

Participatory Heterotopia: A Global Perspective on the Construction Mechanism of the Emotional Community Within the “Brony Fandom,” a Fan Circle of My Little Pony

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Abstract. In the present era of media convergence, My Little Pony has drawn young people worldwide to form an affinity group called the "Brony community". It has broken the traditional view of fans of children's animations and established a self-consistent and distinctive subcultural circle in the online realm. This article adopts the perspective of "participatory heterotopia" to delve into the reasons why the brony community has emerged as a space for young people's emotional attachment. Emphasis is placed on the characteristics of emotional expression and community interaction within this circle. Through six months of online ethnographic observations (covering multiple platforms, such as Trixiebooru and Baidu Tieba) and case studies, it has been discovered that the brony community expresses emotions through various forms, including fan creations and comment interactions. Moreover, it has developed three types of interaction models based on exclusive discourse, collaborative co-creation, and rational mediation. This community not only exhibits the characteristics of "heterotopia" but also constructs a highly cohesive emotional community through continuous "participatory" practices. This research enhances our comprehension of the emotional belonging mechanism among young individuals in the digital era. Moreover, it offers an empirical case and theoretical reference for subculture studies.

Keywords: Participatory Culture, Heterotopia, My Little Pony, Emotional Community, Subculture

1. Introduction

In the realm of media convergence, fan culture, as a significant component of youth subculture, exhibits an increasingly prominent right to speak. Since its debut by the American company Hasbro in 2010, My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic has drawn a group of young fans worldwide, particularly male fans known as "Bronies" (with an average age of 21.4 years). It has also established a self-contained and distinctive subcultural circle - the "My Little Pony fandom" - in the online realm. Contrary to the stereotypical expectations within the mainstream context, which suggest that male fans should favor traditional "masculine" elements like competition, power, and adventure, the equestrian community defies cultural gender norms. It integrates "atypical male

traits," such as gentleness, beauty, cooperation, and sharing, into the daily identity practices of its members. This group has not only propelled the annual sales volume of related derivative comics to surpass one million copies but also facilitated the globalization expansion of offline exhibitions like "BronyCon". The number of participants in a single event has once neared ten thousand [1], indicating a high degree of cultural engagement and enthusiasm among young people worldwide. "My Little Pony" (MLP) is emerging as a youth cultural symbol that transcends national borders. With the advancement of Web 2.0 technology, platforms like Trixiebooru, Baidu's "My Little Pony Bar", and Bilibili have emerged as the central activity arenas for the My Little Pony fan community. Fans have gradually shifted from being "passive recipients" to becoming "active creators" [2].

In recent years, the research on fan culture has been continuously evolving. It has expanded from aspects like content aesthetics and industrial cooperation to levels such as power relations and platform mechanisms [3]. However, research on the interest-based "brony community" group remains relatively scarce. The internal logic of the emotional interaction patterns and cultural expression methods exhibited by this cross-age and cross-country fan community still requires systematic organization, which represents an important research gap. Based on this, this paper endeavors to introduce the perspective of "participatory heterotopia" and centers the core issue on: "Why has the 'brony community' become a space of emotional belonging for young people both at home and abroad (especially male fans)?" Specifically, it is decomposed into two sub-questions: First, how is the emotional expression mode constructed? This encompasses fans reconstructing character relationships in fan creation to achieve emotional projection, along with the emotional catharsis and mutual support manifested in comments, bullet screens, and community interactions. Second, what characteristics does the community interaction model exhibit? High-frequency cross-platform interactions, a common pragmatic system, and a non-confrontational approach to handling differences in opinions all form a unique community consensus mechanism.

This research focuses on young fans within the domestic and international "brony community" as the core sample. Employing the method of online ethnography, it undertakes a six-month observation of fan groups on platforms including Trixiebooru, Baidu Tieba, the creation section of Bilibili, as well as on QQ and WeChat. The interaction trajectories and the text production process are recorded. By integrating with the case study approach, key variables such as the topic rhythm of the platforms, the frequency of emotional communication, and the interaction logic are extracted, and three detailed coding sheets are formulated. This article endeavors to bridge the research gap concerning the "brony community" as a global participatory subcultural community. It aims to enhance the understanding in communication studies of the emotional belonging mechanism of young people in the digital age and offers an empirical foundation and theoretical perspective for subsequent research on platform culture and fan communities.

2. Literature review

2.1. A review of the progress in participatory culture research

Web 2.0 [4] is a network model that emerged after 2003. Its essence lies in the shift from "reading" to "writing" and from one-way to two-way interaction. It encompasses applications like blogs and wikis, and exhibits communication features such as cross-regional accessibility, equality, and directness. Participatory culture [2] was put forward by Henry Jenkins in 1992. Taking the Web 2.0 network as the platform and all netizens as the main participants, through identity identification, people actively create and disseminate content and enhance interactions, thus forming a new type of

media culture characterized by freedom, equality, openness, inclusiveness, and sharing. Additionally, it depends on Web 2.0 technology.

In the participatory culture, young people create culture through symbol reconstruction and language innovation. For instance, in the 1950s, "Hacker" initially referred to programmers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology who were highly proficient in computers and capable of solving problems innovatively. In the 1980s, due to teenagers' disruption of network order and negative media coverage, the signifier of "Hacker" became associated with the signified of "Internet vandal". Although in 1985, "Cracker" was introduced to replace "Hacker" in network usage, the misunderstanding persisted [5].

In this process, the evolution of the "hacker" symbol exemplifies the "duality of symbols and the constructiveness of representation" [6] proposed by Foucault. The dual structure of the symbol is specifically composed of "the idea of the representing thing" (such as the concept corresponding to the word "hacker" itself) and "the idea of the represented thing" (such as the characteristics of the actual group that "hacker" designates). Representation accomplishes self-replication via this dual structure and then constructs new meanings, such as "hackers are internet disruptors".

Existing research has already noted that in participatory culture, young people transform into cultural producers through symbol reconstruction and language innovation. This process resonates with Foucault's theory and indicates that new media decentralizes creative power. Nevertheless, the exploration of how symbols and language innovation mould the power relations within subcultures requires further in-depth investigation.

2.2. A review of the research progress on "heterotopia" culture

As proposed by Foucault, "heterotopia" refers to a space that truly exists yet diverges from the mainstream order. In contrast, utopia is a fictional and ideal space. The two are fundamentally distinct. Take *Las Meninas* as an example. As an artistic heterotopia that actually exists on the canvas, it is not as chaotic and disorderly as ordinary space. The figures in the painting are meticulously arranged in accordance with the classical social hierarchy. The windows, murals, etc. in the background also adhere to the rules of perspective and symmetry in classical art. This exclusive order and layout are entirely different from those of ordinary space [6]. Another instance is that the BL literature community also falls into the category of a heterotopia [7]. BL literature is a literary genre centered around same-sex emotions. It frequently builds a distinctive community culture through shared symbols like "gong" and "shou" (terms within the BL culture denoting two roles in same-sex intimate relationships. The "gong" typically represents the active party, while the "shou" usually stands for the passive party). It establishes boundaries via online platforms like the "Pure Love Channel" on Jinjiang, as well as offline settings such as comic conventions and reading clubs. It also differentiates itself through access mechanisms like the forum invitation system and group joining approval process, much like a painting distinguishes the interior from the exterior through visual symbols and layout.

The community also strengthens identity through the closed loop of "author creation – reader reading – feedback reception – creative adjustment". Through Jinjiang's "article locking" (i.e., restricting the reading rights of rule-violating works), readers' criticism of "Out of Character", and the power structure of top authors' authority and fans' supervision, it enforces discipline. Just as the monarch in the painting appears faintly in the mirror yet dominates the scene with his gaze, this aligns with the political nature and cultural spatiality of heterotopia [7]. Utopia lacks a real carrier or power operation, while this community has a real space and implicit discipline, reflecting the concept of heterotopia.

2.3. A review of the research progress on emotional communities and new media

The emotional community has its roots in Tönnies' community theory. It is a social entity that takes emotion as the core bond and is formed through shared emotional experiences and identifications. It can be founded on blood relations, geographical proximity, or abstract emotional links, such as a family [8]. New media is a form of media that depends on digital technology. It is characterized by digitization, interactivity, etc., and has transformed the traditional communication model [9]. New media facilitates the formation of emotional communities by establishing connections and sharing symbols grounded in similarities of common interests, experiences, or identity. Its essence lies in the collective emotional projection and co-construction of meaning of cultural symbols by members.

This research will center on the "brony community". Integrating relevant theories of participatory culture, heterotopia, and emotional community, it will explore aspects including the group and platform characteristics of its spatial composition, the emotional expression and interaction patterns in the construction of the emotional community, and the interactive relationship between the "participatory heterotopia" and mainstream society. Moreover, it will clarify the construction mechanism of the emotional community within this circle. Simultaneously, at the theoretical level, it will discuss the correlations and distinctions among relevant concepts and summarize the research findings, limitations, and future research directions.

3. Analysis and results

3.1. The diverse forms and practical characteristics of the emotional expression methods in the brony community

3.1.1. The various forms of emotional expression within the brony community

The diversity of emotional expressions within the brony community is centrally manifested in the distinct transmission logics of "creative carriers" and "interaction carriers". These two elements jointly form a circular ecosystem characterized by rich emotional expressions and diverse structures.

From the perspective of "creative carriers," fans translate their emotional resonance with the characters in "My Little Pony" into specific content through creative endeavors such as fan fiction, illustrations, character-based mixed-cut videos, plot novels, and fan music. By doing so, they project their own emotional experiences. This represents the most fundamental mechanism for building community cohesion within the "participatory heterotopia." Coding Table 1 shows that the fan-made image "Family Tree of Characters in My Little Pony" (titled "Apple family") on Trixiebooru, presented in a visual form of a family pedigree, reflects the emotional projection of real-life kinship relationships. The fan video "[MLP: Next Generation] Happy Family - My Little Pony" on Bilibili conveys the anticipation of intimate relationships through the family images created by the characters in the fantasy plot. The work "[My Little Pony/Original Animation/Lifespan Theory] Lose You Now" delves into the emotional losses of the characters resulting from the lifespan setting, emerging as an artistic portrayal of real friendships. Moreover, the portrayal of "Pear Butter and Bright Mac as Applejack's parents" forms a kinship created by fans themselves. On the YouTube platform, the video "PMV | Love Me Cheerilee Music Video" reveals primary school students' emotional imagination regarding their female teacher, Cheerilee. On the same platform, the fan music "BronyDanceParty - Friendship is Witchcraft | Episode 7" uses an original melody to express the recognition of the character's personality. The creations have been extensively disseminated via domestic and international platforms. This has enhanced the emotional resonance and community

identity within the circle and established a more immersive avenue for emotional expression based on audio-visual carriers.

Table 1. Case analysis table of expressions of creative carriers for bronny community

S/ N	Title of creation	Creation type	Direct meaning	Abstract meaning	Source
1		Fan art image s	The relationship tree diagram of each character in My Little Pony, titled "Apple family"	A reflection of real family affection	Trixi ebo oru
2	[MLP Next Generation] A Happy Family	Fan fiction videos	The author imagines the family composition of other supporting characters in the play	A reflection of real family affection	Bilibili
3	[Little Pony/Original Animation/Life Expectancy Theory]	Fan fiction videos	The author's regret and remorse over the result of friends parting due to the different life expectancy Settings of the characters in the play	A reflection of real friendship	Bilibili
4		Fan art image s	Pear Butter (a character in the drama) and Bright Mac (a character in the drama) embrace each other as the parents of the protagonist Applejack	A reflection of real love	Trixi ebo oru
5	[PMV] Love Me Cheerilee Music Video BronyDanceParty	Fan fiction videos	In the play, the primary school student character innocently and straightforwardly admires and worships the female teacher.	The reflection of love in a child's eyes	YouTube
6	Friendship is Witchcraft Episode 7 Cherry Bomb (by Sherclow Pones)	Fan music	The original music in the play showcases the characters' optimistic attitude towards a hard life	Recognition of the optimistic qualities of the characters in the play	YouTube
7	I Am Octavia [Animation]	Fan fiction videos	The story of the friendship friction and reconciliation between the characters Vinyl and Octavia in the play	A reflection of real friendship	YouTube
8		Fan art image s	The scene of Sugar Belle (a character in the play) getting married to Big McIntosh (a character in the play) corresponds to the drama, but with a different painting style.	A reflection of real love	Trixi ebo oru

From the perspective of "interactive carriers", interactions in the comment section, topic discussions, and fan support behaviors serve as interactive carriers. These have established an instant emotional connection and continuously enhanced the collective sense of belonging, thereby intensifying the "present" emotional resonance within the bronny community. Coding Table 2 showcases representative instances of multi-platform interaction. In the comment section of YouTube, fans carry out rational analysis and character interpretation regarding "the relationships between characters in the play", establishing a cognitive consensus through the clash of viewpoints. On the Xiaohongshu platform, there are not only emotional exchanges centered on the "racial setting", but also enthusiastic support for "Applejack". The collective preference evolves into emotional cohesion through the act of support. In the comment section of Bilibili, the "summary and induction of the characters' occupations in the play" has sparked enthusiastic interactions among

fans. Through supplementation and responses, their emotional understanding of the characters has been further deepened. Online sharing (such as using the hashtag #Cheer for Applejack#) and offline displays (such as the arrangement of character-related peripherals and support items) function as an extension of interaction. They further convert individual emotional expressions into collective actions, allowing fans to obtain a sense of belonging from the instant feedback. As a result, the emotional bond becomes even stronger. Unlike the high-intensity emotional output on public platforms, the common interactions within communities are low-intensity daily exchanges, featuring expressions, banter, and comfort. Such emotional feedback is the unique "emotional grammar" spontaneously formed by members of the equestrian community.

Table 2. Case analysis table of "brony community" interactive carrier expressions

S/ N	Interactive content	Interacti ve behavio r	Specific meaning	Emoti onal respo nse	Sour ce
1	@Skaz32225:I think they are related. If they are not siblings, then Sunset Shimmer might be Sunburst's cousin/niece. Perhaps through him, Sunset Shimmer obtained all the information that Princess Twilight had taken her crown to the Crystal Empire. Steal its best moments from her. @TimTamTom_0: This is the exact reason why SAWTOOTH WAVES made the video called "Sunburst's Secret Mission". Yu:However, the magic power of most unicorns is very weak and they can only make objects float with magic. For instance, Rarity has never used magic to teleport herself.	Charact er Interpre tation	Analysis of the relationships among the characters in the play	Ratio nal	Yout ube
2	Ling Xi (author) :His major course is not magic. A Ya Ya replied to Ling Xi :So, as long as you learn magic, you can become stronger, right.	Content discussi on	A discussion on the racial Settings in the play	Rathe r emoti onal	Xiao Hon g Shu
3	AMJ:Wishes AJ a happy birthday as she grows one year older. May she always be herself.	Support and encoura gement	The support for Applejack (a character in the show)	Intens e and positi ve	Xiao Hon g Shu
4	Lido Jun Nei Guan Xue :Suddenly wanted to pair up Meadowbrook, Mistmane and Zecora, both of whom were engaged in medicinal magic. Shuguang Yiyi: Yes!!	Charact er Interpre tation	A summary and generalization of the occupations of the characters in the play	Positi ve	Bilib ili

3.1.2. The practical characteristics of emotional expression methods in brony community

From a practical standpoint, the emotional expressions within the brony community exhibit three core characteristics: "interactivity", "circularity", and "functionality". These characteristics mirror the distinctive operating principles of the emotional behaviors in this community. First, there is "interactivity". The emotional expression within the brony community adheres to the two-way feedback logic of "expression - feedback - re-expression". After fans upload creations related to "My Little Pony" on platforms like Trixiebooru and Bilibili, other fans typically respond by liking, commenting, or producing derivative works. Based on this, creators will then adjust the content direction. For instance, when a fan-made picture or text featuring a certain family affection theme gains widespread resonance, they tend to emphasize this kind of theme in subsequent works.

Consequently, the emotions within the community are constantly deepened through ongoing interaction. Second, there is the issue of "circularity". The emotional expression within the My Little Pony fan community is highly reliant on the adaptation to the exclusive cultural symbols and behavioral norms within the circle. Terms such as "AJ" (an abbreviation for AppleJack) and "AppleDash" (the pairing name of Rainbow Dash and Applejack) appear multiple times in the coding table. Only members within the circle can accurately comprehend their emotional implications. Meanwhile, expressive behaviors should adhere to common understandings like "respecting the character settings" and "participating in rational discussions". As indicated in Coding Table 2 above, when fans discuss character relationships and racial settings, they tend to communicate within a shared cultural context to prevent emotional misinterpretations stemming from platform cultural differences or misunderstandings. Thirdly, there is "functionality". The emotional expressions within the horse circle serve multiple functions, including "emotional transmission", "identity recognition", and "emotional regulation". Another instance is the "Applejack fan support" case in Coding Table 2, which reflects the composite value of emotional expression. Through fan support activities, fans not only express their affection for the character but also affirm their own identities within the fan community and obtain a sense of emotional fulfillment in the context of collective interaction.

3.2. The type classification and operation logic of the interaction model in the brony community

3.2.1. The classification of the types of interaction models in the brony community

The community interaction within the brony community centers around "consensus within the circle" and "emotional connection". By integrating the interaction scenarios and behavioral attributes, it can be categorized into three core models. First, it is the "discourse consensus-based" interaction, namely the transmission of identity relying on in-group jargon. This type uses the "established identity discourse" as the core carrier and forms the basic mode of community interaction. For instance, fans frequently employ exclusive terms like "AJ" and "AppleDash" for communication. These terms not only reduce the communication cost but also function as symbolic markers of the circle's identity. This allows like-minded groups to swiftly confirm their mutual sense of belonging through "synchronized" language. Second, it is the "collaborative participation type" of interaction, namely the behavioral linkage founded on common goals. This model centers on "interactivity" and collaborates around the common goals of the equestrian circle. In Coding Table 3, the "《My Little Pony Friendship is Magic》 Wiki | Fandom" serves as a typical example of content co-creation and collaboration. Fans voluntarily organize tasks like content writing and server management, and collaborate through a division of labor to complete the construction of the knowledge system related to "My Little Pony". This type of behavioral connection founded on shared goals enhances the sense of cooperation and belonging among members. It mirrors the evolutionary progression of the circle from interest convergence to structured cooperation and serves as a crucial indication of the community's activity level. Thirdly, it is an interaction of the "non-violent conflict type", namely the mediation of contradictions based on consensus rules. This model is founded on the fundamental principle of "non-violent conflict resolution" and represents the crucial path for maintaining community stability. Taking the "Derpy Naming Right Dispute" in Coding Table 3 as an illustration, when the fan community and the official differed in the naming of the character "Derpy", the fans voiced their demands through non-violent approaches like online voting and joint petitions. Eventually, they convinced the official to reinstate the original name. This

process embodies three operating principles within the circle: "rational expression" (substituting demands for attacks), "third-party mediation" (establishing a buffer mechanism through community forces), and "consensus priority" (taking the maintenance of the overall atmosphere as a prerequisite). These principles effectively contain conflicts within a manageable range and guarantee the overall stability and sustainable development of the community.

Table 3. Case analysis table of the interaction model of the brony community

S/ N	Interactive content	Content meaning	Interactive mode type	Source
1	AppleJack is directly called the AJ collection (basically all of them are Hong Lin Qi hehehe)_	The collection of Rainbow Dash (a character in the play) and Applejack (a character in the play) together enhances the sense of a couple pairing between the two characters.	Discourse consensus type: Strengthened the partner combination of "AppleDash" couple pairing, as well as the character abbreviations such as RD and AJ that have been conventionally established on the Internet.	Bilibili
2	My Little Pony Friendship is Magic Wiki Fandom	The official My Little Pony folk Wikipedia.	Collaborative participation type: All organized spontaneously by civilians, who write entries and manage the server.	My Little Pony Friendship is Magic Wiki
3	Equestria Daily - MLP Stuff!: Pony History of the Day - Derpy's Removal and the #SaveDerpy Campaign to Get Her Back!	The dispute and conflict between the brony community and the official over the naming rights of the character "Derpy" in the play.	Non-violent conflict type: The brony community exerted pressure on the official company "Hasbro" through non-violent means such as online voting and Posting a joint petition, demanding that the names of the characters in the show be changed back to the word "Derpy". Eventually, the company listened to the suggestions of the fans.	Equestri adaily

3.2.2. The operational logic of the interaction model in the brony community

Although the interactive forms within the horse community exhibit different manifestations on various platforms, through long-term participant observation, it can be discerned that this group has established a relatively stable operational logic in their interactions. This logic serves as the internal driving force for the continuous existence of the brony community as an "emotional community" and also unveils the key cultural characteristics in the construction of its "participatory heterotopia". This section extracts the operational mechanisms of three types of logics, namely the logic of "being supported by cultural consensus", the logic of "being driven by two-way feedback", and the logic of "being regulated by conflict balance". .

First and foremost, the "cultural consensus support" logic implies that the "conventionally recognized discourse" and the value consensus (such as "respecting the role setting") form the cultural cornerstone of interactions within the brony community. Members can communicate based on a common understanding without the need for additional explanation. This shared language system not only substantially lowers the threshold of interaction but also enhances the sense of identity through continuous use, laying a solid foundation for subsequent collaboration and conflict resolution.

Secondly, the "two-way feedback drive" logic highlights that the essence of interaction lies in "two-way feedback": the actions of members trigger the community's response, and this feedback, in turn, guides the modification of actions. For instance, if members who post "analysis posts on the growth of My Little Pony characters" on Bilibili receive positive comments, likes, and additional content (positive feedback), they will be more incentivized to continuously create similar content. Conversely, if a particular topic (such as #Discussion on Obscure Ponies#) elicits a tepid response, the administrator may adjust the strategy accordingly (such as incorporating "memorable scene" elements). This mechanism constantly promotes the optimization of the interaction model and is the key logic for maintaining the community's vitality.

Finally, the logic of "conflict balance regulation" focuses on attaining a dynamic equilibrium between "disagreements" and "consensuses". Its aim is not to eradicate conflicts but to ensure that they do not disrupt community order. This kind of logic not only prevents the loss of participants resulting from "unified opinions", but also restrains the community fragmentation that might be triggered by "unrestrained disputes", thus providing a guarantee for the stable and long-term operation of the interactive model. Of course, through the continuously accumulated frequency of interactions and tacit understanding, the sense of familiarity and sense of belonging among members can be gradually strengthened. When confronted with external ridicule or group disputes, such private communities also serve as an "emotional haven", demonstrating the consoling function of the heterotopian space.

4. Discussion

4.1. The brony community constructs a co-creation space with the characteristics of "heterotopia"

As a subcultural domain, the brony community exemplifies the core traits of "heterotopia." It is both separate from mainstream culture and serves a compensatory role for real emotions. Simultaneously, it is detached from the mainstream media's value system while forming distinctive aesthetic and interactive guidelines internally. The independence of such a space is initially manifested in the establishment of exclusive rules at each level. Fans are required to adhere to common norms like "respecting character settings" and "rationally discussing the plot." Through co-creative endeavours such as fan fiction, illustrations, and character-centred video remixes, they can materialize the emotional projections of family affection and friendship. For instance, the family relationship tree diagram crafted around the characters of My Little Pony depicts real-life kinship connections in the form of a genealogical presentation.

This co-creation space depends on online platforms like Trixiebooru and Bilibili. Even though it exists in the digital realm physically, it attains an emotional "transcendence" of reality because fans re-arrange the relationships and fates of characters within it. By endowing characters with new plots and meanings, fans achieve subjective expression in the cycle of "creation - resonance - dissemination". Meanwhile, they also establish a cultural space that can accommodate emotional release and identity construction. This space functions both as an outlet for individual creativity and as a vessel for group emotional sustenance, demonstrating typical "heterotopian" co-creative features.

4.2. The emotional community within the brony community is generated and maintained through "participatory" practices

The formation and sustenance of the "brony" emotional community hinge on the two-way interactive logic highlighted by "participatory culture". Within this framework, fans assume dual identities as both creators and consumers. On one hand, they translate their comprehension and emotions regarding the characters into tangible content by producing works such as character development analyses and CP-centered mixed edits. On the other hand, as audiences, they also establish an immediate feedback mechanism through means like bullet screen comments and fan support. Creators modify the direction of their subsequent creations in light of feedback (such as the number of likes and the content of comments). Meanwhile, fans continuously enhance their emotional bond through interpretations and resonances in the comment section. In this process, fan-created derivative works not only fulfill aesthetic and expressive functions but also turn into a form of "social currency" within the community. Members utilize these works to exchange creative insights, share emotional experiences, affirm their own identities within the community during interactions, and simultaneously strengthen the emotional connection of the community. Emotional connection is gradually accumulated and strengthened through this continuous and high-density participatory practice. Thus, the "brony community" represents a self-organized manifestation of "participatory culture" in the new media environment. It emerges through "interaction" and circulates across various social platforms.

4.3. The theoretical extension of subcultural communities from a global perspective

Although the "brony community" emerged from American animation, it has rapidly transcended the boundaries of language and culture, propelled by the online space, and developed into a global subcultural community. This expansion process is not a one-way "export of American culture." Instead, through the involvement of fans in different regions, it is constantly localized and recreated, giving rise to cultural practices with diverse manifestations. Relying on the Internet platform, fans across the globe can create and engage with content on various platforms like Trixiebooru, YouTube, and Bilibili. Despite language and cultural disparities, community members can still share cultural symbols through unique terms (such as character nicknames and CP-related expressions) and cross-media recombination methods (such as 3D modeled characters and cross-work remixes), thus forming a "nomadic" global community. Therefore, it is evident that in the new media environment, the generative logic of subculture is experiencing profound transformations.

The successful development trajectory of the "brony community" offers us an inspiration. That is, subcultures can establish communities that transcend geographical boundaries through shared media, cross-platform creation, and interaction, thereby achieving an "global village"-style emotional bond. This community no longer relies on geographical space. Instead, it establishes a new "cross-border cultural flow" model in the online environment. It not only maintains the uniqueness of the circle, like adhering to a particular creative style and discourse norms, but also accomplishes cultural integration via transnational co-creation practices (such as jointly producing support videos and subtitle collaboration). This characteristic of decentralization and de-territorialization not only validates the variable boundaries of subcultural communities with the aid of digital media but also offers a novel perspective for examining the new construction path of identity and participation within the framework of "community" theory.

5. Conclusion

The research reveals that, as a subcultural space, the "brony community" integrates the emotional transfer function and the platform autonomy characteristics of "heterotopia". Meanwhile, through continuous "participatory" practices, it forms a highly cohesive emotional community. Its cross-regional dissemination route breaks through the geographical constraints of traditional subcultural communities, offering new empirical cases and analytical perspectives for the research on "community boundaries" and "media participation" in subcultural theory.

Of course, this study still has some limitations. Most of the samples are concentrated on the youth group, and there is inadequate coverage of the emotional needs of adolescent and middle-aged fans. The platform observation mainly focuses on mainstream communities in China and the West, while less attention is given to brony communities in other regions. Moreover, the impact of commercial capital intervention on the emotional bond within the circle has not been thoroughly explored. In the future, the age and geographical scope of the samples can be broadened to analyze the differences in emotional practices among different groups. Additionally, attention can also be directed towards the role of AI-based secondary creation in the participatory culture of the brony community and the stability of the emotional community.

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