sorted by the fandom practices, cases show up into six categories, which includes the memetic uptake ation of celebrity image culture, the negotiation of celebrity images among fans, the toxic fandom competition among fans on different celebrities, the conflicts among fans of different objects, 'bot' accounts as professional haters, and finally the offline consequences of violence caused by cyberviolence. Each case touches different realm fandom cyberviolence, and also encounters new digital fandom culture phenomenon.

In specific, this study discovered the memetic uptake of celebrity image as a convergence of memetic culture and celebrity culture. However, the uptake exists in both forms of verbal memes and image macros, which can lead to wider rights violation discussion. The negotiation of celebrity images is basically pointing to celebrities' professional skill, moralities and romantic relationships, from which this study has interpreted two power relationships between fans and celebrities, and unveiled an ideology in Asian entertainment industry. Firstly, fans and celebrities are basically the consumers and commodities (Galbraith and Karlin, 2012). That is to say, in the idol industry where fans have invested capitals to produce idols and determine their images, idols' expertise is becoming negotiable only to fulfill the fandom's demands. For those fans whose expectations on an idol are not fully achieved, the idol can become a target of cyberviolence. Secondly, such a consuming relationship requires more intimacy from idols rather than traditional celebrities. Many scholars have admitted that pop idols are widely considered to provide 'a safe' target of romantic love (Karniol, 2001). Once idols are involved in a relationship, it brings the amorous projection to an end. This is why anti-fans often defame idols' romantic relationship, that out of disappointment, frustration, and resentment, fans are at the edge of leaving the fandom, if not revenge in a way of conducting cyberviolence to the idols.

Besides, the discussion over morality and personal characters on female celebrities is comparatively more than on male celebrities, implying that the existence of patriarchy ideology in Asian idol culture, where female idols' personalities and behaviors are objects of moralization in a patriarchal dominating entertainment culture. These social norms and values can have negative impacts on judging female celebrities, and put them into unfair treatment such as 'slut justification', gender discrimination and sexual harassment showing up in the form of cyberviolence.

Toxic competition among fans of different celebrities are mostly represented in defamatory remarks, especially on celebrities' political stances on the ownership discussion of Hong Kong and Taiwan. In other words, the current study found that politicized discourse is weaponized in toxic competitive fan practices. As a result, those celebrities who are alleged to have anti-socialistic political stands or disagree with unification will be rejected and positioned as a target of chauvinism-lead cyberviolence.

Next, this study only observes the conflicts between celebrity fans and fan fiction fans, but can still apply to wider conflicts on different fan objects as fans not making a concession on their discursive hegemony in owning and interpreting a fan object. Surprisingly, in the conflict we captured the emergence of the reporting mechanism of Weibo has been used for a drastic end in fan practices which may come from good intentions, but is eventually abused to solve their idols' personal affairs rather than social issues. Excessive reporting acts eliminate heterogeneous cultural products and put the entire fandom into horror.

When it comes to 'bot' accounts, this study finds out that professional haters can also be organized as their fan counterparts. However, in order to avoid reports and lawsuits, 'bot' accounts require careful content management.

From the last type of fan practice — offline consequences, we notice that with the help of privacy invasion methods such as doxing and human flesh search, cyberviolence can move offline and cause real life impacts.

5.4 The conduction of cyberviolence throughout the logic of social media and fandom culture

The answer to the last research question — how the connection between technology-afforded fandom practice and cyberviolence has been conducted by technological affordances made through social media logic and fandom culture, is given in the data analysis chapter right after each case. The findings are in line with Van Dijck and Poelle (2013) social media logic theory, in which programmability, popularity, connectivity, and datafication are four essential factors of social media platform Weibo legitimizes itself to process information and to form cyberviolence. First of all, datafication is the foundation of social media logic and all digital practices, which is uptaken in nearly every case by fans and wider audiences as a tool to contribute data and meet up with their own ends. Secondly, programmability is the ability of a platform strategically steering users interaction and data contribution; in return the users' practice may influence the data and information flow activated by the Weibo. According to our findings, three elements are highly programmable, including editorial decisions, content accessibility and visibility, and anonymity. This has influenced users' participation and information display in a cyberviolence case. Popularity is also affected in a two-way steam: algorithms surging popularity, and also popularity boosting algorithms. Concluding in a like manner with programmability, the agenda-setting and ranking mechanism promote a cyberviolence event's popularity and visibility to enhance its value and effect. Finally, this study has found that connectivity has been exploited to address certain people and contents, thus can increase intertextuality and the involvement of a cyberviolence event.

5.5 Implication and limitation

From the findings above, the current study provided painted a landscape of various forms of fan practice on Weibo which has a cyberviolence potential. In a word, cyberviolence can be caused by several reasons not only from psychological, cultural or social dimensions. Most importantly, they should be explained with fandom dynamics and the holding platforms' affordances. This paper has used abundant theories from previous academic fandom studies to support and explain the findings. And to the similarities in many social media services' technological affordances, the findings can be applied to analyze cyberviolence events on other social media platforms not only limited to Weibo.

As to the limitation, this study did not provide analysis on the individual perpetrators and victims' understanding of fandom cyberviolence, because it is hard to conduct an interview and to find volunteer perpetrators or celebrity victims. However, this could direct further cyberviolence and fandom studies with a new realm.

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