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A Review of the Structural Model and Decision-Making Mechanism of Fan Support Organizations

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Abstract. Over the past few years, fan communities built around celebrities, idols, and public figures have grown rapidly across social media platforms. Much of the existing scholarship has centered on how fans develop collective identities and engage in participatory practices, yet far less work has looked inside these groups to ask how they become organized, how roles are distributed, and how decisions actually get made. This review draws together work from fan studies, organizational behavior, and social psychology to examine the psychological processes that underpin structured fan-support organizations. It begins with parasocial relationships, the need to belong, and social identity as the emotional and motivational groundwork for joining fan groups. From there, the discussion moves to how group norms and role differentiation give rise to internal hierarchies and routines, and how conformity and group polarization shape collective action. The final sections consider some of the psychological risks associated with intense group involvement, including over-identification, normative pressure, and deindividuation in anonymous online spaces. The review argues that sustainable fan communities depend on maintaining a workable balance between coordinated collective effort and members' personal autonomy. Positive and flexible group norms, platform-level guidance, and ongoing risk-awareness education are proposed as ways to reduce behavioral imbalance without extinguishing fans' genuine enthusiasm and emotional connection.

Keywords: fandom culture, parasocial relationship, social identity, fan-support organizations, group dynamics

1. Introduction

In recent years, fandom culture has become more and more popular among the younger generation. More individuals follow celebrities, idols and public figures and they regard them as their spiritual support. The relationship between fans and celebrities is defined as a parasocial relationship. People who are more susceptible to parasocial relationships are those who are lonely and isolated, indicating that fandom behavior is not merely driven by entertainment needs but is also closely associated with psychological needs.

Meanwhile, the development of the Internet and social media platforms has accelerated the expansion of fandom culture as it overcomes limitations of time and space, allowing fans to interact continuously. It made fandom no longer a solitary hobby but a social experience built on teamwork.

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However, most existing studies have only focused on fans' participatory practices and their collective identity, while insufficient attention has been given to how these fan groups develop formalized internal structures and implement role differentiation.

This review mainly examines the structural model and decision-making mechanism of fan support organizations by synthesizing literature from fan studies, organizational behavior, and social psychology.

2. The psychological foundation within fan support organizations

2.1. The establishment of parasocial relationships

For many fans, engaging with media content goes beyond simply watching or listening. Although there is no actual reciprocal interaction between a fan and an idol, fans often report a sense of familiarity and subjective closeness that resembles real-life communication. This experience has been described as parasocial interaction [1]. Over time, repeated instances of such one-sided interaction can develop into a stable parasocial relationship, generating ongoing psychological closeness [2]. Once an idol occupies a meaningful place in a fan's mental and emotional life, the fan is more likely to engage in long-term supportive practices such as promotion, voting, purchasing merchandise, and maintaining online data.

These activities tend to be time-consuming and resource-intensive. Individual fans often find it difficult to sustain them alone, which encourages cooperation among fans who share the same goal. Parasocial relationships therefore function as an important emotional starting point for organized fan activity. However, they do not by themselves explain the specific structures or decision-making routines that later emerge within fan-support groups.

2.2. Needs to belong

Baumeister and Leary's need-to-belong hypothesis argues that human beings have a fundamental drive to form and maintain stable, positive interpersonal bonds [3]. People are not only motivated to establish social connections but also to preserve them over time. In the context of fandom, a shared admiration for the same idol creates an easy basis for connection. These shared interests can facilitate friendships and make repeated participation in fan events more appealing, thereby addressing the basic human need for belonging.

As fans interact more often, the community itself becomes a source of interpersonal reward. Participation is no longer only about supporting the idol, it is also about maintaining relationships with other fans. The need to belong thus helps explain why people initially seek out fan communities and remain involved in them, laying important groundwork for the later emergence of coordinated group activity [3].

2.3. Social identity

Social identity theory, developed by Tajfel and Turner, offers a way to understand the motivations behind sustained collective fan behavior [4]. The theory suggests that self-concept is partly shaped by membership in social groups. Group-related behavior typically involves three cognitive processes: social categorization, social identification, and social comparison [4]. When people join organized fan groups, they start to sort the social world into in-group members (fellow fans) and out-group members (ordinary viewers, rival fandoms, or critics). By adopting group norms and

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participating in shared campaigns, fans gradually integrate the fandom label into their self-concept, completing the process of social identification.

Collective activities such as data-boosting and chart promotion can then be seen as forms of positive intergroup comparison. Improvements in platform rankings or public visibility generate collective pride, which in turn boosts individual self-esteem through association with the group's success. This dynamic helps sustain ongoing collaborative fan activity [4].

3. Psychological impact mechanisms in fan support organizations

3.1. Group norm formation: how organizational rules shape member behavior

Once a fan-support organization begins to take shape, members develop shared expectations about what counts as appropriate behavior through repeated interaction and joint activity. These shared expectations are usually called group norms. Sherif's early work demonstrated that when individuals lack clear external standards, they tend to construct common reference points through interaction. Once these shared standards are in place, they guide subsequent judgements and actions [5]. Cialdini, Reno, and Kallgren later distinguished between descriptive norms, which reflect how members typically behave, and injunctive norms, which reflect how members ought to behave [6].

In fan-support organizations, members are shaped by both formal rules and informal observation of other fans. Group norms help reduce variation in behavior and make it easier for large numbers of otherwise dispersed individuals to coordinate around shared goals. In this way, norms act as a key psychological mechanism for maintaining internal order and behavioral consistency [5, 6].

3.2. Group role differentiation: psychological differences between core and ordinary members

As fan organizations grow, their activities become more complicated, and members start to take on distinct functions rather than performing identical tasks. Research on group roles suggests that individuals develop particular positions based on group tasks and social interaction, including task-oriented and relationship-oriented roles [7]. It is important to treat core members and ordinary members not as fixed personality types but as participants occupying different positions in terms of involvement, responsibility, and commitment.

Role differences can also produce different psychological experiences. Studies indicate that holding a distinct role can signal to a person that they have special value to the group, increasing their sense of uniqueness and recognition [8]. In addition, work on status characteristics suggests that group members form expectations about others' competence based on observed contributions. Those perceived as more capable often gain greater status and influence [9]. Core members in fan-support organizations may therefore acquire more say over support strategies, resource allocation, and coordination efforts, partly because they hold more information, take on more responsibility, and receive more recognition from others. Role division thus shapes not only participation patterns but also the distribution of influence and decision-making involvement within the group.

4. Collective influence within fan support organizations

4.1. Conformity and the formation of group consensus

Within fan-support organizations, ongoing information sharing and interaction mean that personal opinions are often shaped by the majority view. Asch's well-known conformity experiments showed that even in situations where the correct answer is relatively clear, individuals sometimes adjust their

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responses to match a unanimous majority [10]. This effect is often attributed to normative social influence, where people conform to maintain social acceptance and avoid conflict.

In practice, when fans discuss voting strategies, support plans, or how to allocate resources, members who initially disagree may gradually shift towards the majority position. As more members adopt the same view, the original diversity of opinion becomes compressed into a relatively unified group stance, enabling coordinated action. At the same time, conformity can discourage minority voices, since members may prefer to accept the mainstream position rather than risk social friction. Conformity therefore supports consensus and coordination, but it may also narrow the range of perspectives available to the group [10].

4.2. Group polarisation and the reinforcement of collective fan behavior

Once a fan group reaches a certain level of consensus, continued interaction can push members' attitudes further in the direction of their initial leanings. This tendency is known as group polarisation [11]. Moscovici and Zavalloni's classic work showed that group discussion does not necessarily moderate opinions, instead, post-discussion judgements often become more extreme relative to the group's initial average position [11]. Later research identified persuasive arguments and social comparison as key mechanisms behind this effect [12].

During discussion, members encounter additional reasons that support their existing view and may compare their own stance with those of other members, leading them to adopt a stronger version of that stance. In fan-support settings, members usually share similar positive feelings toward their idol and similar goals. Prolonged interaction therefore tends to intensify both positive attitudes toward the idol and commitment to collective support activities. This can translate into greater willingness to take part in voting, data management, promotional work, and coordinated campaigns. Group polarisation thus deepens shared attitudes and boosts collective action, shaping both the decisions and behavior patterns of fan organizations [11, 12].

5. Psychological issues and behavioral imbalance in fan support organizations

5.1. Excessive identification and weakening of personal boundaries

Identifying with an idol or a fan group is not inherently problematic. Problems tend to arise when identification becomes so dominant that the psychological boundary between the individual and the group starts to erode. Social identity theory points out that group membership can become a central part of self-concept, especially when a particular social identity is highly salient [4]. Within fan culture, when being a fan becomes a major element of self-definition, personal interests and values may become increasingly difficult to separate from collective goals. Members may start to treat support for the idol and loyalty to the fan group as core parts of who they are, making them more willing to prioritise group objectives over private preferences or limits. The concern here is not simply that someone is overly devoted to a celebrity, but that intense identification can blur the line between individual selfhood and collective identity, increasing the influence of the group on personal decisions [4].

5.2. Group pressure and mechanisms leading to irrational behavior

While group norms and conformity can help coordinate fan activity, strong group pressure can also push members to act against their own better judgment. Asch's experiments suggest that even when

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individuals are fairly confident in their own view, they may still alter their response to fit the majority [10]. In highly cohesive fan groups, this normative pressure can be especially powerful. Members may comply with the mainstream view because they fear criticism, exclusion, or negative evaluation from other fans.

The phenomenon of group polarization compounds this problem. When like-minded individuals interact, their shared attitudes are reinforced rather than challenged [11, 12]. Conformity helps explain why individuals follow the group, while polarization explains why the group's position may become more extreme over time. Together, these processes can reduce independent judgment in activities such as collective voting, resource allocation, and online campaigns, producing behavior that departs from what individual members might otherwise choose.

5.3. The impact of deindividuation in anonymous online environments on behavior

The online setting introduces additional psychological dynamics. Deindividuation theory proposes that when people experience high levels of anonymity, reduced personal identifiability, and strong group cues, self-awareness and behavioral restraint may weaken. Individuals become more responsive to situational and group influences [13]. In online fan communities, usernames, anonymous accounts, and large-scale collective interaction reduce the extent to which members feel individually identifiable. Participation is often experienced primarily as group membership rather than as personal action.

Under these conditions, people may think less independently and react more strongly to shared emotions and norms. Anonymity therefore does not simply make individual members less visible, it may also alter how they perceive personal responsibility and the consequences of their behavior. In fan-support organizations, this can amplify conformity and polarisation effects, making collective behavior more intense and potentially more unbalanced [13].

6. The psychological mechanism for the healthy development of fan groups

6.1. Establishing positive group norms to promote rational participation

Because group norms influence how members think and act, establishing positive and flexible norms is central to supporting healthier participation. Fan groups should not rely solely on herd behavior or social pressure. Instead, norms should encourage independent judgment, respect for differing opinions, and voluntary involvement. From the perspective of normative social influence, people adjust their behavior according to what they believe the group expects [6, 10]. If organizational norms explicitly allow for diverse viewpoints and avoid coercive participation, then group influence can shift from enforcing uniformity towards enabling constructive coordination.

Clear rules about information verification, resource use, participation methods, and communication standards can also reduce uncertainty and prevent emotionally driven collective action. The goal of healthy group norms should not be to maximize compliance, but to create an environment where shared goals can be pursued without eliminating individual judgment and voluntary participation.

6.2. Balancing emotional investment and personal psychological boundaries

Healthy fan communities also need to balance emotional investment with the maintenance of personal psychological boundaries. Social identity theory indicates that group membership can

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become a significant part of self-concept, but excessive identification can lead people to interpret their experiences primarily through the lens of group belonging [4]. Maintaining a distinction between personal identity and fan identity helps prevent collective goals from completely overriding individual preferences and values.

The need-to-belong theory similarly emphasizes that social connection is a basic human motivation, but satisfying this need does not require abandoning personal boundaries [3]. Fans can retain meaningful emotional attachment and group participation while still deciding for themselves how much time, money, and energy to invest. A psychologically healthy fan group should therefore not aim to remove emotional involvement, but should encourage members to maintain strong social ties alongside clear personal autonomy.

7. Conclusion

Taken together, the psychological dynamics behind fan-support organizations can be understood as a process that moves from individual emotional connection to collective organisation and then to coordinated action. Parasocial relationships provide the initial emotional foundation for continued support, while the need to belong and social identity draw fans into communities and keep them there. Once these communities become more structured, group norms regulate member behavior, and role differentiation generates differences in participation, responsibility, and influence, giving rise to internal hierarchies and decision-making routines. At the collective level, conformity helps produce consensus, while group polarisation may reinforce shared attitudes and energize collective fan behavior.

However, these same mechanisms can become problematic when taken to extremes. Over-identification, intense group pressure, and deindividuation in anonymous digital spaces may weaken personal boundaries and independent judgment, raising the risk of behavioral imbalance. A healthy fan-support organization does not need to eliminate emotional attachment or collective identity. What matters is maintaining a balance between group coordination and individual autonomy. Inclusive group norms, encouragement of independent judgment, and respect for personal boundaries can help fan communities retain their capacity for collective action while reducing the dangers of excessive conformity and group influence. Platform administrators can also contribute through reasonable external guidance that limits radical behavior without suppressing genuine enthusiasm or emotional engagement. Regular educational initiatives may further help members recognize the potential risks embedded in online group interaction.

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