

EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCE OF IN-DEPTH PARTICIPANTS IN ANIME CONVENTION: USING CHINAJOY AS A CASE STUDY

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to explore the in-depth experience of Anime Convention participants participating in the exhibition, and compare the effectiveness of current animation industry marketing from the perspective of consumers. According to iR 2021 report on China's two-dimensional industry, the total output value of China's animation industry will reach 221.2 billion(CNY) in 2020, and the number of users in the two-dimensional animation market would exceed 400 million (iR, 2021). China International Digital Entertainment Expo (ChinaJoy,CJ) is one of the leading animation companies in the related animation industry. Affiliated to ChinaJoy's Cosplay Stage Super League, it is the largest supporting event of CJ and has been officially held for 17 times (ChinaJoy, 2022b). As a result, the Cosplay Super League has generated a huge brand effect, and more than 60,000 people are attracted to participate every year.

Crompton&Makay (1997) pointed out in the study of festival tourism that festivals participants tend to show exhibition motivations and experiences in different exhibition. The diversification of the convention and exhibition industry has resulted in huge differences in the types of exhibition activities. Therefore, the research on general festival activities has relatively limited applicability to sub-culture animation exhibitions. Previous literature shows that most anime convention studies focus on otaku, anime destination pilgrimage. (Okamoto, 2015; Tung *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, it is urgent to find a comprehensive theoretical framework suitable for this. By studying the behavior, emotion, experience

and other aspects of the participants in the whole process of CJ, a complete perspective can be provided for studying the experience of deep animation participants, which will help to analyze the current effective marketing in the industry from the perspective of consumers characteristics, and provide marketing strategies for anime convention managers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Experience. The word experience can be traced back to Germany in the study of Western language history, and the German is "Erlebenis" (Dilthey, 2010). Then, the psychologist Csikszentmihalyi (1990) proposed an important concept of psychological experience, Flow Experience, which means: when people are performing an activity, they will be immersed in the current situation and filter out All feelings outside of this activity (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihaly, 1990).In academia, research on experience has been carried out in different disciplines, such as leisure, hospitality, culture, information technology, education and entertainment (Sundbo & Darmer, 2008). The research on tourism and experience is no exception (Quan & Wang, 2004).

Tourism experience. In tourism, the earliest scholars who put forward the essence of tourism experience described it as a popular consumption behavior, and believed that in mass tourism experience, cultural commodification and standardization of tourism experience lead to false feelings experienced by tourists, which are usually regarded as Considered a "pseudo-event" (Boorstin, 1961). Then MacCannell (1973) put forward a

diametrically opposite point of view, arguing that tourist experience is an authentic experience that modern people pursue in order to overcome the troubles in life, so the essence of tourist experience is authentic, because "tourists are inherently looking for authenticity. experience". Conhen (1979) synthesized the theories of the above two scholars, and believed that both concepts provided valuable insights into tourists' motivational behavior, etc., but they were not comprehensive enough. He believes that different types of people would like to have different ways of travel experience, and different experiences have different meanings for different tourists and the current society they live in. He defined experience as an individual's relationship to his "spiritual center" that results from one's perception of the world (Conhen, 1979).

Based on Cohen (1979), Little and Schmidt (2006) explored the essence and concept of tourism experience with a research method derived from phenomenology. The implication of this research method is that researchers need to understand the intersubjective world of respondents (The relationship between the self and the world), and how the world they live in is constituted, the key concept of which is the lived experience.

METHODOLOGY

This study used semi-structured interviews in qualitative research. Semi-structured interviews are suitable for studying people's complex thoughts, as well as capturing emotions and other aspects of research topics (Barriball & While, 1994). The study collected data primarily based on the author's social connections. Hill et al (2005) recommend using 8-15 interview participants, with fewer participants required when multiple interviews per participant or when participants are particularly homogeneous. During the actual interview process, it was found that the participants in this study had a high degree of homogeneity, so 15 participants were selected. The duration of the interviews ranges from 65 minutes to 137 minutes, and focus on the discussion of the live atmosphere and on-stage experience of the participants in the CJ stage show. Finally, MAXQDA was adopted as the data collation and analysis software.

FINDING

Although tourism experience is relatively common in festival research area, the theory of in-depth participation in animation exhibitions based on the Chinese cultural background is still being explored. Therefore, this study attempts to explore the driving factors behind the in-depth participants, starting from several types of experience, and interpreting the participants' feelings in different situations. The research mainly finds the following three major themes:

Collective identity. The sense of collective identity stems from the social extension generated after participating in CJ. Social extension has contributed to various derivative collective cultures (such as dormitories, beer festivals) under the background of CJ culture. Numerous collective cultures have brought a sense of collective belonging to the participants and thus endowed CJ with special meaning. The sense of collective belonging prompts the participants to use the "CJ collective culture" as the boundary to divide the internal and external groups. At the same time the competition within the group promotes the generation of collective identity. In the end, the collective identity under this special cultural background stimulated an unconventional, long-term and stable collective consensus.

Grow. In this study, peak experience was a precondition for participants' transformative experience. Transformative experience is a process that runs through CJ, it is not a purposeful change by participants, but led by spiritual innovation and practical opportunities in the participation process, and these two aspects together lay the foundation for the growth of participants.

The boundary between reality and fantasy. The blurring and extension of boundaries run through the whole process of CJ. The artistic prestige brought about by role identity helped participants reshape their role of social selves. CJ provides a threshold space to liberate the social constraints of the participants and find the authentic self under existentialism, so that the authentic experience in the threshold space provides a spiritual support for survival in social situations. Some originally clear and contradictory boundaries gradually blend together to form a contradictory and harmonious

participation experience. Therefore, this experience is a combination of social context, exhibition culture, physical space and bodily sensations, which together constitute a complex social experience. In one word, CJ has become a platform for expressing and constructing experience.

CONCLUSION

This research helps to understand the experience of contemporary anime participants, and provides another perspective for event designers. From this research, it can be found that when participating in festival activities, ordinary experience theory can no longer satisfy the participants under Experience Economy 3.0 era. Under the guidance of the post-modern trend of thought, the participants have developed extremely individual needs, which is reflect the desire for spiritual symbolism. The motivation behind in-depth experience activities is the process of human beings seeking answers to questions related to the meaning of life, freedom and death. From this perspective, participants enjoy endowing activities with meaning in various ways, and it will lead individuals to find answers to existence.

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