Research on the Communication Ecology and Conflicts of ACG Fan Culture in the New Media Era

Wansu Ma

The High School Affiliated to Renmin University of China Xishan Campus, Beijing 100193, China
Email: heavenlypharmacy@qq.com
Manuscript received July 4, 2026; accepted August 1, 2026; published August 26, 2026

***Abstract*—With the rapid development of new media, ACG fan culture—a form of unofficial creative activity by fans based on anime, games, films, and TV shows—has gradually shifted from offline to online, forming a global online communication ecology. This paper discusses how ACG fan culture builds its communication mechanisms through new media platforms and how these mechanisms influence text production and community identity. The study finds that new media technologies, including low-threshold creation tools and algorithmic recommendations, greatly promote the dissemination of and interaction with fan works while also strengthening community cohesion around shared interests. However, fan culture also faces multiple communication conflicts, including copyright disputes, platform regulation, commercialization, and subcultural barriers. Drawing on literature reviews, case studies, and interdisciplinary methods, and on the theory of participatory culture, this paper systematically analyzes the communication characteristics and internal conflicts of ACG fan culture. It offers suggestions for the healthy development of this cultural ecology.**

***Keywords*—ACG fan culture, new media communication, participatory culture, copyright dispute, subcultural clustering**

I. Introduction

ACG fan culture refers to unofficial creative activities by fans based on anime, games, films, and other ACG works, including fanfiction, fan art, animation, music, cosplay, and other forms [1]. At first, this culture existed in offline doujinshi conventions on a small scale and with limited reach. With the rapid development of the Internet, ACG fan culture has broken geographical limits and formed global online communities. Platforms such as AO3, Lofter, and Pixiv bring creators and fans worldwide together, expanding their influence.

At present, many scholars have studied the cultural characteristics and community structure of ACG fan culture [2]. However, there is still a lack of research on how it shapes a unique communication ecology through new media and how this mechanism affects text production and community identity.

This paper focuses on two core questions:

1) How does fan culture form a unique communication ecology through new media?

2) How does the communication mechanism influence text production and community identity in fan creation?

This paper uses literature review, case study, and interdisciplinary methods. By reading academic papers and industry reports, it understands the current research and theoretical basis of ACG fan culture. This study can provide new case studies for subculture and participatory culture research, thereby enriching the theoretical system. By analyzing the communication ecology and conflicts of ACG fan culture in the new media era, this paper can predict its future development, offer guidance for platform operations and management, and propose practical solutions. All of these findings have important theoretical and practical significance for the study.

II. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The theory of participatory culture emphasizes that fans shift from passive consumers to active content producers [3], offering an important perspective for studying ACG fan culture. In the traditional media era, information was transmitted in one direction; the boundary between creators and audiences was clear, and audiences could only receive information passively. In the new media environment, fans are no longer satisfied with consuming content. They take the initiative to create and share works, forming a unique atmosphere of participatory culture.

Existing studies tend to focus on describing phenomena or analyzing individual cases, but fail to provide systematic research on the communication mechanisms and ecology. Based on previous studies, this paper uses participatory culture theory and communication knowledge to deeply analyze the communication ecology and conflicts of ACG fan culture.

III. Communication Characteristics of ACG Fan Culture

3.1 Empowerment by Media Technology

Low-threshold creation tools (such as Photoshop, SAI, CapCut, and Bilibili Cut) provide convenience for fan creators, lower technical barriers, and allow more people to join in creation [4]. Both professional creators and ordinary fans can make their own works with these tools.

Platform algorithms play an important role in content distribution. Functions such as Weibo Super Topics and Bilibili tags accurately push fan works to targeted audiences based on user interests, thereby improving communication efficiency and influence. Users can get their favorite content on time by following related topics and tags, while creators gain more attention and feedback.

3.2 Interactivity of Text Production

The spread of "memes" shows the interactivity of fan text production. Memes come from classic plots, lines, or character traits in original works. After being processed and spread by fans, they become important elements in fan

creation. Fans use memes to create and communicate, forming a unique cultural code that enhances internal interaction and a sense of identity [5].

Cross-media narration is also a typical feature. Fan creations supplement and reinterpret the original works, expanding the story world and character imagery. For example, fanfiction may clarify unclear plots, and fan art may delve into characters' inner thoughts, enriching the original content.

3.3 Community Communication and Subcultural Clustering

Online communities based on shared interests are important carriers of fan culture, including official forums, Lofter, and Douyin channels. Fans share works and exchange ideas, forming close communities. Meanwhile, offline ONLY conventions provide face-to-face communication and further strengthen community cohesion.

"Creating for love" is the main motivation of fan creation. Creators make non-profit works out of love for original works and characters. This emotional labor shows fans' passion and devotion. They do not pursue economic benefits; rather, they express their love and seek recognition from the community.

IV. Conflicts in Communication

4.1 Copyright Disputes and Platform Regulation

Fan-created works fall into a gray area of copyright law [6]. Since most fan works are based on existing originals, they easily involve copyright issues. Copyright holders usually hold mixed attitudes: they hope fan works will expand their influence but worry about infringement.

Platform content review limits creative freedom. The AO3 incident caused wide controversy. As a popular fan platform, AO3 was blocked in some regions due to content issues, raising concerns about creative freedom and highlighting the dilemma between copyright protection and content management.

4.2 Commercial Incorporation and Cultural Resistance

Some official IP holders launch "fan creation incentive plans", such as those by miHoYo and NetEase. They support fan creation with funding and resources and bring fan culture into the commercial system. Commercialization promotes fan culture to some extent but may also make it more profit-oriented.

The community is alert to and critical of "fan circle (fandom) normalization". Fandom culture emphasizes blind worship and exclusivity, which conflicts with the free, equal, and shared values of fan culture. Fan communities worry that fandom trends will damage harmony and the purity of creation.

4.3 Conflicts with Mainstream Culture

Mainstream media coverage of fan culture is selective. They often focus on superficial phenomena, such as cosplay, while ignoring deeper connotations, such as text production. Such one-sided reports easily lead to public misunderstanding, leading people to regard fan culture solely as entertainment and to ignore its role in cultural communication and innovation.

Subcultural barriers lead to external misunderstanding. Fan culture emphasizes "enjoying within the circle". The community has unique rules and codes, making it hard for outsiders to understand and integrate. Barriers protect the uniqueness of fan culture but also intensify conflicts with public discourse, hindering its healthy development.

V. Case Study

5.1 Fan Ecology of Honkai: Star Rail: Global Cross-Cultural Communication

As a popular ACG game, Honkai: Star Rail has a global fan ecology. Fans from different countries and regions create a variety of works, including comics, fiction, and music, all based on game characters and plots.

New media plays a key role in the dissemination of fan works. Fans share works on international platforms (AO3, Pixiv) and overcome language barriers with translation tools, realizing cross-cultural communication. Fans from diverse cultural backgrounds add local elements, making fan works more diverse and expanding the game's influence.

Meanwhile, the official team holds an open attitude. It encourages creation through fan contests, forming positive interaction, and promoting the healthy development of the fan ecology.

5.2 Operation Mechanism of AO3 for the Arknights Fan Community

AO3 is one of the main platforms for Arknights fan creation. Its operation mechanism greatly influences the spread of fan culture. AO3 uses a decentralized management model. Users can upload and share works freely, and the platform review is relatively loose, providing a large creative space for creators.

The platform's tagging system is an important mechanism. Users can add tags, such as characters and genres, to make searching and reading easier. The tagging system improves communication efficiency and strengthens user interaction.

However, AO3 also faces challenges like copyright disputes and content review. Most works are derivative creations, so copyright conflicts are common. Inappropriate content also raises social concerns. These problems challenge the operation and development of AO3.

VI. Conclusion

Fan culture is a typical example of the rise of "prosumers" in the new media era. Supported by new media, fans transform from passive consumers into active producers and disseminators. They participate in cultural communication by creating and sharing fan works, forming a unique cultural ecology.

Subcultural communication strengthens internal identity but also deepens cultural separation. Fan communities enhance cohesion through memes and cross-media narration, but cultural barriers make it hard for outsiders to understand, leading to cultural separation.

The development of virtual idols and AIGC will deeply influence fan creation. Virtual idols provide new materials and inspiration. AIGC may change creation methods and improve efficiency. Meanwhile, attention should be paid to copyright and ethical issues brought by these technologies.

Platform governance needs a balance between copyright protection and creative freedom. Platforms should strengthen copyright management to protect the legitimate rights of original creators and also provide reasonable space for fan creators to avoid over-reviewing, limiting freedom. A sound

copyright authorization system and strict content review can help achieve a win-win situation.

In addition, fan culture should join public discussion, break subcultural barriers, and reduce external misunderstanding. Through cultural activities and cooperation with mainstream media, it can show positive connotations to the public and promote healthy development. Meanwhile, fan communities should improve self-discipline, standardize internal behavior, and prevent bad trends such as fandomization.

In short, ACG fan culture shows a unique communication ecology and faces multiple conflicts in the new media era. In the future, all parties should work together to address existing problems and promote the sustainable, healthy development of fan culture.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

[1] E. Yamato, "'Growing as a person': experiences at anime, comics, and games fan events in Malaysia," *J. Youth Stud*., vol. 19, no. 6, pp. 743–759, 2016.

[2] X. Wu, "Hierarchy within female ACG fandom in China," *Transformative Works Cult*., vol. 30, 2019.

[3] H. C. Piva, "An overview of fan production and participatory cultre in the digital age," *Hortus Semioticus*, vol. 89, 2022.

[4] L. Chen, S. Li, Z. Li, and Q. Li, "DancingBoard: Streamlining the creation of motion comics to enhance narratives," in *Proc. 30th Int. Conf. Intell. User Interfaces*, 2025, pp. 477–503.

[5] R. M. Milner, The World Made Meme: Discourse and Identity in Participatory Media. 2012.

[6] R. Liebler, "Copyright and ownership of fan created works: fanfiction and beyond," in *The Sage Handbook of Intellectual Property*, 2015, pp. 391–403.

Copyright © 2026 by the authors. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited (CC BY 4.0).