

March 2020

Media Fandom: Social Media Use and Collective Identity in China: A Case Study of Z.Tao's Weibo Fandom

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Media Fandom: Social Media Use and Collective Identity in China

A Case Study of Z.Tao's Weibo Fandom

by

Mier Sha

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Zimmerman School of Advertising and Mass Communication
College of Arts & Science
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Date of Approval:
November 20, 2019

Keywords: media fandom, social media use, collective identity, Sina Weibo

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ABSTRACT

With the advancement of information and communication technologies (ICTs), social media platforms have been widely applied in the practices of media fandom. To determine the correlation between social media use and collective identity of celebrity fandom, the current study investigated Z.Tao's Weibo fandom as a case conducting an online quantitative survey with 100 samples and 12 in-depth semi-structured interviews. The results show that social media use significantly facilitates the construction of collective identity of celebrity fandom on Weibo through fans' experiences of ingroup interaction and outgroup interaction.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

There would be no fandom if there were no media. Fandom is a socio-cultural phenomenon that is primarily related to nowadays modern societies, mass media, and popular culture (Duffett, 2013). With the advancement of information and communication technologies (ICTs), digital media have been already integrated with the entertainment industry. As a result, fans were introduced to the spotlight of the business from the quondam margin, which made fandom greater visible and mainstream in public across the last two decades (Jenkins, 2008). As a response to the unique historic prerequisite of a widespread adoption of social media, the fastest and the most momentous revolution in ICTs, fans reconfigured their everyday practices and experiences in media fandom where they have dynamically increased their accesses to a mass of news and information as well as circulated them, and interacted with each other. The reconfiguration has appealed to a generation of scholars into fandom research under the context of new media, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

China would be no exception. With the rapid economic growth in the 1980s, China has also gone through a profound transformation in the cultural dimension. The culture market and entertainment industry in China were fundamentally reshaped in the process of the commercialization wave (Huang, 2015). At the same time, due to the reform and opening-up policy executed in China since 1978, the introduction of popular foreign cultures such as K-pop

and J-pop to Chinese young people have become more and more saturated in recent years. Under this background, a cluster of Chinese indigenous celebrities and their fanatical fans started to step onto the stage and take a significant position in mass media in China. As a burgeoning element of popular culture, they have drawn considerable attention and tremendous exposure by dominating hot topics on Chinese social media. A case in pointing this is Luhan, a well-known Chinese singer/dancer/actor/pop star born in 1990, who has made social media history by breaking the Guinness World Record twice for the Most comments on a Weibo™ post. On September 10th in 2012, he reposted a video about his favorite soccer team on Weibo, then he had received 100,899,012 comments by April 19th in 2016. Moreover, on the day Luhan announced his love relationship with a famous actress in 2017, fans' activities once brought the Weibo servers its knees many times. The collisions among different celebrity fan groups or between celebrity fans and casual social media users, which might cause more serious social problems such as cyberbullying and group conflicts, keep rumbling on.

Such a phenomenon illustrates that the fandom of celebrities on social media have strong cohesion and capacity in the expression of collective identity. How celebrity fans identify themselves as a unique fan group? How these fan groups organize themselves on social media? What is the logic or motivation behind such collective behaviors? Do social media platforms have anything to do with the development of online celebrity fandom? Concerning the continuing mystery and ubiquity of the phenomenon, it is significantly necessary to consider the role social media play in the construction of fandom identification. Therefore, the research aims to determine the correlation between social media use and collective identity of media celebrity fandom and explain how fans construct their collective identity through social media use on the

theoretical foundation of social identity theory. By narrowing the topic to a practicable scope, the current study investigates the correlation within a specific Chinese celebrity fandom on a specific social media platform—Z.Tao’s Weibo fandom—as a case study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Media Fandom

Fandom Research

According to Hills (2002), fans are defined as individuals who are fascinated with particular stars, celebrities, movies, TV programs, or bands. Duffett (2013) also describes fans as individuals with a relatively deep, positive emotional belief and passion for someone or something. However, fans and fandom were usually stigmatized in academic and public perspectives at the beginning of fandom research. At that time, fans were characterized as dangerous and pathological fanatics, and their practices in fandom were considered as excessive and deranged behaviors (Jensen, 1992). Broadly speaking, fan research is an exceedingly multidimensional and interdisciplinary subject with different orientations in psychology, sociology, anthropology, and communication studies.

In general, fandom research has undergone three waves in western academia. In the first phase, scholars redefined fans as productive audiences. Scholars in Frankfurt School (*Frankfurter Schule*), a school of social theory and critical philosophy associated with the Institute for Social Research at Goethe University Frankfurt, thought that audiences were objects unilaterally manipulated by media, and named them “*one-dimensional men*” (Marcuse, 2013). After the *turn to Gramsci* (Bennett, 1982) took place in cultural studies in the 1970s, Hall (1973) proposed the

Encoding/decoding model of communication explaining how media messages were produced, disseminated, and interpreted. He puts forward three positions of audiences in the process of decoding texts delivered by media: dominant/hegemonic position, negotiated position, and oppositional position, which propounds that audiences could also have the ability to change and produce messages by themselves through collective behaviors. This claim prominently distinguishes itself from the negative audience theory of the previous Frankfurt school. Since then, scholars started focusing on fans' subjective initiative, including their consumption and creativity. French scholar De Certeau (1985) firstly proposed the conception of "poachers" to explain the role of media audiences, which means individuals simultaneously are consumers and producers in media environments. With De Certeau's influence, Fiske (1992) identifies discrimination and distinction, productivity and participation, and capital accumulation as three main features of media fandom. In the second phase, fandom was embedded in mass consumption society. Scholars considered fandom in the context of modern societies, economies, cultures, and other aspects to discuss their consumption behaviors. Jenkins (1992) explores the relationship between fans and mass consumption societies, cultural practices, and mass media with an ethnographic approach. Lewis (2002) discusses fan culture and popular media in four aspects, including definitions, gender and feminism, entertainment business and industry, production and creativity. With the popularization of ICTs, fandom research at the third stage started to pay attention to fan groups formed on the Internet, focusing on the discussion of fans' practice behaviors as an integral part of their daily routine. MacDonald (1998), Baym (2000) and Bury (2005) investigate the interaction and communication and among online fans, as well as the relationship between new media and online fandom. Jenkins (2006)

emphasizes that both media producers and consumers influence the emergence of media contents. Gray, Sandvoss and Harrington (2017) note that the practices of fan groups facilitate the construction of their identity and community.

The fandom research in China began in the late 1990s. Other than the legitimate status of fandom research established in the western academe, most Chinese scholars in that period held negative attitudes towards fandom and focused on its negative influence on teenagers causing addiction and violence (e.g., Li, 1994; Fu, 1994). However, a Chinese singing TV contest named *Super Girl* organized by Hunan Satellite Television in 2005 brought Chinese fans to public view. At the same time, arisen new media offered fans more platforms to interact and communicate, the activities of media fandom were present organized and normalized on a large scale. Scholars started to realize that fandom is a complex with multiple dimensions that shouldn't be regarded in an either-or way. Hence, fandom studies in China after the show *Super Girl* became more diversified by focusing on fans' consumption, identification, and practices, as well as discussing the positive role of fandom played in mass communication and entertainment business (e.g., Yang, 2009; Lei, 2012; Wang, 2012). Overall, although the quantity of celebrity fans in Chinese is considerable, the research on media fandom in Chinese academia has just started.

Media Fandom

Academic responded to media fandom generally in the last three decades. Henry Jenkins' ethnographic study *Textual Poachers* (1992) became particularly important and influential in cultural studies understanding media fandom. It locates tele-fantasy fans as communities who

have tangential concerns to those of the media industry and who were themselves active in creating additional meanings and products. Jenkins (1992) focused on communal film and television appreciation, not issues around effects or celebrities. Additionally, scholars such as Hills (2002) and Sandvoss (2005) also devoted to ethnographic studies on media fandom. Since the exponential growth of net use transformed fandom in the mid-1990s, the research on media fandom has progressively targeted on the Internet as a location of online fan activities (Baym, 2007). For many fans, it's a newer and more innovative way to build their own virtual communities by using the Internet. The cyberspace doesn't merely create an online replication of the offline fandom but also intersects with fans' relationships to facilitate fan identification and practices (Zhang, 2016). Moreover, Nikunen (2007) studies the convergence of media fandom in terms of intermediality (the use of both traditional and new media) in fandom.

Fandom and Social Media Use

Social media is also known as social network sites (SNSs). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content (p. 61)." During the past two decades, multifarious popular social media platforms have been developed by digital technologies, sequentially such as the blogging platforms LiveJournal and Blogger in 1999, the wiki-based encyclopedia Wikipedia in 2001, the social network sites MySpace in 2003 and Facebook in 2004, and the microblogging platform Twitter in 2004. In China, social media also emerged in the past 20 years, such as Tencent instant messenger QQ in 1999, Douban in 2005, Sina Weibo in 2009, and WeChat in 2011. As Shirky

(2008) notes, social media abruptly rose to the mainstream with the utilization of these ICTs. Various social media platforms function as online virtual communities on which ordinary users create their personal profiles to communicate with friends, family members, and people with similar interests, while celebrities, enterprises, and institutions, or even governments also own their public accounts to communicate their audiences.

It is widely acknowledged that fandom appeared much earlier than the emergence of modern social media platforms (Coppa, 2013), in the days before which fans have invented their own tools and built their own communities for communicating and collaborating. Nowadays, however, fans in media fandom continue to pullulate their evolution on social media through new practices and new connections in the context of Web 2.0 (Baym, 2000; Hills, 2002). Under this umbrella, fans on social media interact and share with each other more directly, which Booth (2010) states should be considered as the key to fandom construction. Therefore, fandom research is more appropriate to be measured on social media in the contemporary era.

Fandom studies on particular social media platforms mostly focus on Twitter. By analyzing major media events, Highfield, Harrington and Bruns (2013) conclude that Twitter is the most used application as a predominant social media platform for fandom and it facilitates the linking and communion of fans. They point out that Twitter operates as a base area offering backchannels for fans to produce feedbacks and comments on widely shared media texts of events in fandom. However, when Bury (2017) critically examines the techno-cultural construction of online fandom communities on different social media platforms, from Usenet to Tumblr specifically, he argues that not all social media platforms are capable of enabling the

construction of fandom communities. The finding indicates that the relationship between fandom formation and social media use of other platforms still need to be tested.

With over 79 million followers on Twitter and 37 million on Instagram, American singer-songwriter and artist Lady Gaga and her fans, also known as *little monsters*, is a contemporary representative for celebrity fandom studies. According to Click, Lee, and Holladay (2013), the relationship between Gaga and her fans is inextricably related to the connotation of self-empowerment in her utterances that she frequently transmits to fans on social media, which demonstrates that social media create an equal environment for both celebrities and fans to engage intensely, enhancing the collective identity of fans. Bennett (2014) also explores the way Gaga and her fans tie-up with each other and ruminates on the effects social media bring to the relationship in Gaga's fandom. Besides, he argues that the tremendous social media use by celebrities like Lady Gaga reconfigures the intensity and depth of participation in media fandom.

While the studies mentioned above have added valuable understandings of fan/celebrity relations and social media use, most of them are on macrolevel or from the celebrity perspective, so there still maintains a need for future studies, particularly from fans' perspective to understand their collective actions and group psychology.

Weibo Fandom

No Facebook. No Twitter. No YouTube. China introduced its own localized social media services. One of the microblogging platforms dubbed Weibo in Chinese, equivalent to Twitter, was created in early 2007. After the earliest Chinese microblogging websites, including Fanfou, Jiwai, and Digu, were forced to shut down after a Xinjiang riot in July 2009, Sina took this

opportunity to launch its own microblogging service named Sina Weibo (abbr. Weibo) in September 2009. Since then, Weibo has got extensive use in China at a spectacular speed among a huge population, especially young people, shaping each aspect of China's society (Harwit, 2014; Zhang, 2016). As one of the biggest Chinese social media platforms, Sina Weibo offers services on the basis of common public cyberspace and user interpersonal relationships to access, share and disseminate information (Michelle & Uking, 2011). Data on CNNIC (2014) show that the overall penetration rate of microblog services was 43.6% in China and Sina Weibo was the leading service provider with a rate of 28.4%.

In early 2012, Sina Weibo implemented a series of policies, including active recruitment of celebrity users and introduction of real name verification system which attaches an orange/red V symbol both on the lower right corner of users' profile pictures and besides their user names if they turn in identity documents to confirm his/her real celebrity identity. Of the top 20 most popular bloggers on Sina Weibo in 2013, for example, 18 were actors, singers, or show hosts. Real name verification makes a significant contribution to the prominence of celebrity users whom Weibo users tend to follow (Chen, et al., 2012). It also helps with faster and broader repost propagation (Huang, et al., 2014; Huang and Sun, 2014) and stimulates active interaction and participation among the users (Chen and She, 2012). Similar to Lady Gaga, the prominence of Chinese celebrities on Sina Weibo has also been demonstrated in much academic literature. Among the Weibo community, users with V symbols dominate the information dissemination process in terms of both potential influence and activeness (Wang, She, and Chen, 2014). Multiple studies (e.g., Chen, et al., 2012; Liao, et al., 2013; Yu, Asur, and Huberman, 2011)

confirmed that the top users, measured by trend-setting ability, number of comments, page views, or followers, are mostly celebrities.

Currently, Sina Weibo is the biggest and most successful microblogging platform with more than 462 million monthly active users in China (NASDAQ, 2018), which primarily relies on celebrity users to maintain its popularity and has become more and more specialized in its services for fans and fandom communities. Fans can have constant updates from the celebrities through following their Weibo accounts, and immediate interactions with other fans through commenting on each other's Weibo replies. According to Huang (2015), 98.79% of Chinese fans in online fandom use Sina Weibo as their communication platform, which implies that Sina Weibo is the most used and typical social media platform for fandom studies in China. Hence, it is reasonable and appropriate to set Sina Weibo as the research object in the current study.

Fandom Identity

As Sandvoss (2005) asserts, the issue of relationships between fans and fan objects is commonplace in fandom studies so that scholars should divert their attention to how fan identification is assisted in media fandom. Reisen and Branscombe (2010) find positive correlations between membership in fandom and fan aggregation and identification, which suggests that fandom is a subject of group phenomena with high relevance to collective identity.

Social Identity Theory

Social identity, also called as collective identity American terminology, is a composition of an individual. The emergence of social identity is closely linked to the perceived membership

in a certain social group or communities with emotion and value attachment to that membership (Turner, 1986). According to the original proposers, European social psychologists Tajfel and Turner (1979), social identity theory was introduced to interpret intergroup behavior in the 1970s and the 1980s. Since in America academics, scholars commonly adopt *collective* to represent *social* in this term, the terms *collective identity* and *collective self-esteem* appeared in the current thesis, therefore, will refer to the same meaning as *social identity* associated with those memberships and attachments of certain social groups.

Social identity theory suggests that individuals would like to build connections between themselves and others who share similarities or are slightly outstanding than them. Therefore, the theory spends much effort in figuring out how individuals cognize and locate themselves in society by self-reflecting their social and personal identities. As Tajfel (1981) notes, an individual's insistent desire for the maintenance of positive social identities is stimulated by the comparison and distinction between him/herself and other group members or others outside the group.

Hogg, Terry and White (1995) believe that collective identity originates from group memberships, which is considered as the prerequisite of social identity theory. Developed into the leading trend in the field of intergroup studies, the theory puts an emphasis on group processes and relationships among groups in the scope of social psychology (Brown & Capozza, 2000). From this point of view, social identity theory aims to elucidate the psychological processes of categorization and comparison both cognitively and emotionally to distinguish group members and promote positive social identity. Uniquely, concerning the cognitive processes, Tajfel and Turner (1979; 1986) specify three psychological processes, categorization,

identification, and comparison, which are mandatory and necessary for individuals who generate their in-group/out-group classifications.

Social identity theory has been appraised as an effective framework to illustrate the construction and development of collective actions and behaviors (Mudrick et al., 2016). Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail (1994) expressly point out that individuals keep pursuing a sense of belonging and tend to align with groups, which are seen as a feasible way to represent themselves. Individuals' proclivity toward certain groups is the embodiment of integrating the attributes of the groups into their self-identities, in short, internalization (Fink et al., 2002). Correspondingly, the adoption of collective identity can affect individuals' cognition and behaviors (Hogg & Terry, 2001). As a result, groups are inclined to present their favorable images for the public to promote themselves outwards, which Stets and Burke (2000) define as an expression of in-group bias. Moreover, Greene (2004) adds that out-group devaluation and punishment is the other composition of this in-group promotion. In conclusion, individuals bound up with groups are manipulated for enhancing collective identity, and simultaneously, group members will be more unitive and contributive with the increase of group adaptability and self-esteem (Hogg & Terry, 2001).

As Luhtanen and Crocker (1992) note, "collective self-esteem is an important moderator of in-group bias, in-group-serving attributions, and other group-level strategies discussed in social identity theory" (p. 303). To access it in accordance with social identity theory, they established a scale measuring the degrees of individuals' social identity on the basis of their memberships in groups. The scale named Collective Self-esteem Scale includes four types of items in the measure—*membership, private, public, and identity*—each measuring a dimension of

collective self-esteem, which also proposed by Luhtanen and Crocker (1992). The *membership* esteem involves individuals' assessment of if they are how good or worthy enough to be members in their social groups, which is seen as the most individualistic dimension of collective self-esteem, while the other three dimensions of items are more collectivistic which have direct relevance to social identity theory. The *private* collective self-esteem items measure individuals' evaluation of their social groups, which determines if they hold positive attitudes towards the groups from their own perspective. The *public* collective self-esteem items measure individuals' evaluation of how the public judges them, which determines if they think non-members outside their groups hold positive attitudes towards them. Both *private* and *public* collective self-esteem reflect the emotional significance their social groups bring to the members. The *identity* items test the importance of memberships in social groups to individuals' self-concept. The Collective Self-esteem Scale Luhtanen and Crocker developed offers further research as a possible tool to measure individuals' collective identity statistically, which can also be applied in the current study.

Media Fandom and Collective Identity

Fandom shares many similarities to collective identity. Since social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978) explains the social psychology and behaviors when individuals identify themselves as members of certain groups, it is reasonable to adopt it to media fandom as social groups online to provide a demonstrable interpretation of fandom identity.

As Duffett (2013) notes, fandom is both personal and collective. To be specific, a group member is shaping self-concepts and self-presentations inside a fan group, meanwhile, the

group is also developing its common identity simultaneously (Baym, 2007). Baym (2000) also believes that fans would actively search for and gather with other fans sharing the same affections by doing which fans develop collective identity progressively. Generally, any fandom is established on a communal identification with an object (Soukup, 2006). Fans realize the fact that their own identities are immersed with delight and excitement related to the object (Duffett, 2013). For celebrity fandom specifically, Fraser and Brown (2002) argue that the motivation of fans to build connections to celebrities is "based on the need to enhance self-esteem through identification with certain values" (p. 190). Personifying the substances of identification, the ritualized "sacred object" (p. 138) customizes the media contents of celebrity fandom (Lynch, 2007). Such personified identification, together with a particular celebrity and the whole fandom community, is the core of the practices and experiences in the celebrity fandom. More concretely, Soukup (2006) emphasizes the psychological or cognitive identification processes relevant to the fan practices and experiences through interactions in media fandom.

According to Lewis (1992), "perhaps only the fan can appreciate the depth of feeling, the gratifications, the importance of coping with everyday life that fandom represents" (p. 1). Thus, a growing number of scholars is devoting to explore fandom from the fans' perspective. In the context of the digital era, fans become more impactful on how to interpret the media texts with which they identify themselves and others. When combining social media use and fandom identity together, most studies almost wholly focus on sport fans and their team identities (e.g., Jacobson, 1979; Wann & Weaver, 2009; Porat, 2010; Guilianotti, 2013). As media entities often serve as conduits between fans and teams, Phua (2010) asserts that social media usage has increased energetic distinctiveness for sports fans, resulting in a higher collective self-esteem

level because of the enhanced ability to access updates about the teams and athletes they support. Mudrick, Miller and Atkin (2016) investigate the effect of social media on collective identity illustration focusing on fans' reactive behaviors, mainly the interaction with the public and the fandom expression that fans exude. The finding shows that fans with higher team identification are more likely to be heavier social media users in sports fandom. They further explain that social media encourage fans' expression of their identity as members of certain fan groups through collective identification, which is another dimension of social media's use and satisfaction. Moreover, Reysen and Branscombe (2010) argue that sports fans are similar to non-sport fans, which suggests that research findings of sports fandom have a reference value to some extent. Thus, taking all literatures considered in the present study, it is proposed that the correlation between social media use intensity and collective identity of celebrity fandom on Weibo is positive.

H: There is a significant positive correlation between Weibo use intensity and collective identity of celebrity fandom on Weibo.

Z.Tao's Weibo Fandom

Z.Tao

Z.Tao (Chinese: 黄子韬; pinyin: *Huáng Zītāo*; born May 2, 1993), also known as Tao, is a Chinese singer-songwriter, rapper, actor and model. When he was a child, he started learning Wushu and became a professional Wushu athlete. In the year 2010, he was picked by a scout from South Korea's largest entertainment company SM Entertainment on a talent show. On December 27th in 2011, he was formally introduced as the third member of EXO, a South Korean-

Chinese K-pop boy band located in Seoul with 12 members. Since its debut, the band had accumulated considerable popularity in Asia and had won numerous music awards in China, Japan and Korea. However, on April 22nd in 2015, Z.Tao's father posted an announcement on Sina Weibo asking for the termination of his contract with SM Entertainment on the grounds that Z.Tao got injured too much during EXO period due to some unreasonable work requirements. The legal process of his lawsuit against the company is still in progress up to now.

After leaving EXO, in June 2015, he set up his own agency Z.Tao Studio in China and made his solo debut with the mini-album *TAO* under his new stage name Z.Tao who sold 670,000 digital copies in only one week. Since then, he began to focus on his solo career on C-pop music, films, and TV shows and gained mainstream popularity. Z.Tao ranked 25th on *Forbes* China Celebrity 100 list in 2017 and 35th in 2019. Thus, he is widely recognized as a typical Chinese celebrity.

Z.Tao's Weibo Fandom

According to data on social media, up to September 2019, Z.Tao (@热血黄子韬)'s followers on Sina Weibo has exceeded 50 million including 2.25 million super fans with over 160 billion views and 1.5 million posts in his super tag Z.Tao (#黄子韬#) community. Z.Tao's fans named themselves *HL* (Chinese: 海浪; pinyin: *Hǎi Làng*; paraphrase: sea waves) which means accompanying and guarding Z.Tao because he said he liked walking by the sea. So that the term "HL" mentioned in this study refers to Z.Tao's fans or fandom. HL defined blue as their image color and "the sea is always the same color as the sky, and HL will always stand by your side" as

their slogan. Due to the popularity of Z.Tao and maturity of his fandom, Z.Tao's Weibo fandom HL could be measured as a typical celebrity fandom on social media in China.

Z.Tao's Public Image

Z.Tao's public image became controversial after he left EXO in 2015 with his unclosed lawsuit against SM Entertainment. As a matter of fact, he is not the first Chinese member who left EXO. In the year 2014, two former Chinese members of EXO, Kris and Luhan, announced officially that they scraped their contrasts with the company and went back to China. At that time, Z.Tao censured Kris for his betrayal on his Instagram. In the public's view, this behavior was considered as a contradiction with his subsequent leaving. Due to this incident, he dissatisfied numerous fans of both two left members and EXO. Moreover, rumors about him, such as putting on airs in talk shows, hooking up with girls, being late on international fashion shows, were widely spread on Chinese social media. Though some of them were confirmed as false news, his personal reputation had been deeply damaged at that time. During 2015~2017, his haters on the Internet kept cyber-bullying him by abusing and making memes about him—a Weibo account named Z.Tao's Memes (@黄子韬表情包) gathered nearly 300 thousand haters in this period.

In conclusion, scholars have realized the increasingly rise of Weibo celebrity fandom in recent years. As reviewed above, innumerable studies have been reviewed on social media use and fandom identity respectively. Unfortunately, few scholars have done the examination of correlations between social media use intensity and collective identity of online celebrity fandom both quantitatively and qualitatively. Though some studies provide some positive

connections between social media use and the process of fandom identification, they focus mostly on sports fans or celebrity perspective. Besides, none studies have put the specific conditions of Chinese social media and Chinese celebrity under consideration. Therefore, the present study aims to reveal a deep understanding of the correlation between social media use and fandom collective identity in China both quantitatively and qualitatively as a new direction, which hopefully will extend media studies and enhance the knowledge of media fandom.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH QUESTION AND HYPOTHESES

From the literature reviewed, the research gap combining social media use and fandom identity is foreshadowed and justified. Combining with the context of China, Weibo is considered as the most appropriate and practical Chinese social media platform as the research object of the current study. Based on the knowledge and understanding derived from the previous literatures and scholars' empirical prediction, therefore, the following hypothesis narrowed will be tested in the present study:

H: There is a significant positive correlation between Weibo use intensity and group identity of celebrity fandom on Weibo.

As Luhtanen and Crocker (1992) strongly recommend, instead of creating an integral or unitary score, collective identity should be measured by four separate dimensions (*membership esteem, private collective self-esteem, public collective self-esteem, and importance to identity*). Therefore, the hypothesis could be divided into four sub-hypotheses into these four dimensions, respectively:

H₁: The correlation between Weibo use intensity and collective identity of celebrity fandom on Weibo is significantly positive in the dimension of membership.

H₂: The correlation between Weibo use intensity and collective identity of celebrity fandom on Weibo is significantly positive in the dimension of private.

H3: The correlation between Weibo use intensity and collective identity of celebrity fandom on Weibo is significantly positive in the dimension of public.

H4: The correlation between Weibo use intensity and collective identity of celebrity fandom on Weibo is significantly positive in the dimension of identity.

If the correlations are proved to be significant positive, then a further research question flows from the hypothesis for deeper qualitative understanding of the quantitative results:

RQ: How collective identity of celebrity fandom on Weibo is constructed through Weibo use?

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

Understanding fandom is based on enough coherence to warrant detailed analysis. According to Jenkins (1992), varieties of fan groups where fans come from could be essentially the same as other types of fan groups by sharing similar experiences, but they also show differences from each other due to their specific social statuses and cultural backgrounds. Analogously, Duffett (2013) concludes that fandom studies usually concentrate on a number of appreciable fan practices and a diversity of specific fandom objects, however, how these are combined and compared will differ each case from others, which suggests that it is crucial to select an attractive case of practices and objects in a fandom study (Duffett, 2013). A case study can literally afford a profound and individually relevant understanding of a complex research problem and offer a multi-sided research approach that identifies and recognizes various aspects of human behaviors. To obtain an in-depth appreciation of the issue on Weibo celebrity fandom, therefore, the current study enlists a case study of a specific Chinese celebrity fandom on a specific Chinese social media—Z.Tao’s Weibo fandom in its natural and real-life context as an intensive case study of a typical representative aiming to generalize across a larger population of media fandom.

As Jones (1997) suggests, a mixed methodology is an appropriate, suitable, and desirable research design for the topic of fandom research. Methodologically, the current study applies

innovative methods combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to the analysis of the correlation between Weibo use intensity and collective identity of celebrity fandom as well as the cognitive processes how collective identity is construction on social media, which provides a profound and unique insight into the issue.

An online quantitative survey and several in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted after receiving the IRB certification.

Section A: Survey

Respondents

Of 106 respondents who are Sina Weibo users as well as Z.Tao's fans participating in the survey, 6 are removed from the sample because 4 of them are under 18 years old, and the other 2 completed the questionnaire in less than 50 seconds, which are all deleted as invalid data. The final sample (N=100, see **Table 1** on page 24) is composed of 9 males (9%) and 91 females (91%). For age, 30 are between 18~21 years old (30%), 49 are between 22~25 years old (49%), 13 are between 26~29 years old (13%), and only 8 are over 30 years old (8%). It shows that most of them belong to Generation Z (often abbreviated as Gen Z) born during the mid-1990s to early-2000s who accessed the Internet from a young age and are acquainted with technology and social media. For educational level, only 2 held high school degrees (2%), 61 held bachelor's degrees or are currently undergraduate students (61%), and 37 held master's or higher degrees or are current master candidates (37%).

Table 1. Sample Demographics

Descriptive statistics		N (%)
Gender	Male	9 (9%)
	Female	91 (91%)
Age (years old)	18~21	30 (30%)
	22~25	49 (49%)
	26~29	13 (13%)
	30~	8 (8%)
Education Level	Senior high	2 (2%)
	Bachelor	61 (61%)
	Master or above	37 (37%)

Procedures

The one-time online quantitative survey was conducted on WJX™ (<https://www.wjx.cn/>), a Chinese professional online survey platform, to measure both the intensity of Weibo use and fandom collective identity, from August 15th to September 1st. Due to the language environment on Weibo and the nationalities of Weibo users, the questionnaire was released in Chinese (see **Appendix 1**) for accurate understanding. A snowball sample was applied to find respondents on Sina Weibo: the researcher posted the link of the survey automatically generated by WJX (<https://www.wjx.cn/jq/45168424.aspx>) both on the homepage of Z.Tao's Super Fan Community and his fan chatrooms on Weibo with a brief description of the current research. The survey only recruited normal healthy adult subjects who use Sina Weibo and identify themselves

as Z.Tao's fans and members of his Weibo fan group HL. No compensation was offered, so the participation of respondents was completely voluntary. Respondents were also encouraged to repost or resend the link to other Z.Tao's fans they know. At the end of the survey, all respondents were asked if they were willing to participate in a 20 minutes in-depth interview for further investigation with no compensation and left their contact information (their phone number or Wechat ID). Data collected via the questionnaire was imported into SPSS for statistical considerations.

Measures

To test the hypothesis aforementioned, the present study employed an online survey with a questionnaire (see **Appendix 1**) measuring both social media use and fandom collective identity of fans. The 5~8-min questionnaire was separated into three sections of required questions: personal information, Weibo use intensity, and fandom collective identity. Each of them only has one single choice.

The first part asked participants' personal information, including their gender, age, and education level.

In the second part, Weibo use intensity was measured using the modified version of the *Facebook Intensity Scale* (Cronbach's alpha = .83). It was originally designed by Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe (2007) aiming to measure social media usage in a better way that not only counting frequency or duration indices but also scoring the levels of individuals' dependency on Facebook they perceive about themselves. The original scale has been adopted in some previous research on different social media platforms (Charoensukmongkol, 2014; Moqbel, Nevo & Kock, 2013),

which proves its practicability of application. To be consistent with the current study, the researcher made a readjustment by replacing “Facebook” with “Weibo” and editing a few options to fit the Weibo context. For instance, the first question of *Facebook Intensity Scale* “about how many total Facebook friends do you have?” was separated into two different questions asking “follows” and “followers” separately. The reason of this modification is considering that there is usually a great difference between the numbers of one’s follows and followers on Weibo because mostly they are celebrities or strangers while the “friends” on Facebook are usually acquaintances who know each other in their real life. The current scale *Weibo Intensity Scale* (see **Table 2** on page 27) includes two self-reported measurements of Weibo behaviors, developed to assess the intensity of individuals’ participation and engagement in Weibo activities: the number of their Weibo “follow(s)” and “follower(s)”, and the amount of time they spend on Weibo in a typical day. Measuring the degree of individuals’ emotional attachment in Weibo and its immersion into individuals’ everyday routines, the current scale also includes a set of 7-point Likert-scale of attitudinal questions, whose answers were scored ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

The third part fandom collective identity was measured with *Collective Self-Esteem Scale* firstly created by Luhtanen and Crocker (1992) to evaluate individuals’ collective identity in certain social groups on four dimensions (*membership esteem, private collective self-esteem, public collective self-esteem* and *importance to identity*). Each of these four dimensions included four items, and the responses to all 16 items were also measured on a 7-point Likert-scale. The reliability and validity of the scale criterion used as a research tool have been proved. Reysen and Branscombe (2010) then modified the scale as *Identification with the Group (Fandom)* in their

study of fandom and fanism by replacing “the social group” with “the fan group” to investigate fans of the same interest. Higher scores indicate greater identification with the group. For the current study taking Z.Tao’s Weibo fandom as a case, the researcher edited the scale by renaming the scale as *Fandom Collective Self-Esteem Scale* (see **Table 3** on page 28) and replacing “the fan group” with the name of Z.Tao’s fan group “HL” (e.g., “I am a worthy member of HL”).

Table 2. Weibo Intensity Scale

Weibo Intensity Scale
About how many total follows do you have on Weibo? 1 = 10 or less, 2 = 11–50, 3= 51–100, 4 = 101–200, 5 = 201–300, 6 = 301–500, 7 = more than 500
About how many total followers do you have on Weibo? 1 = 10 or less, 2 = 11–50, 3= 51–100, 4 = 101–200, 5 = 201–300, 6 = 301–500, 7 = more than 500
In the past week, on average, approximately how much time per day have you spent on Weibo? 1 = less than 10 minutes, 2 = 10–30 minutes, 3 = 31–60 minutes, 4= 1–2 hours, 5 = 2–3 hours, 6 = 3–5 hours, 7 = more than 5 hours
Weibo is part of my everyday activity.
I am proud to tell people I’m on Weibo.
Weibo has become part of my daily routine.
I feel out of touch when I haven’t logged onto Weibo for a while.
I feel I am part of the Weibo community.
I would be sorry if Weibo shut down.
*Response categories ranged from 1 to 7. 1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3=Disagree Somewhat, 4= Neutral, 5=Agree Somewhat, 6= Agree, 7=Strongly Agree

Table 3. Fandom Collective Self-Esteem Scale

Fandom Collective Self-Esteem Scale
Membership I am a worthy member of the fan group I belong to. (1) I feel I don't have much to offer to the fan group I belong to. (5) I am a cooperative participant in the fan group I belong to. (9) I often feel I'm a useless member of my fan group. (13)
Private I often regret that I belong to the fan group. (2) In general, I'm glad to be a member of the fan group I belong to. (6) Overall, I often feel that the fan group of which I am a member are not worthwhile. (10) I feel good about the fan group I belong to. (14)
Public Overall, my fan group is considered good by others. (3) Most people consider my fan group, on the average, to be more ineffective than other fan groups. (7) In general, others respect the fan group that I am a member of. (11) In general, others think that the fan group I am a member of is unworthy. (15)
Identity Overall, my group memberships have very little to do with how I feel about myself. (4) The fan group I belong to is an important reflection of who I am. (8) The fan group I belong to is unimportant to my sense of what kind of person I am. (12) In general, belonging to the fan group is an important part of my self-image. (16)

*Response categories ranged from 1 to 7. 1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3=Disagree Somewhat, 4= Neutral, 5=Agree Somewhat, 6= Agree, 7=Strongly Agree.

*The numbers in parentheses indicate the sequence of items in the scale.

* Items was reversed for scoring. Reverse-score answers to items 2, 4, 5, 7, 10, 12, 13, and 15, such that (1 = 7), (2 = 6), (3 = 5), (4 = 4), (5 = 3), (6 = 2), (7 = 1).

Section B: Interviews

Participants

The 12 interview participants (N=12, see **Table 4** on page 29) is composed of 1 male (8.33%) and 11 females (91.66%).

Table 4. Participant Information

Participant	Gender	Age	Education level	Weibo follows	Weibo followers
1	Female	19	Bachelor	889	716
2	Female	25	Bachelor	371	598
3	Female	23	Bachelor	349	98
4	Female	26	Master	95	116
5	Female	20	Bachelor	1054	1965
6	Female	23	Master	386	5897
7 Tong	Female	21	Bachelor	63	16238
8	Female	22	Bachelor	33	1204
9	Female	31	Master	93	2576
10	Female	21	Bachelor	414	890
11	Female	28	Doctor	310	251
12	Male	19	Senior high	258	77

Procedures

The 12 participants of personal in-depth interviews were volunteers chosen randomly from the 27 survey respondents who were willing to take part in interviewing with no compensation. They were contacted through Wechat IDs and phone numbers they left at the end of the survey. Since all participants lived in China, all interviews proceeded online via Wechat video chat or Facetime. Before the interview started, every participant was required to sign up a consent form guaranteeing privacy and confidentiality. In this form, all participants were

informed that the interviews they participated in would be recorded with their permission and the recordings of the interviews would be destroyed after 5 years the interviews have been transcribed; besides, their personal information or responses would not be displayed or associated in any possible way. Each interview lasted approximately 30~45 minutes with a brief introduction and 8 preset open-ended questions listed in the interview outline. Most of the interviews consisted of several additional questions after the participants' responses.

Measures

Craibe (1998) argues that the crucial factor associated with identification is an individual's experience due to its subjectivity built-in. The individual arranges, communicates, evaluates, collects and maintains his or her connections and interactions with the world in daily practices, which should be considered as the key process of constructing identity (Bauman, 2004). Porat (2010) also suggests that experience is the core of both fandom objects and fandom communities. Similarly, it can be indicated that the collective identity of Weibo fandom is constructed through fans' ordinary experiences on Weibo. Thus, the research question that how collective identity of celebrity fandom is constructed on Weibo was measured with the experiences of participants provided.

To investigate the construction of collective identity of Z.Tao's Weibo fandom, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews for a deeper understanding of fan group members' experiences in a celebrity Weibo fandom from the perspective of fans themselves. Relying on the participants' in-depth responses, 8 open-ended questions related to collective identity construction were asked. The interview outline (see **Appendix 2**) includes aspects of fan

self-identity (e.g., “Why and how you identify yourself as Z.Tao’s fan?”), social media use (e.g., “What activities do you usually do on Weibo relevant to Z.Tao?”), ingroup interaction (e.g., “How do you interact with Z.Tao and his other fans on Weibo?”), membership (e.g., “How do you evaluate the membership among fans in Z.Tao’s Weibo fandom?”), outgroup interaction (e.g., “What do you think about the conflict with public and other fan groups?”) and media role in collective identity construction (e.g., “How do you think the use of Weibo affects the group identity of Z.Tao’s fandom?”).

Data Analysis

After all the interviews were finished, the researcher transcribed the records in Chinese firstly due to the language the participants used in the interviews, and then translated them in English, which was double-checked by a third-party interpreter to ensure the translation expressing the original meanings to the greatest extent. The records were analyzed in the approach of grounded theory. The researcher applied systematic procedures to develop an inductive explanation of the construction of fandom collective identity on Weibo that was solidly grounded in the data and fans’ experiences. In the process of coding, as Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest for grounded theory, the researcher conducted open, axial, and selective coding sequentially. Firstly, the collected data were logged in according to their original meanings, and then they were divided and configured into various categories based on the similarities and differences contained in them, which recombined them to determine their conceptual genera. Specifically, in the current study, various categories of Weibo activities of Z.Tao’s fandom was developed based on the use experiences of Z.Tao’s fans, such as posting, reposting,

commenting and, sending DMs. Secondly, organic relationships among the categories were established, and the intention and motivation behind them were explored. In this case, not only the relationship between Z.Tao and his fans, but also the relationships among his fandom and, among his fandom and other pertinent fandom were systematically analyzed according to the use experiences of Z.Tao's fans. The data then were further integrated as core categories dominating most of the research results in a relatively broad theoretical scope. As a result, two main themes—ingroup interaction and outgroup interaction—were developed to reflect the process of collective identity construction of Z.Tao's Weibo fandom.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

The mixed methodology combining a survey and interviews emerges both statistical and interpretative descriptions, which corresponds to the hypotheses and research question, respectively. Therefore, the results founded in quantitative and qualitative methods will be presented sequentially.

Correlation Between Weibo Use and Collective Identity of Celebrity Fandom

Prior to assessing the correlation between Weibo use intensity and Z.Tao's Weibo fandom collective identity, it is necessary to conduct reliability analyses. The reliabilities of both *Weibo Intensity Scale* and *Fandom Collective Self-esteem Scale* were evaluated using reliability coefficients Cronbach's alpha (α). As shown in **Table 5** (see page 34), the internal consistency of 7 questions of Weibo Intensity scale is excellent ($.9 \leq \alpha$), 4 questions of Membership Esteem subscale is good ($.8 \leq \alpha < .9$), 4 questions of Private Collective Self-esteem and Importance to Identity subscales are acceptable ($.7 \leq \alpha < .8$) and, 4 questions of Public Collective Self-esteem subscale is questionable ($.6 \leq \alpha < .7$). Overall, both Weibo Intensity Scale and Fandom Collective self-esteem Scale are reliable. Then the answers to Weibo intensity scale scores were added together and divided by 7, and the answers to the four items for each subscale scores were summed and divided by 4 respectively as their final scores.

Table 5. Reliability Statistics

Scales/Subscales	Cornbach's Alpha(α)	N of Items
Weibo Intensity	.926	7
Membership Esteem	.811	4
Private Collective Self-esteem	.799	4
Public Collective Self-esteem	.676	4
Importance to Identity	.767	4

Table 6 (see page 35) provides descriptive statistics of each item. The mean of Weibo use intensity scores is 4.791 ($\sigma=1.46707$), which indicates that generally Z.Tao's fans on Weibo not only have high frequencies and long duration on using Weibo, but also present positive attitudes and emotional connections to Weibo in their daily lives. For the four dimensions of collective identity, it shows that Z.Tao's Weibo fandom has high private collective self-esteem scores (mean=5.3525, $\sigma=1.2583$), membership esteem scores (mean=3.9325, $\sigma=1.2583$), importance to identity scores (mean=3.8425, $\sigma=1.32700$), but low public collective self-esteem scores (mean=2.5475, $\sigma= .69603$) on average. Relatively, the private collective self-esteem is significantly greater than the other three items, which means that Z.Tao's fans on Weibo generally estimate the fan group HL they belong to with extremely affirmative personal judgments. Besides, they generally assess themselves as good or worthy members in the HL fandom and consider the memberships as an important part of their self-conception. However, they don't give a high assessment of how other people evaluate the HL fandom.

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics

	Mean (of 7)	Std. Deviation
Intensity	4.7914	1.46707
Membership	3.9325	1.25823
Private	5.3525	1.07549
Public	2.5475	.69603
Identity	3.8425	1.32700

Results of Pearson correlation analyses that included all variables and their Pearson correlation coefficients are presented in **Table 7** (see page 36). The hypothesis that speculated the correlation between Weibo use intensity and collective identity of celebrity fandom on Weibo was tested on four dimensions, and each of them met the criteria for statistical significance as the following statements:

H1 predicted a positive correlation between Weibo use intensity and collective identity of celebrity Weibo fandom in the dimension of membership esteem. The result reveals a significant positive correlation between them ($r = .531^{**}$, $p < .01$). Thus, **H1** is supported.

H2 predicted a positive correlation between Weibo use intensity and collective identity of celebrity Weibo fandom in the dimension of private collective self-esteem. The result indicates a significant positive correlation between them ($r = .636^{**}$, $p < .01$). Thus, **H2** is supported.

H3 predicted a positive correlation between Weibo use intensity and collective identity of celebrity Weibo fandom in the dimension of public collective self-esteem. The result shows a significant positive correlation between them ($r = .382^{**}$, $p < .01$). Thus, **H3** is supported.

H4 predicted a positive correlation between Weibo use intensity and collective identity of celebrity Weibo fandom in the dimension of importance to identity. The result is also a significant positive correlation between them ($r = .499^{**}$, $p < .01$). Thus, **H4** is supported.

Overall, since Weibo use intensity has significantly positive connection with each dimension of Z.Tao's fandom collective identity, it can be concluded that the correlation between Weibo use intensity and collective identity of celebrity fandom on Weibo is significantly positive, which indicates that stronger intensity of Weibo use leads to higher collective identity of celebrity Weibo fandom. Weibo fans with stronger social media use intensity are more likely to evaluate themselves as worthy members in the fan group and feel good about it whether from private perspectives or public views as they thought. Moreover, they tend to perceive the importance of the fan group in the process of their identity construction. In other words, social media use facilitates the construction of collective identity of celebrity fandom on Weibo.

Table 7. Correlations Analyses

		Membership	Private	Public	Identity
	Person Correlation	.531 ^{**}	.636 ^{**}	.382 ^{**}	.499 ^{**}
Intensity	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Collective Identity Construction of Celebrity Fandom on Weibo

Through the online survey, the results statistically prove that Weibo use intensity has significantly positive connection with Z.Tao's fandom collective identity in total of four dimensions, which indicates that stronger intensity of Weibo use leads to higher celebrity fandom collective identity. To dig a deeper understanding of the quantitative results, transcribed in-depth interviews were integrated and coded based on the Weibo use experiences of Z.Tao's fans. A description of two main themes of Weibo interaction of HL fandom was developed based on the systematic analysis of the 12 interviews. Each theme will be expounded with particular examples of experiences picked up from the interviews. Additionally, the Weibo use experiences of one participant, Tong (Participant 7, a famous super fan within the fan group HL and one of the subordinate administrators of Z.Tao's Super Fan Community who has 16064 fans on Weibo), is detailed in the explanation in order to illustrate the specific experiences of collective identity construction of Z.Tao's fans in the process of Weibo interaction.

Ingroup Interaction

When asked the reason why they become a member of Z.Tao's Weibo fandom, most participants gave various and multiple answers, such as "to access Z.Tao's updates", "to communicate with people with same interest", or "to gain the sense of identity and belonging", even "to achieve self-worth", but all of them strongly agree that the fundamental emotional motivation is the love for Z.Tao, and the desire to directly interacting with Z.Tao is the immediate cause that drives them to use Weibo, where is the only social media platform Z.Tao owns himself and posts frequently that can be accessed by fans in China (he also has Instagram

and Twitter accounts, but both of the two social media platforms were banned in mainland China).

"I comment a lot on each of his posts. I hope he could see my words so that my love would pass to his heart." (Participant 3)

"It's a little bit embarrassing to say it out... but I send direct messages to him everyday imaging he is my boyfriend, though I knew he would never check them... would he?" (Participant 1)

"This might not be an appropriate analogy, but... Z.Tao is like the emperor of our kingdom, and we are like his concubines. If he has no time to play with us, then we play with each other." (Participant 7)

While fans' love for Z.Tao dominates the direct interaction between his fans and him, the emergence of fandom collective identity was produced by Z.Tao himself predominantly. The customized position Z.Tao takes in the collective identity of his fandom is strongly cognized by fans. The interpersonal relationship among fans built on the collective identity rooting in their common idol Z.Tao on Weibo can be defined as a form of weak ties with high heterogeneity in which information can be spread more quickly and effectively than strong ties (Granovetter, 1973). Tong elaborated the presentation:

"Z.Tao is cute, honest, optimistic, straightforward, kind-hearted and talented, sometimes a little bit childish. I love him because of these idiosyncrasies. He is never afraid to tell the truth. He never gives up his dream. He knows what he wants and always be himself. I believe that people who love him like me must have similar attitudes and values to him. We are the same kind of people, or we are trying hard to be. That's what made us together. Z.Tao is our label." (Participant 7)

Same as Tong, most participants also thought these idiosyncrasies were symbols of both Z.Tao's fandom and themselves. As Dutton et al. (1994) and Fink et al. (2002) notes, individuals seek group affiliation and gravitate towards groups that are perceived as self-concepts and self-representations. Z.Tao's fans perceive these idiosyncrasies as their own attributes they ascribe to the whole fandom, which emerges their vicarious involvement in the process of collective identity construction. And when the participants were asked to judge the whole Z.Tao's fandom, most of them used favorable words such as "unitive", "warm" and "enthusiastic" to describe it, even "rich". As well as, they expressed positive emotions generally, such as "happy", "excited", "warm" and felt "a sense of belonging" towards the fandom. Obviously, the findings provide proof to **H2** from another aspect that, in the dimension of private collective self-esteem, Z.Tao's fans tend to think their fandom is a worthwhile group and give a higher evaluation to it from their own perspective.

As Porat (2010) proposes, fandom is highly associated with the symbolic-cultural contents. In this case, Z.Tao's fandom embodies its attributes with symbolic labels of personalities. More overtly, Z.Tao's fans symbolize the charms and characteristics of Z.Tao and HL textually on Weibo. "Peach", "C-pop" and "HL" were the three most mentioned symbols by 12 participants. According to them, Peach (usually represented by the emoji 🍑, Chinese: 桃; pinyin: *Táo*, a partial tone of Z.Tao's Chinese name) stands for Z.Tao but sounds "cuter" as his exclusive nickname; C-pop (Chinese pop music) stands Z.Tao's dream and career because "once he said it was his dream to bring it popular in the world"; and HL (Chinese: 海浪; pinyin: *Hǎi Làng*; paraphrase: sea waves) refers to the name of his fans and fandom often represented with the emoji 🌊. Of 12 participants, 10 (83.33%) use at least one of these symbols in their Weibo

usernames to textually declare their identities of Z.Tao's fans and distinguish fans from different celebrity fandom. As Fiske (1992) notes, by discrimination and distinction, fans and casual viewers have criteria for what does and does not make someone a fan or casual. In interviews, the participants frequently used the first-person pluralities "we", "us" and "our", which indicates that Z.Tao's fans perceive their self-images as the same presentation as their fan group HL. The symbolic experiences offer fans a chance to assess the connotation of their identities with their fandom in comparison and a particular context, which helps them answer the questions "Who am I?" and "Who are we?", that is, to substantiate both self and the entire collective identity of the fandom. The finding corresponds with **H4** that the correlation between Weibo use intensity and collective identity of celebrity fandom on Weibo is significantly positive in the dimension of identity, which means that through the experiences of Weibo use, fans shape their personal identity by aligning with the collective identity of their fandom as an essential element and reflection of themselves.

When expounding Weibo experiences in Z.Tao's fandom with other fans, all participants mentioned the term "Super Fan Community" system on Weibo with the highest frequency, which is considered as the key technical foundation of fandom in group interaction. Super Fan Community (SFC) is an interested-related interaction community Weibo created technically for celebrity fans based on its recruitment of celebrity users and application of real-name verification system. In SFC, Weibo users are able to find other users with the same interests and gather together as a set of exclusive fandoms easily and quickly. The amounts of pageviews, posts, and followers of the super fan community of a celebrity's fandom presenting how active

his or her fandom is are displayed on the top of the community page, and they are regarded as the equivalent of a celebrity's popularity and commercial value.

As Tong described, the steps of joining in a celebrity fandom is "pretty easy":

"Search Z.Tao's name on Weibo, you will see his super tag with a diamond icon. Click on the icon, his fandom community page will be immediately loaded. Then click the 'follow' button, and now you become a member of his fandom!" (Participant 7)

SFC provides fan services and celebrity-related events for fandom ingroup interaction, including four channels—posts channel, quintessence channel, updates channel, and video channel—as well as events such as *Everyday Checking in*, *Hits in Charts* and *Live Surprises*. Of 12 interview participants, 11 (91.67%) reported that they regularly participated in the ingroup interaction in Z.Tao's super fan community on Weibo. Each interaction behavior in the fandom community will be logged and quantized automatically by the SFC system as experience values (from 1 credit to 300,000 credits) and corresponding levels (from level 1 to level 18). According to Tong, after the first time a user follows Z.Tao's super fan community, the interactive behaviors including signing in, posting, reposting, commenting posts, liking posts, replying comments, liking comments, and posting in fan group chatrooms will all be calculated in the form of credits. Through this rule, fans interact with each other to gain credits and improve their levels in Z.Tao's fandom community. The level directly reflects a fan's intensity of engagement and involvement, measuring the contributions the fan makes towards the fandom he or she belongs to. In other words, higher level a fan achieves in SFC indicates more contributions he or she has made to a certain celebrity Weibo fandom. From the participants' experiences of ingroup

interaction in Z.Tao's super fan community, the main contents of acceptable contributions could be coded into three categories: updates sharing, ritual performance, and textual poaching.

Updates sharing. As virtual cyberspace, the SFC system on Weibo creates a field that breaks the limitation of time and space. Fans share texts, pictures, videos to present scenes where Z.Tao appears and stuff Z.Tao is doing. Updates of Z.Tao, such as his latest news, recent agendas, live concerts and commercial endorsements, are widely shared within Z.Tao's super fan community on Weibo. For example, participant 2 recalled her experience of attending one of Z.Tao's world tour concerts in Beijing 2 years ago:

"It was definitely the most unforgettable memory I've ever had... My seat was just at the center of the second row, so I could watch him very close and clear from there. The show was so amazing that I kept holding my phone and could not help recording every sec... At the encore part, he suddenly released his new EP without anybody's expectation. I mean, me and other 2,000 fans there that day were the first ones who ever heard that melody. I immediately posted the live video of his singing that song from my fantastic angle of view on Weibo, and guess what? I got over 5,000 reposts and 10,000 likes!" (Participant 2)

Most participants remarked that accessing Z.Tao related information was their primary purpose and goal of affiliation to Z.Tao's Weibo fandom. This need can be easily fed by the persistent updates fans keep contributing to Z.Tao's super fan community, which narrows the information barrier among fans. 7 participants (58.33%) also felt that the more time they exposed under Z.Tao-related updates, the more they got addicted to Z.Tao and his fandom, which indicates that high frequency of information exposure in fandom deepens the loyalty and dependence of committed fans who belong to it.

Ritual performance. Compared to informative and substantial updates, the contents of ritual performance circulated among fandom express more formal and symbolic meaning. After the Incorporation/Resistance Paradigm was criticized, Spectacle/Performance Paradigm (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998) became the most important paradigm in audience research. It suggests an inevitable connection between media use and identity construction, in which media audiences are not only message receivers but also transmitters or producers. In other words, audiences construct their identity in the process of spectacle and performance.

All participants admitted that conventional fandom regulations fans comply with did exist. For example, Z.Tao's fans in his super fan community are required unobtrusively to sign in the fandom homepage every day to contribute to the activity values of Z.Tao's fandom. Over half of 12 participants reported that they posted or kept posting "colorful bullshit" (Chinese: 彩虹屁), a term of fandom expression referring to repetitive but meaningless greetings or compliments, as their contributions to Z.Tao's super fan community.

"The first thing to do after I wake up every morning is posting hi to Z.Tao and other HL on our super fan community page. Sounds like I'm silly and senseless, but that's what I have to do."
(Participant 5)

Most participants think ritual performance is a form of fandom culture in the context of Weibo. Participant 9 explained its economical and emotional rationality:

"In the age of big data, digital data flow literally domain everything on Weibo. Just think it realistically. It's not just about digits. More data flow related to Z.Tao means more attention. More attention implies huger commercial value appealing to more opportunities to play in movies and TV shows. More sponsors will support him. Then he will get more exposure and more popularity. It's

totally a virtuous cycle. Don't you wanna see him make more money and become more popular in the future, do ya? If you really love him, you'd be most willing to do these things for him."

(Participant 9)

Tong appraised it:

"Although there are no compulsory rules, fans are still hijacked morally." (Participant 7)

Ritual performance is a type of specific practice behavior consistent with psychological analysis when fans construct their collective identity (Huang, 2015). According to An (2008), group members gain a sense of recognition and approval from their groups through the repetitive and incremental procedure of ritual performance. A series of formalistic performances were created by fans and were put into fandom practices with a large number of insignificant ingroup interactions. In this process, the value and meanings of the information spread in fandom are reduced to an extraordinary extent, which emphasizes the significance of involvement and allegiance instead of the quality of the interaction. As unwritten rules in Weibo fandom standardize fan behaviors, rituals represent convergences performance displaying of collective identity construction.

However, 2 participants held negative opinions on it.

"I literally hate this kind of fandom 'culture'. Sometimes I feel like a bot, who keeps reposting, reposting and reposting, but I have no choice... If you don't obey the rules in the fandom and are found out by other HL, they will query your love for Z.Tao, and judge you're not an eligible fan. I don't want to be left out." (Participant 8)

"Fandom on Weibo is abnormal and unreasonable in this respect. I love Z.Tao, which doesn't mean I have to follow the dictates of his fandom... Maybe I'm worthless in their eyes, that's why I don't have many fan friends to hang out. What a price for freedom." (Participant 11)

Textual poaching. In the generation of traditional mass media, Jenkins (1992) identified audiences as "both drifters and poachers, always moving across and between texts, delightedly creating new intertextual connections and juxtapositions (p. 67)". He points out that, in the context of media convergence, audiences are given the opportunity to take part in creating and distributing media texts. Textual poaching nowadays on Weibo takes the form of fan works such as fanfiction, fanart, fan videos and podfic. As participants reported, Z.Tao's fandom teems with fan works, especially manga (a form of digital painting), and has its own cultures to appreciate these works:

"I know lots of fan artists on Weibo and I love their works so much. Z.Tao under their pens is even cuter...(searching on Weibo) Ah, here she is, Bushuopo, my favorite fan art painter. Her works are always peachy and a little bit sexy sometimes. I save a lot and set them as my iPhone's wallpaper." (Participant 2)

"I read fanfiction, and I'm also a fanfiction writer. Me and my fan friends on Weibo, we write and share with each other." (Participant 6)

Tong shared her experience of producing fan works:

"I was totally a computer moron before I learned how to filter pictures on Photoshop and edit videos on Premiere for Z.Tao by myself. Z.Tao gives my passion for doing anything I have never tried before. Other fans like my works." (Participant 7)

Primitively, fans spend a lot of time to create media content and cultural products about Z.Tao through updates sharing, ritual performance, and textual poaching that are voluntary for free and not compensated by money but reputation in fandom. Lewis (1983) believes that the initial motivation of fans to share news, release resources and do other media use behaviors is their emotional collective identification with fandom objects. The benignant relationship built on voluntary contributions in fandom ingroup interaction symbolizes the spiritual satisfaction and psychological happiness among fans, which enhance their collective identity. The finding also explains **H1** that good membership based on fandom contributions makes fans feel worthy, useful, and cooperative, which positively assists the construction of collective identity in Weibo celebrity fandom.

However, under the rules of Super Fan Community system on Weibo, any contributions fans make in their Weibo fandom are quantized and presented on credits and levels which can be converted to capitals and privileges. For example, Tong got an affiliated competence to administrate Z.Tao's SFC because she was a level-12 fan. In this contribution/privileges exchange system, fans are encouraged to promote their status through ingroup interaction in order to obtain more privileges, such as the administration authority and discourse power to lead other fans. What's more, the real-time ranking list exhibited on the homepage of the super fan community leads to competition among fans who belong to the same fandom. Social identity theory posits that individuals strive to maintain or enhance a positive collective identity (Luhtanen & Crocker 1992). In the interaction within Weibo fandom, fans are struggling for meritorious membership, which helps strengthen a positive collective identity. Meanwhile, fans

with negative or threatened membership esteem have the potential to leave or dissociate from their fandom.

Outgroup Interaction

The image of Z.Tao out of his fandom is controversial due to his leaving from EXO, and rumors and scandals widely spread on social media. On the one hand, he has many pertinent celebrity competitors. On the other hand, he suffered from cyberbullying by casual Internet users. Therefore, based on the experiences of 12 participants, the outgroup interaction of Z.Tao's Weibo fandom can be categorized into two themes: conflicts with pertinent fan groups and compromises with the public.

Conflicts with pertinent fan groups. Like fans ranking within a certain celebrity fandom, Weibo's Super Fan Community system also provides celebrity ranking counting by the total activity value of each pertinent celebrity fandom, which stimulates fans of different fandom to contend with each other by increasing data flow in their super fan communities. The data battle on Weibo among fandom seems like a benign competition, while in the shadows, accumulated rancor often causes torrent word wars on Weibo among fans belonging to different celebrity fandom at any time. All of the 12 participants reported that they once participated in the fan battles and word wars at least several times and showed negative emotions such as "angry", "sick" and "sad" when talking about other fan groups and the conflicts with them.

"How dare they say Z.Tao is ugly? Their idol is the one who has an ugly and fake face."

(Participant 4)

"I don't want to use bad words in the interview, but I cannot find other words to describe them. Yes, I'm talking about Kris's fans. They literally deserve all obscene languages in the world if you know what they did to our precious Z.Tao." (Participant 8)

According to participants, the interaction on Weibo among fans belonging to different fandom of pertinent celebrities usually become personal abuse or collective attacks finally. The noneffective communication usually aggravates the contradictions among different celebrity fandoms.

"They crazy bunch are disgusting. Fortunately, we are not fans like them." (Participant 2)

"Their idols have no qualification to be mentioned with Z.Tao in the same breath."
(Participant 12)

As Greene (2004) claims, out-group devaluation and castigation is a component of promoting the in-group. Hence, in the process of comparison and discrimination with other fan groups, collective identity of Z.Tao's Weibo fandom got greatly amplified and strengthened.

Compromises with public. The negative evaluation of Z.Tao from the public view has been influencing the interaction between Z.Tao's Weibo fandom and the public all the time, which leads HL's low position in this entertainment feast. From their perspective, they don't have another choice but to accept all judgments when facing the public, especially the mainstream media. Concerning the cyberbully towards Z.Tao, the interactions with the public have never left good experiences to Z.Tao's fans either. All participants expressed their emotion of grievance towards the bully.

"People on Weibo never stop abusing and teasing on him. I feel wronged for Z.Tao. He should not be treated like this. If he gets depression because of that, I won't forgive people who abused him." (Participant 5)

"To be honest, Z.Tao sometimes is too straightforward to people. He meant no harm. It can't be the reason that people leave bad comments and make fun of him. They call him 'Chinese Justin Bieber', laugh at his career, use his photos to make memes. Shouldn't these haters be blamed? But there are too many haters to argue with. I feel weak that we cannot protect Z.Tao." (Participant 11)

Interestingly, Tong looks at the case on in another angle:

"Literally, I don't think that being bullied on Weibo is totally a bad thing. At least, I got an extreme experience through the defending. As a fan group, our cohesion needs to be consolidated now and again. Through every time we fight with the outside world, I feel we are more unitive and solid as an entirety." (Participant 7)

As Mudrick, Miller and Atkin (2016) note, individuals will become more loyal and determined in factions if they get more adapted in their group environment. The compromises with the public reduce and narrow the scope of Z.Tao's fans dialogue with the outside world on Weibo, so that each individual in the fandom tends to attach to the group, which tightens the bonds of collective identity. However, there are also resistances existing in a compromised environment. Over half of the participants mentioned that they participated in fandom activities against the public, such as comment control and rumor refutation. According to their experiences, when mainstream media post reports related to Z.Tao, HLs will take the lead in leaving good comments about Z.Tao, and like these comments to make them be at the top of

all other comments. By doing this, the spiral of silence works, and bad comments are greatly reduced.

Additionally, Tong introduced another usual outgroup activity in Z.Tao's fandom:

"Daily, we report haters who abuse and defame Z.Tao by making use of Weibo's community management regulations. If any speeches are identified as abuses or rumors, the Weibo accounts of haters will be punished or directly banned due to breaking Weibo's regulations." (Participant 7)

In the dangerous and complicated environment on Weibo, the game between public and celebrity fandom is still going on. Although fans' compromise with the public is not confrontation in the real sense, it constructs fans' identity and self-empowerment in the way of collective mobilization, which inspires fans to be more active in outgroup interaction with the outside world.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

In the 1990s, when the Internet has not been popularized like nowadays in China, fans usually learned about their idols from print media or TV reports. Celebrities portrayed unilaterally through mass media were “replicas” after modeling and packaging under the umbrella of censorship (McQuail, 1997). This situation resulted in that fans could only passively accept information delivered by mass media, showing a scattered distribution based on their locations, unable to be mobilized into a group organization. However, with the application of information and communication technologies (ICTs), fans brought from the passive status into the spotlight have begun to take shape their own culture. On the one hand, the use of the Internet, especially social media platforms, has dispelled the images of celebrities constructed officially. Online fans no longer imagine celebrities based on the official level of discourse but take an active part in building the entertainment industry through their interaction within or out of their fan groups. On the other hand, large-scale participation of online fans has implied that fans’ identity in the context of new media was constructed on a collective level, which influences not only individuals as members of fan groups but also the formation of the whole fandom. As Lei notes (Lei, 2012), the rise of new media has transformed the decentralized structures of fandom into a complex with disciplined and organizational construction and dissemination. In

conclusion, social media offers the technical foundation for online fandom, which plays a crucial role in the process of collective identity formation.

In the quantitative survey, the results statistically prove that Weibo use intensity has significantly positive connection with Z.Tao's fandom collective identity in total of four dimensions, which indicates that stronger intensity of Weibo use leads to higher celebrity fandom collective identity. In the membership dimension, Weibo use intensity is positively associated with fans' evaluations on their values as members in their fandoms; In the private dimension, Weibo use intensity is positively connected to a fan's individual evaluation about their own fandom; In the public dimension, Weibo use intensity has a positive relationship with fans' assessments of how other people judge their fandom; In the dimension of identity, Weibo use intensity has a positive correlation with the importance of fans' memberships to their self-concept. Generally, the case study of Z.Tao's Weibo fandom illustrates that social media use facilitates the construction of collective identity of celebrity fandom.

Providing a deeper understanding into the way collective identity of celebrity fandom is constructed on Weibo, the results of the qualitative investigation suggest that celebrity fandom collective identity is formed and facilitated through fans' experiences of intergroup interaction, including two main themes: ingroup interaction and outgroup interaction. When interacting within fandom, psychologically, the celebrity-centered relationships among fans based on weak ties on Weibo is the emotional foundation of the collective identity of celebrity Weibo fandom emerging fans' initiative distinction and primary involvement. In this process of discrimination from others and affiliation to a certain fandom on Weibo, both self and collective identity of a celebrity fandom are substantiated. Objectively, Weibo fan services dominated by Super Fan

Community system provide the technical foundation of collective identity for celebrity Weibo fandom by stimulating more intensive use and contributions. Updates sharing, ritual performance and textual poaching are categorized as the three main contents of contributions accepted by fans in SFC on Weibo, which presents two themes, production and participation, of ingroup interaction in fandom. Concerning production, Fiske (1992) isolates three kinds of productivity: semiotic, enunciative, and textual. Symbols and rites, as semiotic fandom products, refers to making meanings of collective identity and experience gained from the semiotic resources in symbolic-cultural contents, whereas articulate performance takes the public form of shared culture. Overall, ingroup interactions within celebrity Weibo fandom increase the exposure of celebrity-related contexts and deepen the loyalty and dependence of fans, which converges collective identity of fandom. When interacting outgroup, conflicts with pertinent fan groups and compromises with the public are the two main themes due to the controversiality of Z.Tao. Instead of weakening the collective identity, the aggressive and negative experiences of outgroup interaction, though somehow aggravates the conflicts with pertinent fandoms and public, generally amplifies fans intense common emotions and strengthens fans' collective identity by collective mobilization of achieving the common goal.

Tajfel and Turner (1979; 1986) propose that collective identity is constructed on three crucial cognitive factors: categorization, identification, and comparison. The qualitative findings basically conform to the three cognitive processes in which individuals build their collective identity. Firstly, categorization enables fans to define Weibo users, including themselves, on the basis of various fan groups they belong to, which mainly emphasizes on the homogeneity of fans in the same fandom and the heterogeneity of fans in different fan groups. The second process,

identification, is the procedure that individuals identify themselves as members of certain fan groups, which leads fans to learn and imitate the behaviors they believe that other members of the fandom should behave, for instance, the three forms of contributions to Weibo fandom. By going through these processes, fans have been both physically and emotionally attached to their memberships in celebrity Weibo fandom. At the same time, their self-conception is also influenced by the attributes of the fandom they belong to. Thirdly, comparison is the process in which fans compare their fandom with other fan groups according to their statuses and reputation on Weibo. Usually, members tend to perceive his or her fandom as a better fan group with higher evaluations than other fan groups. However, most Z.Tao's fans have accepted that they don't have a good prestige or image in public view, even they admitted their lower position in the whole Weibo context, which is inconsistent with social identity theory proposed by previous scholars. This might also be the reason that the Pearson coefficient of the correlation between Weibo use intensity and public collective self-esteem is significantly less than the other three dimensions. What's more, findings show that competition and comparison also exist in ingroup interactions due to the mechanism of Super Fan Community system, where fans with more contributions will stick more in the fandom while fans with few contributions will be isolated or leave the fandom.

The construction of collective identity of Weibo fandom also has some connections to the emotional gains and losses accompanied by curative or excitative cathartic effects (Lopes, 1999). For example, gaining positive emotions is one of the emotional motivations of a fan attaching to a certain fan group and keeping adjusting themselves to it, which spiritually solidifies the fan into the collective fandom. In practice, fans generally evaluate and rate their

relationship with their fandom to assess their membership. However, Lopes (1999) points out that rather than unconscious emotions, the cognitive experience counts gains and losses depending on costs and benefits. By comparing how much they pay out and how much they get paid in a certain fandom, fans can be categorized as conservative fans who gain benefits with minimal costs and dedicated fans who devoted themselves to their fandom without expectation. In collective identity construction and maintenance, though emotional gains and losses are more obvious, the cognitive and symbolic experiences in intergroup interaction are more impactful to individuals, which can precisely be another interpretation of why the influence of the long-term negative emotions in Z.Tao's Weibo fandom maintains a low extent.

Overall, the current research demonstrates the facilitation of social media use towards the construction of collective identity of celebrity fandom on Sina Weibo, not only quantitatively and qualitatively, but also descriptively and interpretatively. It provides an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the role Weibo plays in collective identity construction of celebrity fandom and the process of how the collective identity is constructed through social media use. Macroscopically, the findings illustrate collective identity construction of celebrity Weibo fan groups in fandom research theoretically, as well as expand social identity theory under the context of social media in China. Particular, the current study creatively explores the distinctness and peculiarity of the specific social media platform Sina Weibo, and minutely introduces its fan services based on Super Fan Community system, which provides practical experience and enlightenments for other platforms which regard celebrity fans as their main target audiences.

Nevertheless, like any other research in social science, the current study also has some limitations difficult to avoid. According to Luhtanen and Crocker (1992), firstly, the collective self-esteem scale they developed originally aims to measure individuals' levels of collective identity in ascribed social groups in terms of their genders, races, religions, ethnicities, and socioeconomic classes rather than acquired social groups like fandom based on personal interests, which might confound collective identity with self-identity. Second, the case study of Z.Tao's Weibo fandom with high particularity and uniqueness due to its controversy in public might prevents it from being widely generalized the results to a large population. Additionally, 100 samples for a survey may also be too small to replicate or verify findings. The last but not least, the grounded theory approach requires a strong ability to interpret qualitative data, which may lead to subjectivity and the researcher's own subjective feeling influencing the coding leading to researcher bias.

Despite the limitations, the current study suggests a content analysis of SFC system to gain deeper and more accurate knowledge about its mechanism by dissecting its regulations and rules for further research on Weibo. Additionally, the interaction of celebrity fandom offline in the social media era nowadays is also another fascinating phenomenon that future scholars should pay attention to.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

It's difficult to separate fandom from media, which is just like that any social group can never exist without collective identity. Aiming to determine the correlation between social media use and collective identity of media celebrity fandom and explain how fans construct their collective identity through social media use on the theoretical foundation of social identity theory, the current study employed a case study Z.Tao's Weibo fandom as the research object. An online quantitative survey and in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted as a mixed methodology to test the hypothesis and the research question. The results show that the correlation between Weibo use intensity and Z.Tao's fandom collective identity is significantly positive, and the collective identity is constructed through fans' experiences of intergroup interaction. In the practices of ingroup interaction, fans build their collective identity based on the emotion towards a certain celebrity as their psychological motivation; as well as, fan services on Weibo dominated by Super Fan Community system provide the technical foundation of collective identity for celebrity Weibo fandom. The ingroup interactions within celebrity Weibo fandom increases the exposure of celebrity-related contexts and deepens the loyalty and dependence of fans, which converges collective identity of fandom. In outgroup interaction, fans' common emotions and collective identity are strengthened through collective mobilization.

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APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE

社交媒体使用强度与粉丝群体认同调查问卷 Survey of Social Media Use and Fandom Collective Identity

简介：本研究以新浪微博和黄子韬的粉丝群体海浪为例，致力于发现社交媒体使用与网络粉丝群体认同之间的相关性并尝试解释粉丝是如何通过社交媒体构建其群体身份认同的。如果你愿意参与本次调查，即视为你默认你是新浪微博用户且是黄子韬的粉丝以及他的粉丝群体海浪中的一名成员。请结合你的微博使用体验和海浪群体的成员关系，作答下列与微博使用情况相关的问题和与你对海浪这一粉丝群体的看法相关的称述。完成本问卷可能需要5~8分钟，每一道题都是必答单选题，分为3部分28小题。选项仅展示你真实的反应与想法，没有对错之分。

Introduction: The current study, taking Z.Tao's Weibo fandom as a case, aims to determine the correlation between social media use and collective identity of media fandom and explain how fans construct their collective identities through social media use. As you are willing to take part in the survey, you would be considered that you have given tacit consent to that you use Sina Weibo as well as identify yourself as a Z.Tao's fan and a member of his fan group HL. Please consider both your experience on Weibo and memberships in HL and respond to the following questions about your Weibo usage and statements based on how you feel about HL and your memberships in it. In general, it will take you 5~8 minutes to finish the questionnaire. Each question or statement is required and has only one choice, in total 28 of 3 parts. There are no right or wrong answers to any of these questions or statements.

第一部分 个人信息

Part 1 Personal Information

1. 你的性别 [单选题] * Your gender

男 Male

女 Female

2. 你的年龄 [单选题] * Your age

未满18周岁 under 18 years old

18周岁~21周岁 18~21 years old

- 22周岁~25周岁 22~25 years old
- 26周岁~30周岁 26~30 years old
- 30周岁以上 over 30 years old

3. 你的受教育水平 [单选题] * Your education level

- 初中及以下 Junior high or lower
- 高中/中专 Senior high
- 本科/大专 Bachelor
- 硕士及以上 Master or higher

第二部分 社交媒体使用强度 (请基于新浪微博的使用情况作答)
Part 2 Social Media Use Intensity (based on Sina Weibo usage)

1. 你的关注数量 [单选题] * The amount of your follow

- 10及以下 10 or less
- 11~50
- 51~100
- 101~200
- 201~300
- 301~500
- 501~1000
- 1001及以上 1001 or more

2. 你的粉丝数量 [单选题] * The amount of your followers

- 50及以下 50 or less
- 51~100
- 101~200
- 201~300
- 301~500
- 501~1000
- 1001~5000
- 5001及以上 5001 or more

3. 在过去的一周里, 你平均每天大约花费多长时间刷微博? [单选题] *

In the past week, on average, approximately how much time per day have you spent on Weibo?

- 不到十分钟 less than 10 minutes
- 十分钟到半小时 10-30 minutes
- 半小时到一小时 31-60 minutes
- 一到两小时 1-2 hours
- 两到三小时 2-3 hours
- 三到五小时 3-5 hours,

o超过五小时 more than 5 hours

请根据你的实际情况选择最符合的选项[矩阵单选题] *

Please read each statement carefully and respond by using the following scale.

微博使用强度量表 Weibo intensity scale	完全不同意 Strongly Disagree	比较不同意 Disagree	中立 Neutral	比较同意 Somewhat Agree	同意 Agree	完全同意 Strongly Agree
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4. 微博是我每天生活的一部分。
Weibo is part of my everyday activity.

5. 我自豪于告诉别人我使用微博。
I am proud to tell people I'm on Weibo.

6. 刷微博是我每天必须做的事。
Weibo has become part of my daily routine.

7. 当我不刷微博时，我感觉与世界失去了联系。
I feel out of touch when I haven't logged onto Weibo for a while.

8. 我觉得我是微博社区的一员。
I feel I am part of the Weibo community.

9. 如果微博停运，我会觉得遗憾。
I would be sorry if Weibo shut down.

第三部分 粉丝群体认同 (请基于海浪这一粉丝群体作答)

Part 3 Fandom Collective Identity (Based on Z.Tao's fan group HL)

请根据你的实际情况选择最符合的选项[矩阵单选题] *

Please read each statement carefully and respond by using the following scale.

微博使用强度量表
Weibo intensity scale

完全不同意 比较不同中立 比较同意 同意 完全同意
Strongly Disagree Somehow Neutral Somehow Agree Strongly Agree
Disagree Disagree

1. 我是海浪中有价值的一员。
I am a worthy member of HL.

2. 我有时会对自己是海浪的一员感到后悔。
I often regret that I belong to HL.

3. 总体来说, 他人对海浪的评价良好。
Overall, HL is considered good by others.

4. 总体来说, 海浪中的其他粉丝和我对自己的看法毫无关系。
Overall, my group memberships in HL have very little to do with how I feel about myself.

5. 我觉得我能为海浪做的事情不多。
I feel I don't have much to offer to HL.

6. 总体来说, 我很开心能够成为海浪的一员。
In general, I'm glad to be a member of HL.

7. 大多数人认为海浪总体上比其他粉丝群体好。
Most people consider HL, on the average, to be more ineffective than other fan groups.

8. 海浪是我自身品质的一个重要塑造要素。
HL is an important reflection of who I am.

微博使用强度量表
Weibo intensity scale

完全不同意 比较不同中立 比较同意 同意 完全同意
Disagree Neutral Somehow Agree Strongly Agree
Strongly Disagree Somehow Disagree

9. 在海浪中我是积极参与各种群体活动的成员。
I am a cooperative participant in HL.

10. 总体来说, 我时常感觉海浪是没有价值的。
Overall, I often feel that HL is not worthwhile.

11. 总体来说, 他人尊重海浪。
In general, others respect HL.

12. 海浪对于我的自我认知是不重要的。
HL is unimportant to my sense of what kind of a person I am.

13. 我时常觉得我是海浪没用的成员。
I often feel I'm a useless member of HL.

14. 我对海浪感觉良好。
I feel good about HL.

15. 总体来说, 他人认为海浪是没有价值的。
In general, others think that HL is unworthy.

16. 总体来说, 融入海浪已经成为我的自我印象的一个重要部分。
In general, belonging to HL is an important part of my self-image.

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW OUTLINE

1. 作为黄子韬的粉丝，你能说说你是如何喜欢上他的吗？为什么喜欢他？你是如何认同自己的粉丝身份的？
How long you have been Z.Tao's fan? And why you like him? How do you identify yourself as his fan?
2. 作为一个社交媒体用户，你通常在微博上进行一些怎样的有关黄子韬的活动呢？
As a social media user, what activities you usually do on Weibo relevant to Z.Tao?
3. 你在微博上是如何与黄子韬以及他的其他粉丝互动的呢？
How do you interact with Z.Tao and his other fans on Weibo?
4. 你如何评价你在海浪中的角色？
How do you evaluate your role in Z.Tao's Weibo fandom?
5. 你如何评价海浪这一粉丝群体中的成员关系？
How do you evaluate the membership among fans in Z.Tao's Weibo fandom?
6. 黄子韬在社交媒体上的公众形象并不总是正面的，他和他的粉丝自从他退出EXO后遭受了很长时间的网暴。你对于这种粉丝群体与公众以及粉丝群体之间的冲突怎么看？
The public image of Z.Tao is not always positive on social media, so he and his fans have been suffering from cyberbully for a long time since he quitted EXO. What do you think about the conflict with public and other fan groups?
7. 你如何评价微博在网络粉丝群体认同构建的过程中扮演的角色/ 你认为对于微博的使用如何影响了海浪这一粉丝群体的群体认同？
Please evaluate the role Weibo plays in online fandom collective identity construction/How do you think the use of Weibo affects the group identity of Z.Tao's fandom?
8. 作为一个活跃在社交媒体的粉丝，还有一些其他的经历你想要分享的吗？
Do you have anything else to share from your experiences of being a fan on social media?