Exploring the Influencing Factors of Identity Recognition among Rock Music Fans

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Abstract: Since the reform and opening up, rock music fans have always been one of the important fan groups that cannot be ignored in the subculture youth group. This article explores the factors influencing the identity recognition of rock music fans through a questionnaire survey of the rock music fan community. And through the analysis of the optimal regression scale, it was found that cultural ritual participation and anti-mainstream value identification are the core influencing factors on the identity recognition of rock music fans. Ultimately, this study concludes that the critical spirit of rock music and the ritualistic interactive participation jointly construct the underlying identity of rock music fans.

Keywords: Rock music fans; Identity recognition; Participation in cultural ceremonies; Subcultural symbol capital; Counter mainstream value identification

1. Introduction

Rock music was born in the United States in the 1950s and was introduced to China in the late 1970s under the reform and opening-up policy. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Chinese rock music reached its peak. After 2000, Chinese rock music gradually shifted underground. Until 2019, the broadcast of the variety show "Band Summer" brought rock bands and rock music back to the public eye and gained popularity among young people. Independent rock music is gradually being incorporated and commercialized by mainstream culture, and at the same time, there are also many "fan circle" cultures among rock music fans, which makes people wonder: how does the identity of rock music fans come about?

2. Concept clarification and literature review
2.1. Rock fans and identity recognition

Rock music fans refer to the group that loves rock music. Zhang Han defined rock music fans as "people who are addicted to rock music or obsessed with rock musicians, or actively participate in rock-related activities and are

familiar with rock culture" in "Research on the Identity of Rock Music Fans in Online Communities" [1]. Identity recognition is a psychological process in which an individual confirms their own identity and integrates their cognition of the group they belong to, as well as the accompanying emotional experiences and behavioral patterns [2].

2.2. Literature review

In recent years, research on rock music and its related groups in China has gradually received attention, but there are only four papers focusing on the identity recognition of rock music fans. Zhang Han's "Research on the Identity of Rock Fans in Online Communities" focuses on the identity construction of rock fans in online communities from the perspectives of communication and sociology, using the Douban group as an example. Zhang Qian's "Research on the Identity of Rock and Roll Youth Subcultural Fans" takes the group of fans who admire the band as a case study to explore the construction of their identity, and points out their changes and influencing factors under new media. Long Xiaoya's "Research on the Identity of Rock Music Fans from the Perspective of Social Identity Theory" explores the implementation path and influence of rock music fans' identity recognition from the individual and group levels based on social identity theory. Yan Xiaoxuan's "Research on the Identity Construction of the Interest Group in Chinese Outdoor Music Festivals" focuses on the interest group of the "Midi Music Festival." Using observation and interview methods, it points out that rock music fans form group identity after three processes of categorization, comparison, and differentiation, and analyzes the impact of obtaining this group identity on individuals' emotions and behaviors.

3. Research methods and design

3.1. Research hypothesis

This study uses demographic variables as control variables, with ritual participation in rock culture, symbolic capital of subcultures, and anti-mainstream value identity as independent variables, to explore their relationship with rock fan identity. This study will be conducted based on the following three assumptions.

3.1.1. Assumption of participation in cultural rituals

Referring to Durkheim's theory of religious rituals, the participation and interaction in rock music scenes can be understood as a means for rock music fans, a social group, to regularly consolidate themselves. From the perspective of ritual, participation in rock scenes is essentially a form of ritual participation [3]. This kind of ritual participation strengthens the group connection among rock music fans. From this, it can be assumed that the higher the cultural ritual participation of rock music fans, the more they identify with the identity of rock music fans.

3.1.2. Subcultural symbol capital

According to Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, the cultural significance of tangible objects can reflect the social status of the owner. Therefore, this study assumes that the more rock fans grasp, possess, display, and consume the symbolic capital of rock subculture, the more they identify with their rock fan identity.

3.1.3. Counter mainstream value identification

The Birmingham School in the UK believes that the resistance of subcultures is an anti-hegemonic ideology [4]. In the field of sociology, scholars generally regard rock music as a youth culture, associated with social change and social class, and explore the connotations of rock music [5]. Therefore, this study assumes that the more rock fans

have an anti-mainstream value identity, the more they identify with their own rock fan identity.

3.2. Research design

3.2.1. Dependent variable and its measurement

The measurement of the dependent variable identity was developed with reference to the Musical Identity Measure (MIM) developed by Karen Burland et al. in 2022. The score is calculated based on the cumulative score of the scale, and the higher the score, the stronger the sense of identity [6].

3.2.2. Independent variables and their measurements

There are three independent variables: cultural ritual participation, subculture symbol capital, and anti-mainstream value identification. Add up the scores of the four dimensions under each independent variable to generate a new variable with a value range of 4–20 points. The higher the score, the higher the degree of the independent variable.

3.2.3. Control variables

The control variable is demographic characteristics, including four variables: gender, age, education, and monthly income.

4. Research results

4.1. Descriptive statistical analysis

This survey was conducted from April to May 2025, using an online convenience sampling method. The questionnaire was distributed to the rock music fan WeChat group through Wenjuanxing, and a total of 172 valid questionnaires were collected. Among them, in terms of gender, male fans account for 47.1% and female fans account for 52.9%. In terms of age, the age range of 18–35 accounts for 75%, indicating that the youth group is the main group of rock music fans.

4.2. Normality analysis

The indicators for testing the normality distribution of data usually use kurtosis and skewness coefficients. Some scholars suggest that data must meet the following conditions to form a normal distribution: the absolute value of the kurtosis coefficients for all measurement items must be less than 10; The absolute value of the skewness coefficient is less than 3. The kurtosis and skewness analysis were conducted on each measurement item, and the results showed that the absolute kurtosis coefficient was between 0.040–1.172, all less than 10, and the skewness coefficient was between 0.202–1.091, all less than 3, indicating that the data obtained from the questionnaire survey in this study were normally distributed.

4.3. Reliability test

Conduct a reliability analysis on the questionnaire total scale and various variable scales. From the table below, it can be seen that the overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale is 0.879, indicating high reliability and an ideal construct of the entire scale. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients of each variable scale range from 0.688 to 0.863, indicating good reliability within each variable scale. In summary, the reliability and quality of the data in this study are acceptable.

4.4. Validity analysis

From the table below, it can be seen that the KMO value is 0.873, and if the KMO value is greater than 0.8, the research data is very suitable for extracting information, which indirectly reflects good validity. In the field of social sciences, if the cumulative explanatory variation of extracted common factors can reach over 60%, it indicates that the common factors are reliable. If the cumulative explanatory variation of common factors is over 50%, the results of factor analysis are also acceptable. This study used principal component analysis to extract a total of four factors, and the combined explanatory power of the four factors was 69.072% (>60%), indicating that retaining the extracted four factors has good construct validity.

4.5. Optimal scale regression analysis

This study used Optimal Scaling regression analysis. The optimal scale regression analysis results show that the R-squared of the model is 0.367, the test value F is 11.809, and the significance is<0.001, indicating that the regression model is overall significant and statistically significant. The standardized coefficients for cultural ritual participation (Beta=0.277) and counter mainstream value identification (Beta=0.286) are the highest and significant, indicating that these two factors have the greatest impact on the identity identification of rock music fans.

Table 1. Optimal scale regression results of rock fans' identity recognition

Variables included in the model	Standard regression coefficient Beta	Bootstrap (1,000) estimation of standard error	Test value F	significant level	Importance factor	After conversion	Before conversion
Participation in cultural ceremonies	0.277	0.07	15.752	<0.001	0.357	0.717	0.718
Subculture symbol capital	0.076	0.065	1.349	0.247	0.048	0.767	0.768
Anti mainstream value identification	0.286	0.076	14.139	<0.001	0.362	0.664	0.665
Gender	0.032	0.046	0.487	0.486	0.008	0.961	0.967
Age	-0.155	0.069	5.017	0.026	0.071	0.867	0.89
education	0.209	0.072	8.342	<0.001	0.094	0.882	0.952
income	-0.162	0.061	7.038	0.009	0.062	0.823	0.844

Note: Shortcuts given in abbreviations

Firstly, anti-mainstream value identification is the most influential variable. The higher the level of value identification of rock fans with the counterculture, the stronger their sense of identity as rock fans. Since its birth in the 1980s, Chinese rock music has had a distinct rebellious, humanistic atmosphere and sense of social responsibility, maintaining a niche elite in the underground rock era [7]. So, the higher the degree of anti-mainstream value recognition, the deeper the identity recognition of rock music fans.

Secondly, cultural ritual participation is the second most important influencing variable. The participation in cultural ceremonies reflects the level of time, energy, money, and other investment that rock fans make in live

rock music. The higher the level of participation, the stronger their sense of identity as a rock fan. The physical interactions between fans in rock scenes, such as pogo and mosh, enhance the depth of the ritual and the sacred perception of the ritual for rock fans to participate in rock scenes.

5. Conclusion and discussion

This study explores the influencing factors of rock fans' identity recognition and finds that cultural ritual participation and anti-mainstream value recognition are the two most significant influencing factors. But there are still shortcomings and regrets. For example, the influence of subcultural symbol capital on the dependent variable is weak, and further exploration should be conducted on the deep meanings beneath the subcultural symbols of rock music fans. The spirit of rebellion and criticism inherent in rock music also determines the underlying identity of rock fans. Only by accepting rock music and its fan base can the voices and appeals of young people be seen and understood more in society.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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