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Perception Asynchrony and Public Governance in Mediated Spaces: A Field Study of Offline Star-Chasing at Hengdian World Studios

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Abstract. With the growth of fan culture and its closer integration into daily life, offline star-chasing is now seen more and more often. The data of this paper come from fieldwork carried out at Hengdian World Studios. On-site observation and semi-structured interviews were used to study four types of core stakeholders (N=9). The aim is to explore the views of different stakeholders on rational star-chasing behavior and to discuss how governance can be improved. The results show a general agreement among all groups on the abstract idea of "rational star-chasing," but they judge specific behavioral boundaries in different ways. In this paper, this phenomenon is called "perception asynchrony." On this basis, the study introduces the "nudge theory" of behavioral economics and puts forward suggestions in three aspects, that is, space supply, platform governance and internal organization. These suggestions may be of some reference value for park management and fan education. Due to the small sample and its uneven distribution among the four groups, the conclusions are exploratory.

Keywords: offline star-chasing, Hengdian World Studios, fan culture, rational star-chasing

1. Introduction

A common claim is that everything in contemporary social life is mediated [1], and that social reality is increasingly built under the conditions of deep mediatization [2]. Fan culture keeps growing in scale and has become a larger part of daily life, and in such a mediated society star-chasing is no longer limited to online spaces; offline star-chasing has also become more common. One of the places where this happens is Hengdian World Studios. It is a tourism space and a film production space at the same time; therefore, fans, ordinary tourists, park staff and film extras all use the same scenic areas and the public areas near them.

People in the same space do not always have the same view of acceptable behavior. Fans may gather near filming locations with the hope of seeing actors, and other groups need the same space for sightseeing, business, park management and film production. If these groups draw the boundaries of rational star-chasing in different places, offline conflicts can occur, such as when waiting crowds affect filming schedules or the order of the park. Therefore, moral advocacy that

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only asks fans to be rational may not be sufficient in this situation, since knowing what is appropriate is not always followed by the matching action.

The fieldwork was carried out at Hengdian World Studios; on-site observation and semi-structured interviews were used with four types of core stakeholders (N=9), that is, fans, ordinary tourists, park staff and film extras. This study has two research questions: how different stakeholders perceive rational star-chasing behavior, and what these perceptions mean for the governance of offline star-chasing in shared spaces. This paper uses the term "perception asynchrony" for a situation in which the groups agree on the abstract idea of rational star-chasing but judge specific behavioral boundaries differently, and it applies nudge theory from behavioral economics to develop governance suggestions.

The rest of the paper is arranged as follows: it will first review related literature and give a description of the research methods, then present the findings for each group and across groups, after that discuss these findings together with governance suggestions, and lastly give a conclusion with the limitations of the study.

2. Literature review

2.1. Fan culture, parasocial bonds and offline star-chasing

For a long time, fan studies have regarded fans not as a passive audience but as an active cultural group that takes part in participatory culture [3]. Another related area of research is about the emotional bond between audiences and media figures. Horton and Wohl called this bond para-social interaction: audiences feel a sense of intimacy with a performer, but the relationship is one-sided and does not become mutual [4]. According to Zhang and Negus, digital platforms have reorganized the idol industry in China, and fans have come to understand platform metrics and use individual and collective strategies to influence rankings and traffic; they call this development data fandom [5].

The above studies mainly look at fans themselves, their bonds with media figures and their relations with the media industry. Offline star-chasing brings in another dimension, since fan practices in this case happen in physical spaces that are also used by other people.

2.2. Film-studio tourism at Hengdian

Film tourism means travel to places connected with film and television productions, and it has become an established field in tourism research [6]. Research on Hengdian World Studios in China has looked at both its visitors and its workers. Meng and Tung adopted a netnographic approach and identified three travel motivations of domestic tourists to Hengdian: serendipity, traverse and dream, and mimicry [7]. In their study, serendipity means that tourists hope they may meet celebrities or filming crews by chance at the destination [7]. Xu and Reijnders did interviews with 15 extras at Hengdian; they found that the extras arrived with dreams, then met a film industry with multiple hierarchical layers, and those who stayed learned to live in this hierarchy [8]. Thus, Hengdian is a tourist destination and also a workplace, but these two studies look at tourists and extras separately.

2.3. From knowing to doing: stakeholders, norms and nudges

Stakeholder theory can be used to compare groups that are in one setting but have different interests. According to Mitchell, Agle, and Wood, stakeholders have different levels of power, legitimacy and urgency; thus, the salience of their claims is also different [9]. The theory was first developed for

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companies and their managers, but its main point is that different stakeholders have claims of different kinds and different importance, and this also applies to a site where fans, tourists, park staff and film extras all have a stake.

Research on the gap between knowing and doing has been done at two levels. Pfeffer and Sutton put forward the term knowing-doing gap and used it for organizations that know what they should do but do not turn this knowledge into action [10]. At the individual level, Sheeran reviewed evidence on how well intentions predict behavior and found that intentions are not always translated into behavior; this discrepancy is called the intention-behavior gap [11]. Here, the organizational term knowing-doing gap is borrowed for individual fans; the intention-behavior evidence gives it a meaning at the individual level [10, 11].

Behavior is also affected by the groups that individuals belong to. Cialdini and Trost reviewed the influence of social norms, conformity and compliance on individual behavior [12]. Nudge theory in behavioral economics provides another perspective. Thaler and Sunstein held that behavior can be guided by changes to the choice architecture, with no need to forbid any options or to change economic incentives significantly [13]. Later, Hansen discussed how this definition should be formulated and stressed that a nudge does not use bans, mandates or changes in incentives [14].

Existing studies have looked at fans and audiences [3-5], tourists' motivations [7] and extras' motives and experiences [8], mostly one group at a time. It is less common for them to compare several groups of stakeholders in the same site and to ask how each group defines acceptable fan behavior. For this reason, this study takes a comparative approach at Hengdian and interprets its findings with stakeholder theory, the knowing-doing gap and nudge theory.

3. Research methods

The study site was Hengdian World Studios, and it covered the Qin Palace, the Qingming Shanghe Park, Guangzhou Street·Hong Kong Street and other major areas, together with the surrounding public areas. The research lasted from July 25 to July 30, 2026. Purposive sampling and snowball sampling were used together, and both are established sampling strategies in qualitative research [15]. Altogether, 9 valid samples were obtained (N=9), and they came from four types of core stakeholders: fans (2 people), tourists (2 people), park staff (4 people) and film extras (1 person). The interview with each interviewee lasted about 5 to 15 minutes.

The data came from semi-structured interviews and participant observation. After transcription, the data were sorted by thematic analysis into three dimensions of attitude tendency, behavior description and suggestions; thematic analysis is a method for the identification and analysis of patterns in qualitative data [16]. Each interviewee gave oral informed consent before the interview, and all personal information has been kept anonymous.

4. Findings

The basic information of the nine interviewees is given in Table 1, including group category, gender, age range, degree of star-chasing connection, attitude tendency and definition of rational star-chasing. Only age ranges were recorded, not exact ages. To make the analysis easier, park volunteers and merchants are put together as "park staff" in the following text.

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4.1. Fan group: cognition and self-control under emotional drive

A basic level of rational thinking about star-chasing was shown in the answers of both fans. The first fan talked about a hard period in her life and said, "When I went through a low point, my idol was my biggest source of motivation." The idol was regarded by her as emotional support, and she connected the idol with "motivation during hard times." Research on mediated society calls such one-sided attachment to a media figure a "parasocial relationship" [4]. According to the second fan, 80% of her free time was spent on idol news and fan support activities. Each of them stressed balance between daily life and star-chasing. However, rational thinking is not the same as rational behavior. For example, the second fan knew that her time should be controlled and still had difficulty doing so. Her case matches the typical "knowing-doing gap" [10, 11]. For these two fans, behavior that is driven by emotion seems to be one psychological source of the "perception asynchrony" between fans and the other groups.

Table 1. Basic information of interviewees

Group Category	Gender	Age Range	Star-Chasing Connection	Attitude Tendency	Definition of Rational Star-Chasing
Fan	Female	15–20	High	Emotional dependence	Balance between life and star-chasing
Fan	Female	12–18	High	Daily immersion	Reasonable time planning
Tourist	Female	20–25	Low	Low tolerance	No impact on public order
Tourist	Female	20–25	Low	Does not recommend obsession	Star-chasing only as a life diversion
Park volunteer	Male	20–25	Medium	Dislikes crowding	No impact on park management
Park volunteer	Female	20–25	Medium	Dislikes order disruption	No impact on other tourists
Park merchant	Female	25–30	Medium	Accepts moderate spending	Avoid excessive spending
Park merchant	Male	25–30	Medium	Dislikes business disruption	Ensure normal shop operation
Film extra	Female	15–20	High	Obey rules and management	Follow on-set management rules

4.2. Ordinary tourists: low participation and neutral stance under a chance-encounter logic

Unlike the fans, the ordinary tourists did not come to Hengdian to see stars, and "meeting a star" was seen as a random bonus during the trip. A tourist commented, "Treating star-chasing as a spiritual pillar in life is a good thing, but it can only be a temporary diversion, not an obsession." Long waiting and blocking behavior were hard for the tourists to accept; their general attitude was

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relatively neutral. The "normal use of public space" was used as their standard [17]. Public supervision of order may draw on this stance; it also differs sharply from the emotional logic of fans.

4.3. Park staff: the two sides of consumption benefits and order burden

Park volunteers and merchants see the star-chasing groups in a contradictory way. Fan gatherings brought extra spending that shops could see, and at the same time they clearly made the space more costly to manage. In general, the interviewees said that shops sold more on days with fan gatherings in the park or at the shops; long gatherings, blocked roads and noise, however, were said to disturb normal business operation and the order of the whole park. For merchants, "economic gain" and "business disruption" are in direct conflict. The volunteers pay attention to management first; therefore, they dislike gatherings that break the order. Overall, this split inside the group shows that people in different roles in one space define "rational star-chasing" by their own interests [9].

4.4. Film extras: boundary setting under a rule-oriented logic

As frontline workers who hold a lower position in the film production hierarchy [8] and deal directly with fans, this group has the most specific definition of what it regards as "irrational" behavior. One film extra interviewed said, "Fans often wait in large numbers for actors to go to and from filming, but when it goes too far, it affects the filming schedule." This group's view makes clear the industry boundary of fan behavior. Hengdian is not only a tourism space but also a film production space. Any behavior that disturbs the "production process" is seen by this group as crossing the line. Based on the account of one film extra, this offers an indication of where the bottom line of governance in film industry spaces may lie.

4.5. Cross-group comparison and core contradiction

In the abstract, all four groups understood rationality in the same way, that is, "not breaking the law, not affecting others' normal lives." Differences appear in judging specific "line-crossing" behavior, and each group draws the line from its own position. On the whole, the two fans interviewed acted on their own feelings, passersby looked at public order, park staff thought of the operation of the whole park, and the film crew extras put production first. However, feelings may not be all that drives the fans; the setting itself may also encourage people to wait, through information gaps that lead to blind waiting and through the traffic that leaked videos and photos may bring. Offline conflicts may be partly explained by this structural disagreement over standards. This also suggests that only using moral advocacy may not be enough to regulate the situation effectively.

5. Discussion and governance suggestions

5.1. Understanding perception asynchrony

The findings show a pattern: all groups agree on rational star-chasing in the abstract, but each group draws its specific boundaries differently. Where a group draws the line may be explained in part by its position in the space.

To ordinary tourists, meeting a star was a random bonus, not the purpose of the trip. This chance-encounter logic is similar to the serendipity motivation identified by Meng and Tung among domestic tourists at Hengdian; those tourists hoped to meet celebrities or filming crews by chance

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[7]. Their trip is not organized around stars; this may help explain their low tolerance for long waiting and blocking behavior.

The film extra judged fan behavior by asking if it disturbed the production process. In the study of Xu and Reijnders, extras at Hengdian are described as working in the layered hierarchy of the film industry [8]. This position is in line with a rule-oriented logic, and the logic may help explain why the extra interviewed took rational star-chasing to mean following on-set management rules.

Stakeholder theory also provides an interpretation of the fact that abstract agreement and divergent boundaries exist together. Since stakeholders are different in power, legitimacy and urgency, their claims also differ in salience [9]. In the same space at Hengdian, the stakes of fans, tourists, park staff and film extras are not the same; therefore, every group defines rational star-chasing according to its own interests.

5.2. Governance suggestions

In the scenic area, the park management should set up special fan waiting areas near popular filming spots, and crew updates that are not confidential should be released in real time. These updates can reduce the blind waiting that comes from a lack of information. According to Hansen, a nudge influences behavior without bans or changes in incentives [14]; setting up waiting areas applies this idea to the design of space and can therefore be called a spatial nudge. Thus, order is guided by the layout of the space and not by forceful expulsion, and emotional conflict is avoided.

On online platforms, content moderation, or content review, is described by Gillespie as a central part of platform governance that shapes what users can see [18]. For leaked videos and secretly taken photos from unofficial channels, platforms should apply stricter review and traffic limits, so as to reduce the hidden incentives for waiting. This type of measure belongs to information-source nudges. Fewer potential traffic benefits for the behavior that interviewees regarded as "irrational" may then mean less motivation for blind waiting.

Within fan communities, fan clubs should be encouraged to write "offline support behavior codes" for their members. Then, members can supervise and persuade one another under such codes, and normative pressure within the group may be formed [12]. This is a form of social norm nudging. In this way, peer pressure and self-restraint in the group are used to help members turn rational understanding into actual behavior and to narrow the existing "knowing-doing gap."

6. Conclusion

Offline star-chasing is a normal emotional outlet in a mediated society. Therefore, denying it or simply stigmatizing it is not appropriate. The interviews at Hengdian suggest that a basic agreement on rational star-chasing is already shared by fans, tourists, park staff and the film extra. The main obstacles are that the "knowing-doing gap" is hard to overcome and that "perception asynchrony" is found between different groups. Governance in the future should involve several parties working together. On the basis of respect for emotional needs, an action framework that all groups can accept should be built step by step through better space supply, upgraded platform governance and internal community norms.

The sample of this study is small (N=9). Each interviewee was interviewed once, and each interview lasted about 5 to 15 minutes. The fieldwork took place at a single site over six days, with two fans, two tourists, four park staff and only one film extra, so the groups were not evenly represented. The data are limited to what the interviewees said and to observation, and ages were recorded only as ranges. Therefore, readers should take the findings as exploratory and should not

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generalize them to each group as a whole. Future research could add more interviewees from each group, especially film extras, use longer interviews, and compare Hengdian with other sites of offline star-chasing. Also, it can be tested whether designated waiting areas and the other suggested measures actually reduce blind waiting.

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