



# A Study of Community-Based Communication of Niche Cultures

Yifan Zhang

Zhengzhou University, Zhengzhou, China

1054258276@qq.com

**Abstract.** With the continuous popularization of computer and Internet technology, various niche cultures have been widely disseminated and discussed. Compared with mainstream culture, niche culture still faces the dilemma of being marginalized, although it has more development positions in the Internet era. Communities focusing on a specific niche culture bring together niche culture enthusiasts and provide an ideal place for the dissemination and development of niche culture. This paper takes a niche culture WeChat group as the research object, and adopts the research method of cyber ethnography to explore the aggregation, marketing and interaction of the dissemination of niche culture within the community.

**Keywords:** niche culture, Community, Social communication.

## 1 Introduction

The development of the Internet and media platforms has provided niche culture enthusiasts with rich and diverse communication channels, and has also provided a vast soil for the development of niche culture. In 2003, Baidu posting bar entered the internal testing stage, based on keywords and user interests, providing corresponding communication space for different enthusiasts. In 2005, the Douban group function was launched to create a place for like-minded people to communicate together, and it is still the main position of many niche cultural groups. In recent years, social media such as RED and Tiktok have used algorithms to create an invisible wall for niche culture lovers, allowing users to easily find their areas of interest and interact freely with them.

Technological support and an open environment have ensured the blossoming of niche cultures, and a variety of new cultures continue to emerge and spread in their own circles, or break through the circle. The rise of niche cultures and their groups is an important cultural phenomenon and trend in Chinese society, as well as a manifestation of economic and technological development and social civilization.

Niche culture, also known as "non-mainstream culture", developed with Web 2.0 at the beginning of the millennium and expanded its influence. Niche culture refers to a small circle of people within a social class who have the same or similar interests, hobbies or character, and its emergence is accompanied by the division of the youth class

caused by social change, the fragmentation of mass media and the long-tailed new media, the openness of the society and the change of concepts, as well as the development of the Internet technology.[1]Niche culture is often used in conjunction with subculture or indiscriminately, subculture is also the opposite of mainstream culture, the application of the two concepts of the scene is similar to a high degree, so this paper will not make a subtle distinction between the two concepts. In this paper, niche culture is defined as the small circle culture evolved by a specific group of people because of the same interests or the convergence of interests, and it is a kind of cultural pursuit that is more independent from the mass culture, and it is characterized by the dimensions of group, knowledge and constructiveness. Niche culture can be said to be the indispensable opposite and complementary side of mass culture, reflecting a trend in cultural development.

Since the sociologist Rheingold proposed the concept of Virtual Community[2], the community has increasingly become an aggregate of transmitters and receivers in online communication. Community communication is a new form of communication that conforms to the trend of segmentation, and it is being adopted and applied more and more at present, when more and more attention is paid to the precision of communication. The Internet has become an active place for various interest groups and fan communities [3]. We-media represented by microblogging and WeChat has opened up a brand new way of information dissemination, which has a natural advantage for the formation of community [4].Socialized communication is a new form of communication based on the new media time. The new media technology has given rise to the new media time, which has led to the formation of new communities and the recreation of communication relations and forms, presenting new characteristics in communication elements such as communication subjects, media systems, content production and distribution, as well as scenarios and environments[5]. The traditional sense of the mass is deconstructed, the growing prominence of the long-tail group makes the segmented community communication has more space for development, the phenomenon of community economy, community-based marketing and other phenomena have increasingly become the focus of attention in the field of multi-disciplinary.

## 2 Research Methodology

The research object of this paper is a niche culture enthusiasts gathering WeChat group, which members join out of their love for a classic IP image and their willingness to buy its specific peripheral products. As one of the built-in functions of WeChat, the most widely used social communication tool today, WeChat groups emphasize the strong relational connections among members, and have become an ideal habitat for many niche culture groups with frequent transaction behaviors and large marketing needs.

The research method of cyber ethnography adopted in this paper is an extension of traditional offline ethnography in cyberspace, and cyberspace is the starting point and foundation of its research. Cybercommunity transcends the limitations of geography and status, and is a transcendence of the physical space "people are divided into groups". Cyber ethnography is a product of the gradual development in the face of

changes in the virtual space, such as the specificity of the research object, maintaining neutrality, maximizing the restoration of the characteristics of the daily behavior of the research object, etc., which has led to its widespread use in community research, and has become a commonly used method for online fieldwork. The research object of this study is a niche culture gathering place, and the use of cyber ethnography as a research method enables us to observe a more realistic daily life within the group on a participatory basis, so that we can obtain a more objective and realistic process and results of the dissemination of the niche culture community.

The author entered the group as a bystander and observed the activities of the group members for a period of 40 days, during which the members of the WeChat group had grown from the initial two hundred or so to 443 during the observation period, and the group had a high level of activity. At the same time, the group owner and members of the mission group were selected to conduct semi-structured interviews in the form of private chats, setting up a number of questions from the motives for creating the group (joining the group), the fulfillment of related needs and the views and attitudes towards the group's niche culture, etc., with the intention of exploring the role of the community in the dissemination of the niche culture, as well as the dissemination process and characteristics.

### **3 Community-based Dissemination of Niche Cultures**

#### **3.1 Interest and Communication**

Niche culture audiences are scattered all over the Internet, and in order to bring them together to form a sizeable community organization, the dissemination of niche culture is indispensable. The group master, we called Z, is a fan of a classic cartoon image and its peripheral products. By chance, Z was connected to the overseas purchasing channel of the cartoon image's peripheral products through a friend. As such peripheral products in the country does not have the original production, so Z was born the idea of the creation of the group: "because I am very interested in these peripheral, so I want to build a group of ways to sell, not only can be appreciated every day, but also can be obtained," in Z's view, this is a win-win and their own interests and interests of the spare time work. Therefore, Z will be through RED and TikTok to publish their own shooting peripheral pictures and videos, and in the publication of the contents of the corresponding topics, in order to be able to accurately pushed to the appropriate audience. It is worth noting that although the communication activities within the group are free from the operational behaviors of topical labeling in open platforms, mass communication is unavoidable in the process of absorbing members.

According to the interviews, there are differences in group members' interest in the niche culture, which can be roughly categorized into three types according to the degree of interest. The first category is like-minded, they are enthusiasts of the niche culture, and when they browse to the relevant pictures and videos released by Z, they will have a strong interest and sense of belonging, and then they will be eager to enter the group chat right away. "I've always been a die-hard fan of it, and when I see the cute peripherals, I immediately want to own them, and I want to enter the group quickly to buy it"

"I've swiped these peripherals before, and I want to buy and buy them" "I had swiped the pictures of these peripherals before, but I didn't know where to buy them, so when I saw the buying group, I immediately came in". The second type is interest-inspired, where members have more of a good-natured fondness for the niche culture within the group and are not very fanatical, but they also have a desire to own and communicate with each other due to the content of the beautiful images they see. "I feel it's quite cute, I didn't realize that there are so many kinds of peripherals" "Originally I had little interest, but when I saw the pictures I suddenly got it, and want to buy them". The third category is group members with mediocre interest, but will join the group chat for some reason. "I've never seen it before, and by chance I swiped it, and I'm quite curious as to what it is" "I'm not a big fan of these, but I usually still I'm not a big fan of these things, but I usually like all kinds of cute little things, and I'd like to buy a few to take home. For this type of members, there is no obvious difference between purchasing peripheral products from the group and other similar products.

### 3.2 Marketing and Purchasing

One of the major differences between this microblogging group and other niche cultural communities lies in the purchasing behaviors within the group, such as the group rules and other restrictive conditions that tend to limit the trading activities within the community and even among the members in private. One of the goals of the group was to make a profit, so marketing and purchasing behaviors are a daily part of the group. In addition to marketing on social media, in groups with a more focused target audience, the group owner will market through previews of peripheral products and by posting beautiful videos and images in Moments in order to motivate group members to purchase.

The group owner Z basically every day in the group in the form of pictures in the group to show the peripheral products, due to the special nature of the peripheral products, many styles and a limited number of often need to be snapped up. After the successful purchase, the group members take the initiative to pay the group owner, and then the group owner will carry out unified delivery. When shipping, Z will be confirmed in the group through the form of pictures, the buyer needs to specify the peripheral they purchased, this behavior in the group is figuratively known as "claiming". This type of transaction behavior is the key to the daily activity of the community, through the community as a real-time communication channel, the group members' desire to buy can be strengthened in the fierce atmosphere of buying and hot exchanges. "Sometimes I'm torn between buying or not, so I just have to rush to grab it" "The requests and praises from other sisters in the group will also make me successfully plant my grass and join in the rush to buy". In addition, the group members can also be flexible from the buyer to buyer status change, will be snatched peripheral resale, will be unused for sale, just send the appropriate message in the group.

### 3.3 Identification and Communication

The frequency of interaction of group members can reflect the degree of concern for the niche culture to some extent, while frequent communication can have an impact on the identification with the niche culture. Through the active interaction of the group enthusiasts, members can strengthen their identification with the niche culture. "Discussing new money and communicating together in the group every day makes me more and more addicted day by day" "Originally, I entered the group with curiosity, just wanting to have a look, but I didn't realize that I am now in the pit too". The exchange of various topics is an important foundation that makes up the interaction within the group. According to the theory of use and fulfillment, the WeChat group meets the needs of many niche culture enthusiasts who can rarely meet like-minded people around them in the real world. Discussions of emerging trends, recommendations for the purchase of peripheral products, and mine avoidance often resonate among group members through a large number of in-group exchanges, which strengthens their sense of identification with the niche culture, and also gives them a sense of satisfaction that their niche hobbies have been recognized. As one of the interviewees said, "In the group, my hobbies are supported and often shared, but this is often not understood by people around me. However, there is always a flip side to everything, and there are also group members whose recognition decreases during interaction, and behaviors such as quitting group chats reflect the automatic withdrawal of certain group members who are no longer interested in the niche culture.

It is worth noting that in addition to the exchange of niche cultures, the group has also generated daily discussions on topics other than niche cultures. For example, the group exchanges information about various commodities, discusses social events, exchanges emoticons, and even shares members' own trivial matters. In this scenario, the group temporarily hides its focus on the characteristics of niche culture, and is more like a comprehensive communication community, assuming functions similar to those of the circle of friends and other strong relationship networks.

## 4 Conclusion

The Internet space facilitates the dissemination of culture and the aggregation of cultural communities, in which all cultural forms are given equal opportunities to be discussed, recognized and developed. Virtual communities bring together isolated, small moments in time and integrate them into a rich social asset[6]. In the community, niche culture has been spread and gained space for development through activities such as member aggregation, product marketing and interactive exchanges within the group. It can be seen that the members are distinguished from the general group of society by the characteristics of internal consistency[7]. In this paper, we take a WeChat group as the object of observation, and through the observation of its activities and interviews with group members, we have sorted out the path of community-based dissemination of niche cultures through WeChat groups as a representative channel. However, due to the fact that the observation object is relatively single and more communities are not studied, it is difficult to fully reflect the whole picture of the socialized dissemination

of niche culture. For other questions, such as what is the spread of niche culture in other communities? Or what are the similarities and differences in intra-community communication activities? More comprehensive research is needed in the future. In the future, in the face of the possible emergence of new and more cultural forms, it is necessary to sort out and discuss the existing modes of cultural dissemination in order to better understand the characteristics, channels and paths of dissemination of various cultural forms.

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