

# Research on the Extreme Behaviors of Fans Participating in Star-Chasing in the Era of Social Media

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**Abstract:** The emergence of social media has facilitated the dawn of fan behavior. As their voice and initiative continue to increase, fan groups have also exerted a huge influence on social media. This paper studies the star-chasing of fans and their extreme behaviors, supplemented by the cultivation theory as theoretical support, and then collects data in the form of questionnaires to analyze the correlation between the degree of participation and their extreme behaviors.

**Keywords:** Cultivation theory; Social media; Participation of fans; Star-chasing; Extreme behaviors

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## 1. Introduction

The emergence of social media has facilitated the dawn of fan behavior. Fans no longer unilaterally accept information output by idols; instead, they interact with idols on the internet. As their voice and initiative continue to increase, fan groups have also exerted a huge influence on social media, becoming a social existence and force that cannot be overlooked and forming a unique fan culture.

However, star-chasing has caused certain negative effects. As the producers and maintainers of idols, fans often have the “halo effect” toward their idols. Therefore, fans usually forbid others from speaking negatively about their idols. In this process, some extreme behaviors are prone to occur, such as online abuse, controlling reviews at the comment area, etc. <sup>[1]</sup>. Star-chasing fosters a high sense of group identity, collective belonging, group consciousness, unified group emotions, and common idol-based values among the fan community. As fans spend a lot of time, energy, emotion, and money in the process of star-chasing, their extreme behaviors are aggravated to a certain extent <sup>[2]</sup>.

Therefore, this paper attempts to explore the performance of fans’ extreme behaviors and the factors that influence or trigger their extreme behaviors. By studying the influence of different levels of fan participation in star-chasing on their extreme behaviors, it is possible to determine the factors that trigger extreme behaviors and the relationship between fan participation and their extreme behaviors.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1. Cultivation theory

Cultivation theory was first proposed by George Gerbner to explain the imperceptibly influence of media

viewing on people's ideas, attitudes, and values. He believes that the existence and development of a society as a unified whole requires the members of the society to have a consensus along with the mass media having the responsibility to provide and spread this consensus. Gerbner pointed out that the "cultivation effect" of mass media lies in its ability to help audiences form mainstream social concepts, even audiences from different social backgrounds can converge in social concepts.

## 2.2. Hypothesis of cultivation theory

The most basic hypothesis of cultivation theory is that television (TV) is a type of media with a powerful spreading effect. Audiences are becoming more and more dependent on media. Cultivation theory measures the long-term effect of television. Gerbner believes that the more time people spend on television, the easier it is to believe the "media reality" displayed on televisions. This cognition further affects their attitude (moved, afraid, desire for wealth, etc.) and behavior (aggressive behavior, buying behavior, etc.).

## 3. Variables

From Gerbner's cultivation theory, entertainment content is most likely to have cultivation effect. Since social media recommends the content preferred by fans, most of the content and opinions showed are consistent with or close to the opinions held by the fans themselves<sup>[3]</sup>. At this time, the effect of cultivation is expanded. Fans will be more likely to accept the values spread within the fan community. The more a fan likes an idol, the more often he or she will follow the idol and the related social accounts. In this process, fans will often get in touch with the fan community. Under the influence, the fan will slowly accept the values spread by the community and participate in their daily activities, thereby developing some fan behaviors<sup>[4]</sup>.

When a person participates in more collective behaviors, he or she will gradually tend to have the same opinions with the community and eventually integrate into this community. At this time, if the fan community defines extreme behaviors such as online abuse and controlling reviews at the comment area on social platforms as normal behaviors for supporting idols, no one in the community would object, thus aggravating the occurrence of extreme behaviors<sup>[5]</sup>.

Based on the above discussion, five variables have been proposed: online abuse, controlling reviews at the comment area of social platforms, group identity, fan behavior, and sense of defending. The definitions of these five variables are discussed below.

- (1) Online abuse refers to the exposure of private information on social media by fans via cyber manhunt in the face of negative comments. Fans abuse netizens by sending large-scale private messages and even posthumous photos, which would affect the daily lives of netizens<sup>[6]</sup>.
- (2) Controlling reviews at the comment area on social platforms refers to the large-scale positive comments posted by fans on the idol's Weibo to ensure the negative comments are out of people's sight. Especially when facing negative news about idols such as principled mistakes, fans tend to disregard moral standards to defend the idol without a bottom line in the comment section<sup>[7]</sup>.
- (3) Group identity refers to the degree of recognition of the values of the fan community, which is usually determined by the degree of "love" for the idol.
- (4) Fan behavior refers to the degree of participation in group behavior in the fan community, which is generally reflected in the things that fans can do for a certain idol, especially the amount of money spent on the idol.

- (5) Sense of defending refers to whether fans believe in the idol no matter what happens and the degree of their willingness to clarify for the idol on social media to protect them from being “attacked” by netizens as well as to reduce the negative impact on the idol, especially when seeing negative news about the idol.

#### **4. Hypotheses**

Applying the cultivation theory to star-chasing, the more the fans watch idol-related videos, the more likely they are to accept “media reality”; that is, the attitude of the fan community<sup>[8]</sup>. The attitude of the majority of fan communities is to protect their idols. Therefore, the number of idol-related videos that fans watch is likely to have a certain impact on whether they have the awareness of protecting their idols.

**H1:** The more the fans watch programs about their idols, the stronger their sense of defending their idols.

**H2:** The more the fans watch programs about their idols, the more likely they will abuse others (who is against their idol) on social media.

**H3:** The more the fans watch programs about their idols, the more likely they will control reviews on social platforms at the comment section.

**H4:** The more the fans watch programs about their idols, the more likely they will spend money on their idols.

#### **5. Method and sampling**

As the research subjects of this dissertation are the fan communities of various celebrities with extreme behaviors, the main active platforms include Weibo, Tieba, Douban, LOFTER, and other channels to obtain and share information. As the internet does not implement a real-name system, most of the extreme behaviors that occur on the internet are done with an account that is rarely used. Therefore, this dissertation mainly uses the survey method. The collection of the sample is via snowball sampling, which is a non-probability sampling.

#### **6. Measurement**

##### **6.1. Independent variable**

According to the four hypotheses, the independent variable is watching idol programs. Watching these programs influences how fans defend their idols, how they participate in online abuse, and how they control reviews as well as spend money on their idols. The independent variable encompasses the frequency and the length of watching idol programs each time.

##### **6.2. Dependent variables**

The dependent variable in H1 is the sense of defending idols. The sense of defending idols influences how fans react and respond to negative news about their idols on social media, which encompasses the degree of defending idols, such as apologizing for the idols, posting positive comments about their idols, and arguing with others.

The dependent variable in H2 is abusing others (who is against their idol) on social media. Abusing others on social media influences how fans react and respond to netizens comments on their idols, which encompasses the acceptance of negative comments.

The dependent variable in H3 is controlling reviews on social media. Controlling reviews on social media encompasses the degree of emphasis on the commercial value of idols.

The dependent variable in H4 is spending money on idols. Spending money on idols influences how fans are willing to improve the commercial value of idols, which encompasses their devotion to their idols.

## 7. Result

### 7.1. Sociodemographic characteristics

There is a total of 281 valid answers to the questionnaire. A descriptive analysis of the demographic variables on the surveyed was first carried out. The results obtained are shown in **Table 1**.

**Table 1.** Sociodemographic characteristics of the participants

Baseline characteristic	Sample	
	n	%
Gender		
Male	52	18.51
Female	229	81.49
Age		
Under 15	5	1.78
16-18	14	4.98
19-25	221	78.65
26-30	17	6.05
Above 31	24	8.54
Highest educational level		
Primary school	3	1.07
Middle school	3	1.07
High school	17	6.05
Undergraduate	244	86.83
Post-graduate	13	4.63
PhD	1	0.36

Note: N = 281

It can be seen that the samples are diverse: there were more female respondents than male respondents; the respondents were mainly 19 to 25 years old and were mainly undergraduates.

### 7.2. Correlation between watching idol programs and sense of defending

**Table 2** shows the correlation between watching idol programs and sense of defending (to test **H1**).

**Table 2.** Correlation between watching idol programs and sense of defending

Variable	1	2
Length of watching idol programs	-	
Fans fight back to protect idol	.236**	-

\*\*  $p < .01$

From **Table 2**, it can be seen that there is a significant positive correlation, where the more idol programs they watch, the easier it is for fans to have a sense of defending their idols. Therefore, **H1** is supported.

### 7.3. Correlation between watching idol programs and online abuse

**Table 3** shows the correlation between watching idol programs and online abuse (to test **H2**).

**Table 3.** Correlation between watching idol programs and online abuse

Variable	1	2	3	4
Length of watching idol programs	-			
Insulting each other	.232**	-		
Frequency of swearing on social media every day	.272**	.454**	-	
Frequency of arguing with others	.319**	.464**	.554**	-

\*\*  $p < .01$

According to **Table 3**, it can be seen that there is a significant correlation between them, where the more idol programs they watch, the more violent language the fans use. Therefore, **H2** is supported.

### 7.4. Correlation between watching idol programs and controlling reviews

**Table 4** shows the correlation between watching idol programs and controlling reviews (to test **H3**).

**Table 4.** Correlation between watching idol programs and controlling reviews

Variable	1	2	3
Length of watching idol programs	-		
Participate in controlling reviews	.402**	-	
Frequency of controlling reviews on social media	.398**	.706**	-

\*\*  $p < .01$

From **Table 4**, it can be seen that there is a significant correlation between them, where the more idol programs they watch, the more the fans control the reviews. Therefore, **H3** is supported.

### 7.5. Correlation between watching idol programs and spending money

**Table 5** shows the correlation between watching idol programs and spending money (to test **H4**).

**Table 5.** Correlation between watching idol programs and spending money

Variable	1	2	3	4
Length of watching idol programs	-			
Quantity of purchase	.387**	-		
Quantity of same products	.445**	.382**	-	
Purchasing of scalped tickets	.339**	.407**	.434**	-

\*\*  $p < .01$

According to **Table 5**, it can be concluded that the more idol programs they watch, the more the fans purchase idol-related products. Therefore, **H4** is supported.

## 8. Discussion

Cultivation theory measures the long-term effect of media viewing. The basic hypothesis of cultivation theory is the more time people spend on television, the easier it is for them to believe in the “media reality” displayed on television. In this research, cultivation theory is used to analyze the acculturation effect of social media instead of the acculturation effect of television, a mass media. Compared with mass media, social media has a greater penetration into people’s daily lives. People spend most of their time and social interaction on social media. Therefore, the acculturation effect of social media has a greater impact on people compared to mass media.

Through data analysis, **H1** is supported; the more the fans watch programs about their idols, the stronger their sense of defending. From the result, it can be concluded that the more the fans watch programs about their idols, the more likely they will abuse others who are against their idols on social media; therefore, **H2** is supported. Through correlation analysis, **H3** is supported; the more the fans watch programs about their idols, the more likely they will control reviews at the comment area on social platforms. According to the result, the more the fans watch programs about their idols, the more likely they will spend money on their idols, thereby supporting **H4**.

## 9. Conclusion

This dissertation focuses on fans’ star-chasing behavior in the era of social media and explores the increasingly common tendency of extreme behaviors in the fan community. Upon correlation analyses, the results showed that all the hypotheses are supported, which proved that the higher the participation of fans in the process of star-chasing, the more likely they are to exhibit extreme behaviors. The madness of the individual has become the madness of the community, which then influences individuals.

In addition, the results of the research expand the cultivation theory to a certain extent, proving that the cultivation theory is equally applicable in the field of social media. The more the information received on social media, the more likely the occurrence of the cultivation effect. People are more receptive to content and behavior on social media. In the cultivation of extreme behaviors among fans, the process can be divided into three stages: the initiation period of extreme behaviors, the penetration period, and the behavior imitation period. Upon research, it has been found that the cultivation of extreme fan behaviors spreads rapidly; therefore, it should not be disregarded. A little carelessness can shape the ideology of people with poor judgment. In today’s environment where media cultivation is so general for the masses, creating a healthy environment for star-chasing is indeed an issue that is worth discussing.

Moreover, in the process of cultivation, the most likely to go astray are teenagers and children whose values are in the process of being formed. Therefore, the government should issue corresponding social media management regulations. Social platforms should also introduce some models to protect the younger generation. It is worth mentioning that the cultivation theory can be used to guide fans into doing charitable activities with their idols together. Last but not least, this topic can be discussed not only in the fan community, but also generalized to a larger population, such as patriotism culture, etc.

## Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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