

Fans Capital in Contemporary Business: From the Perspective of Relational Capital to Understand Fandom

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Abstract

This article aims to understand the status and features of fans relationship in the relational capital of enterprises, and then put forward some potential actions about how to take advantage of this kind of capital. The first part is about fans participation and the status of fan capital in the commercial context. From the technical perspective, it is based on an internet-based consumption model, making digital ubiquity will become the new normal. From the cultural perspective, convergence culture and participatory culture further evolve and develop. Therefore, it can be considered that fan relations provide enterprises with additional channels and new interaction possibilities. The second part is about fans psychological features and some problems concerned. In most cases, fan labour is driven by emotion without compensation. Loyalty, identity and Passion are the main psychological characteristics. This kind of emotional group will also bring about instability and moral problems, usually being regarded as the "Dark side". Some potential actions to expand their profit model and channel are what the last part wants to discuss. This article suggests three actions: i) Establish brand page and brand communities; ii) Value and operate the relationship of fans and iii) Combine products and propaganda with the aesthetic economy.

Keywords

Fans capital, e-business, relational capital

1. Introduction

Developments of new technologies have greatly affected people's lifestyles. The widespread use of new media has influenced the communication relationships between business owners and their customers [1]. It also brings more possibilities and changes for the relationship between fans and relationships from them. The first question this study wants to discuss is what the status of fans' relationships is in the relational capital of enterprises. Most of the modern consumer market is often the generations described as "digital native", they are used to the internet-based consumption model, which is the foundation of this study. Combined with the technical foundation and participatory culture, fandom in social media provide additional channel and new interaction possibilities for modern business.

Based on online communities, especially today, with the popular development of UGC (User Generated Content) continues, fans will use social media and other platforms to conduct related activities based on their favourite content. Talking about whether fans capital can be regarded as an important and useful intellectual capital in this era of entertainment, it is not only necessary to discuss its influence and importance, but also to consider whether this capital can be used. Therefore, the psychology and motivation of fans need to be mentioned. Identity, loyalty, and passion are the three important psychological features behind fans participation. This part will also discuss the dark side and instability of fan's labour to remind such a point: before managing fans capital to expand enterprises' profit model and channel, the disadvantages and interests of the fan community are also worthy of attention.

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Traditionally, advertisers used to invite stars as spokesmen to promote sales, but they often used a relatively single way of communication, such as advertising in newspapers. Now, with the development of social media, enterprises should learn how to use these new tools to expand the market scale and maintain user stickiness [2]. Therefore, in this last part, from some new economic features, three actions related to social media are proposed.

2. Participation and Status of Fans in Business

People tend to be involved in social media and do fandom behaviours frequently in contemporary society. Jason [3] did research on American Internet users, revealing that the spend on social networking and microblogging are respectively 1.72 h and 0.81 h a day on average. Additionally, on social media, half of their users are obsessed with following brands [4]. The relationship between enterprises and consumers has changed a lot due to new communication ways.

Digital natives are often referred to as Generation Y and Z who grows in the environment full of digital and technological devices. While traditional sources of information and consumption models also have a big influence on these people, digital sources tend to play a more important role. A study about the young generation showed teens and tweens spend more than 6.5 h and 4.5 h respectively on screening media [5]. The study also indicated that the online behaviour of tweens and teens, finding social media has been integrated into our lives, regardless of adults and children, which caused a change with functions of social media to stick users has been well recognized by marketers who tend to use social media as their publicity tool and make advertisement on it in consumer behaviour. Meanwhile, there are more and more types of online shopping platforms and online goods, helping the young generation form an internet-based fan consumption model.

In the production link of the fandom economy, it requires the participation of a large number of people to form a heat and form a virtuous circle. In addition, due to the promotion of the cultural economy by the web 2.0 and UGC model, the behaviour of fans has evolved from "participation" to the "output". Enterprises must find some new changes and methods to deal with this consumption model, social media is the platform they often rely on. However, the typical method of focusing on the number of original fans cannot describe the potential and realized range of social media brand impressions, they need to take actions to interact actively with the digital natives, creating an effective strategy for reaching key audience segments [6].

Fans' online participation is completed by fans' expressions, sharing and communication. Within online communities, fans take the initiative to produce cultural products related to idols and interact with other fans, these all happen naturally around common interests when people participate in online communities [7]. The audience is no longer satisfied with passive acceptance but participates in cultural production. Fan groups use new media earlier than other types of audiences and are more active participants [8]. In the traditional concepts of convergence culture and participatory culture, the focus of fan practice is to "participate in production" rather than "what to produce". In the fan community, fans participate in the growth of their favourite content and gain experience for themselves through this participatory behaviour itself. On the internet-based consumption model, participatory culture is not only restricted by the market economy, fans' self-experience and self-identification in cultural consumption can be echoed more widely. Jenkins used "cultural dupes, social misfits, and mindless consumers" to describe fans as the active consumer to challenge the existing stereotypes of fans.

In addition, as a group, the behaviour of fans will also reflect collective characteristics. Hills [8] used the concept of "transmedia and collective intelligence" to describe the large-scale information collection and processing activities that occur in the online community. No one knows everything on the Internet, but everyone knows something. People gather for a common goal, forming a new type of community marked by voluntary, temporary, and strategic affiliation, cooperating in the production and exchange of knowledge.

Because of the unique communication characteristics of social media, communication between consumers and businesses has changed from one-way to two-way. Traditionally, advertisers used to invite stars as spokesmen to promote sales, but they often used a relatively single way of communication, such as advertising in newspapers and magazines. Now, with the development of new media technology, the commercial value of stars can be further explored. For example, some idols or

stars will recommend products when they live, resulting in great sales, forming some new types of digital labour and marketing methods, providing additional channels and new interaction possibilities.

The new platform supported by technology makes timely interaction possible and can even make this a habit. Social media users have the habit of reposting, commenting, following and liking others on social media. As a result, fans instead of customers, brand advocates instead of followers are the quest for a larger market share in business [10], the social media platforms can contribute to this process. The content and triggers on social media platforms can attract attention and cause them to act, action will also maintain their loyalty to the brand in return. In short, social media and fandom conduct an additional channel for enterprises to promote, and some new interaction possibilities come into existence according to platforms' mechanisms and rules.

3. Fans' Psychological Features and Some Problems about it

Kim and Ko [11] argued that social media has effects in attracting and ultimately maintaining customers' loyalty, so companies must try to understand how to use it. To study the deep influencing factors behind this, fans' psychological features and some problems caused are explained in this part.

3.1. Identity, Passion and Loyalty

The fan community is often an internal communication space based on the identity of fans, which distinguishes fan behaviours from general online cultural practices. In the online community, fans will communicate through avatars and acquire different identities, through which they can also gain a sense of achievement, satisfaction, and social participation [12]. Different types of fans also show different loyalty characteristics. Managers of fan communities,

or those with more fans, often have more power to speak and make decisions. They can be regarded as key opinion leaders, possessing propaganda value similar to celebrities. As usual, virtual community members with a strong sense of social identity are more likely to be more willing to participate in online communities. Similarly, supporting evidence regarding the direct influence of social identity motivation on the intention to participate in online communities [11] & [13].

Fans' labour is always free, so the motivation behind their labour is not compensation. Passion is the most common motivation. In the sports industry, passion can be seen as the fuel of its future development [14]. Kirk Wakefield [15] uses his multiple-item passion scale and compare it with established social identification fan classification scales to provide evidence of discriminant and predictive validity to prove the concept of fan passion is important on sports and entertainment properties. For fans, their labour is often not for monetary and material gains, but emotional rewards. Sometimes the avoidance or escape from other activities is the primary motivation for fan's online participation [11], they need to find other ways to release their emotional needs, and this need is often through a passion for a certain culture or cultural content.

Loyalty is another important factor that should be taken into account, which could influence brand supporters in the long run. The relationship between relationship benefits and customer loyalty is related to relationship marketing [1], which is obvious in the gaming industry. Online games have become a popular computer application, and the loyalty of gamers is crucial to game providers because online gamers often switch between games [16]. The establishment and maintenance of brand loyalty is an important topic of long-term concern in the market [6]. It is a symbol of brand loyalty and can be conceptualized as the ultimate goal.

3.2. Instability and Violation of Fan Interests

Some arguments about the meaninglessness of managing fan capital are because they hold a view that fans are often emotional, they are often changeable and unreliable. But when it is discussed from the perspective of a group, this kind of concept is relatively stable. There are many factors involved: loyalty, identity, social participation, and satisfaction, etc. While some people leave the community, others will join the community, which can form a relative dynamic balance. Also, participating in team

activities encourages online gamers to abide by team norms and meet their social needs, while also increasing their loyalty.

In addition, some mechanisms of social media also establish technical feasibility for fan stability. Facebook provides opportunities not only to deliver brand impressions on a large scale but also to deliver impressions with a social background. This means that it has the potential to produce improvements through the whole marketing cycle from brand awareness to lifetime value [6]. Perhaps an individual's interests are changeable, but social media tags will always have a corresponding group of people, which also maintains a relatively stable target for marketing.

Fan participation is freely chosen in all aspects and understood as a kind of fun, and neither of these is usually related to money. Companies treat fans as a kind of free labour, the lack of relevant laws is also an important factor, making enterprises ignore the interests of fans. Concerns about free labour for fans not only exist in online fan communities, but also in some

traditional labour modes in real life. In the broader American working environment, it is called as "late capitalist sports culture industry" to describe the dark side of fans free labour as interns [17]. Because it expects interns to accept substandard working conditions but is full of enthusiasm and love for their work.

In short, the instability of fan groups is greatly reduced due to the protection of online communities and social media mechanisms. It is more valuable to manage this type of capital from the perspective of the group. However, before using the perspective of capital to understand fan capital, we must consider the protection of the interests of the fan community.

4. Fans' Psychological Features and Some Problems about it

In the era of new media, consumers' ability to identify and establish connections with brands of interest enables brands and consumers to share and interact in new ways. Brands and their consumers can now establish a two-way relationship and share content, news, and feedback, forming a good participatory communication and market paradigm. However, the typical method of focusing on the number of original fans (or the total number of participations in a given content) cannot describe the potential and realized the scope of social media brand impressions [6], and companies need to adopt some new methods to reach the fan base.

4.1. Establish Brand Page and Brand Communities

The Internet provides a brand new market channel for the brand where the display is the first and relatively important level. Pin Luarn et al. [18] studies 1,030 brand-page posts on Facebook, finding that "the media and content type of posts exert a significant effect on user online engagement".

The attention economy is an economic model that achieves profitability by attracting audience attention [19], which heavily influence modern marketing to attract the attention of users or consumers at low cost, cultivate potential consumer groups, and obtain the greatest future intangible assets. Under the mode of the attention economy, the concept of "symbolic value" of commodities has been further deepened. The gap between the quality of commodities is constantly narrowing, so the symbolic meaning of commodities has also changed when people choose commodities. From a sociological perspective, consumption is not only an act but also a symbol system [20]. Both consumption and consumer goods are symbolic systems and symbol systems used to convey meaning, which can be shown on the brand page. In addition to this, brand communities will maintain the loyalty of fans and provide them with a good place to produce symbols that are closer to consumers, because the audience of branded content on social platforms can better understand the true impact of these impressions. Using Facebook or other social media to meet the needs of Generation Y and respond will make marketers gain the most because consumers' loyalty is ensured through buying an assigned brand [18].

4.2. Establish Brand Page and Brand Communities

The paradigm of interpersonal communication has declined in recent years due to the development of mass communication technology, but the extensive use of social media has brought new development and possibilities to this paradigm. Zainal et al. [21] studies how electronic word-of-mouth can affect consumers on their intention of purchasing, finding social media engagement could improve their intention because of the recommendation in the fandom communities or from their friends. Attracting fans through marketing messages is of interest to brands, but current research has found that fans' friends represent a huge potential audience, usually far beyond the size of fans.

The mechanism of social media could convey the information actively and directly by algorithm, or by the participation of fans post, repost and likes. These unpaid impressions are created when friends actively interact with the brand and are visible on friends' walls or news sources. These behaviours may appear between fans, fan friends and other social media users. Take Facebook, for example, social media determines factors of digital native's relationship commitment towards brands [11] & [1]. Besides, social media users are more likely to share brand information with their friends in innovative ways on the platform, regardless of in positive ways like expressing their love and recommendation or negative ways like criticism. In this way, social media platforms such as Facebook accelerates the coverage and vitality of the sharing. For each fan, 34 fans can be contacted [22], so each user is endowed with great communication efficiency. Under this behaviour model, a very huge consumer market has emerged in front of the brand through the exploration of fan relationships. Therefore, by operating the relationship between fans and other social media users, the brand can form a wide and effective communication effect at the level of interpersonal communication.

4.3. Combine Products with Aesthetic Economy

The objects have "aesthetic value" besides the use value and exchange value considered by Marx. Aesthetic value is a new type of value that transcends human physiological desires [23]. It is the result of transforming production goals from satisfying the needs of human life to opening human desires in the pursuit of more benefits in the development of business and capital.

Under the influence of aesthetic economy and aesthetic culture, with the advancement of technology and the improvement of social tolerance, enterprises should take strategic vision to develop strategies on how to attract audiences through aesthetics. AR is considered to be a technology's ease of use, which will greatly affect consumers' attitudes towards technology [17]. The emergence of AR brings a new watching experience for fans, which is superior to traditional watching types with a fixed angle of view and low-speed movement, thus may be regarded as the most important new trend for consumers to interact with activation in some way [24]. AR is just an example of how enterprises could use new technology to make their consumers have a better aesthetic experience. Products with good design and a beautiful appearance will have better marketing results in social and cultural markets.

5. Conclusion

Fandom does play an important role in contemporary business models, which is largely linked with the Internet-based consumption model formed by digital natives. Additionally, people participate more actively and output more products in their social media or online communities. Fandom is taking shape of some new additional channels and interaction possibilities for enterprises, to expand their profit channel and marketing targets. It is no doubt that fandom drives by some emotional features and is not restricted by contract or money. But simply thinking it is unreliable is not correct, the good choice to tackle with fan capital is to understand and then take advantage of these psychological features to manage them in the long run. Besides, the problems about violation of fan interests are also worthy of attention because they will also influence enterprises in return.

As a result, enterprises have no choice but to adapt to this trend by making strategies regarding social media to manage this kind of relational capital. They need to manage fans capital through social media to form a good brand image and achieve better communication results with the help of social media. By

establishing brand homepages and communities, they can attract and maintain the attention of fans; by valuing and operating the relationship of fans, good communication can be formed, and its effect does not less than mass communication's; by giving consumers more aesthetic experience, their products will also have more unique aesthetic competitiveness, especially for fans.

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