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Master's Thesis
Academic Year 2017

Minimized Efforts and Optimized Consumption:
A Request-Based Website Service to Enhance
Japanese Fandom Tourism

Keio University
Graduate School of Media Design

Qianran Liao

A Master's Thesis
submitted to Keio University Graduate School of Media Design
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER of Media Design

Qianran Liao

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Abstract of Master's Thesis of Academic Year 2017

Minimized Efforts and Optimized Consumption: A
Request-Based Website Service to Enhance Japanese
Fandom Tourism

Category: Design

Summary

During recent years, Japanese pop culture has been raising its profile worldwide as soft power and Gross National Cool. International fan communities are evolving from merely cultural transporters to financial entities with strong consumption power. Especially, when Japanese government starts to loosen multi-entry tourist visas to Chinese residents along with the economic growth in China, Japanese pop culture fans begin to have more opportunities than ever to explore the host culture, its society and participate into the fandom practices. However, internet regulations and the excessive amount of information have made a enjoyable experience more difficult than it should be. Therefore, in this thesis, we will firstly explore the growing path and future aspiration of Japanese pop culture fan community by qualitative analysis in order to understand its ideologies, needs and consumer culture. Then, we will propose a website services that provide targeted fandom consumers customized and organized information that enhances users planning experiences by reducing their spent time and efforts.

Keywords:

Postmodernism, Fandom Tourism, Sub-cultures, Website Service Design, and Communities

Keio University Graduate School of Media Design

Qianran Liao

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Motivation and Backgrounds

I have been strongly interested in Japanese culture for the past decade. By actively engaging in the cultural practices, I notice that the subculture community to which I have belonged has been under constant alteration. Looking back into the journey in early 2005 in mainland China, obtaining information about Japanese pop culture was rather inconvenient and the information amount was substantially limited.

Among all reasons, on one hand, internet services and household computers were far less popularized. On the other, people consuming Japanese culture was still a comparatively small community without mainstream media information feeding. These two major reasons have thereby contributed to a top-down information dissemination structure in Japanese fan communities even until now. With time and IT technologies, how to obtain and provide information has been shaping the structure of a subculture fan community and is changing from a closed mechanism to a increasingly open one.

Earlier, as I can recall finding my first little group online, there were mainly two roles played inside the community—contributors and audiences. Contributors are the group who have access to the information recourses whereas audiences are those who can only perceive what are served on the table. In a way, it is implied that without open resources, people heavily consume second-handed information, which is subjective and narrow minded. Even until now, when fan communities have experienced several shifts from closed forums to open social media platforms and the fast growing internet world has enabled a more convenient environment for free information gaining, fan community of Japanese pop cultures seems to still rely densely on the old contributor-audience mechanism.

There are arguably several facts that may account for this fan community

structure. Frankly speaking, the hierarchy presented actually fits the culture consumption behavior of Chinese audiences. Historical wise, during more than 5 thousand years the society itself has been taken charge by centralization of authority. Even in the modern society where there are remarkable economic growth and global impact, people are still struggling with equality in every aspect of social life: as big as gender and higher education, and as small as just searching information from outside of the wall. Media channels are basically under authority controls and people have get used to information passed down by higher status. Internet regulations have further shaped audiences behavior of seeking information inside the wall. Therefore, this structure in a way can tighten the relations in the community and barely evolve even the internet provides a more flexible environment to obtain information.

Apart from the unidirectional information flow, there are other characteristics that I have observed while being a member for years, given the history of how fan communities of Japanese idols self-fertilize and serve as international cultural carriers. These traits have assisted in shaping the virtual Japanese pop culture fan community and the way members interact inside and outside the border, which will be later elaborated and discussed.

Fandom of Japanese pop cultures has been an academic topic triggering quite a lot researches in terms of its socioeconomic impact during recent decades. Some argued, as Carolyn S. Stevens, that Fandom can be considered a rational consumer strategy, rather than a deviant psychological attribute, when considered within the hyper-developed context of a media-saturated, late-capitalist consumer society. Fandom, when viewed from this perspective, can be distinguished from pathological behaviour and focuses on pleasure, the pursuit of social capital, and individualised identity building, especially in a society where traditional corporate groups such as the family or the workplace no longer offer the same attraction. [21] This quote provides a fair rationale for studying and understanding how subcultural communities survives and prosperous in foreign countries.

Japan has been sparing efforts to promote its pop culture around the world in various ways, such as more aggressive export of media contents, attending overseas events (Animation Expo in the United States and France), and even loosening multi-entry visa application process to several countries. These all allow more and more people worldwide to have a taste of Japanese pop culture and potentially become fans. The first step afterwards will be seek relevant information. Gener-

ally, information can be found online via official websites and various social media platforms—Tweeters, Facebooks, Youtubes, Instragrams, etc.

Among all, mainland China presents quite a special case owing to the national internet regulations. That says, without VPN (virtual private network) services, audiences are unable to access to the massive amount of information out there, which further reinforces the hierarchical structures. Understanding the dynamic of Chinese fan community—community culture, communication codes, behavioral trends—can help both Chinese (import) and Japanese (export) merchandises to better form strategies in different occasions, such as international film festivals, overseas performance events/concerts, and cross-border e-commerce.

Although indeed fandom of Japanese pop culture has yet been highly phrased and public opinions are still more or less stereotyped, active members have gradually demonstrated their personal accomplishments, economical consuming power and even more of globalized cultural communication, as implied in the above. Therefore, I am motivated to dive deeper into virtual Japanese fan communities in mainland China, especially idol fandom, to reveal them in a fresh and comprehensive perspective: how the inner culture is shaped and contributed to both the community as a whole, individual participants along with the greater society.

Moreover, I intend to build a website as both a solution to enhance the uni-directional information dissemination tunnel and to encourage subcultural niche market tourism as business potentials, after identifying and categorizing the communities potentials and unmet needs as niche market consumers.

1.2 Research Questions and Scope

This thesis will mainly focus on reviewing virtual Japanese pop culture communities in mainland China from various perspectives, analyze the interactions especially cultural and economic contributions in terms of the following aspects: 1) identify outer and inner factors (cultural, economical, political) that shape the community culture; 2) analyze the counter-influence among greater society, community itself and individual members, and conclude strategy implications; 3) apply the implications to a designed website. The research scope will be narrowed down to the Japanese idol fan communities. Fans of Japanese male idol groups form one of the largest communities inside the Japanese pop culture pool. On one hand, this community shares strong values regarding collective behaviors and has

developed its own community codes. Their cultural practices cover almost every media channel. Therefore, I consider this group a typical and representative to study current Japanese fandom.

There have been a large amount of researches regarding fandom and fan communities after the mid-to-late 20th century (or let's say 1950) when postmodernism has come to play. According to Brian Duignan, while encompassing a broad range of ideas, postmodernism is typically defined by an attitude of skepticism, irony or distrust toward grand narratives, ideologies and various tenets of universalism, including objective notions of reason, human nature, social progress, moral universalism, absolute truth, and objective reality. That says, postmodernism proffers fertilized academia soil for people to explain smaller cultural grouping phenomenon. In this thesis, postmodernism is as well the primary theoretical groundwork to understand how subcultural fan communities function in a modern society, how members can identify themselves and relate back to the public world.

Learning and discussing subculture communities in an in-depth manner and with fresh eyes given the current global context have not only cultural but also practical values. As mentioned earlier, in the article *You Are What You Buy: Postmodern Consumption and Fandom of Japanese Popular Culture*, author argues that "fandom can be considered a rational consumer strategy, rather than a deviant psychological attribute, when considered within the hyper-developed context of a media-saturated, late-capitalist consumer society." [21] That says, it is highly possible that appropriate applications can convert a cultural community to a profitable and sustainable niche market.

Chris Anderson, chief-in-editor of the *Wired Magazine*, has stated in his book, *The Long Tail*, that our economy and cultural have gradually been stucked into even smaller nutshells. With him arguing, apart from the mainstreams markets, there are infinite business opportunities and huge potentials coming from the tiny little groups, from which the new growth will be expecting now and in the future. Subcultural fan communities can be definitely considered as one of this niche markets. During the past decades, there are an increasing amount of cross-border e-commerce services emerged and mainland China is undoubtedly a main targeted market. Among this very diversified large market, I believe that fan communities, if well explored and served, can become a rather promising business battlefield. This is one leading reason that in the latter part of this thesis, a designed website

will be introduced catering to this particular group to fulfill their consuming needs.

However, it is not a down equation between subcultural community and a niche market. As media content is disseminate differently in mainland China, consuming culture content does not guarantee the actual willingness to pay. Therefore, pinpointing the segment with actual consuming power is crucial in terms of the designed website.

In summary, in this thesis will firstly explore the cultural and economical significance of Japanese fan communities in mainland China according to theoretical reviews and empirical studies. Economical potentials of the discussed community as a niche market will be underlined. Secondly, a designed website service will be introduced according to implications found as a business tool responding to the communitys unmet need: provide users customized and organized information depending on their own requests. In this way, users will not need to dive into the massive information pool and filtrate useful information. In terms of future development, hopefully this website will be actually running and profitable.

Chapter 2

Related Work: Postmodernism, Fandom and Consumption

2.1 Literature Review

A significance to discuss postmodernism theories in this thesis is to clarify why it is appropriate to apply this term to the very specific context that is analysed and thereby validate the conclusions drawn using it.

Postmodernism is one of the most frequently applied theories used to study pop cultures and the up-to-date media fields. One major reason is that postmodernism allows social and cultural phenomena to be accounted by multi-dimensional theories. Argued by Angela McRoovie in her book, *Postmodernism and Popular Culture*, Postmodernism allows what were respectable sociological issues to reappear on the intellectual agenda. It implicitly challenges the narrowness of structuralist vision, by taking the deep interrogation of every breathing aspect of lived experience by media imagery as a starting-point. [16] This is very important to the society in which we are living as well as to this thesis because given the increasing complexity in a global context, no single answer will be sufficient.

In one way, postmodernism can be defined as a way to characterize the exhaustion of totalizing metanarratives and substitute localized, self-reflexive, and contingent analyses for the search for objective, universal truth [16]. A great deal of professionals and academia, especially the younger generation, have intentionally sought answers to experiences occurred in subcultures and minorities. As well argued by McRobbie: "The reason why postmodernism appeals to a wider number of young people, and to what might be called the new generation of intellectuals (often black, female, or working-class) is that they themselves are experiencing the enforced fragmentation of impermanent work and low career opportunities. Far from being overwhelmed by media saturation, there is evidence to suggest

that these social groups and minorities are putting it to work for them.” [16]

However, a problem is that how the western postmodernism discussed above can fit in a marxist society as mainland China, which will be mainly discussed in this thesis. More precisely, since we will be discussing a subculture group in which members are cultivating by a different type of culture, how postmodernism can be applied to sociological experiences and cultural practices of the specific audience. Although it may seem to be relevant, ideologies of a society shape the way how cultures are disseminated and what values actually matter. One evident example will be, for Japanese idol fans, even though they live overseas, they will find a way to purchase the released albums or CDs (such as amazon japan, buyee.jp or other proxy purchase services) as a consequence of being saturated by the ideologies and values of the Japanese market. Whereas, to be honest, very few people in mainland China still purchase physical music products any more to support their idols.

True, given the current music or even the entertainment industry, profits no longer come from the sales of CD or other physical products. According to Nielsons 2016 year-end report, the music industry experienced steady and consistent growth in 2016, with overall volume up 3 percent over 2015, fueled by a 76 percent increase in on-demand audio streams compared to last year. Both ends of the industry are well aware of this change occurring worldwide.

Nevertheless, there are several more factors. Firstly, free music streaming applications prevail in mainland China. General consumers have not formed the mindset to actually pay for intangible properties when they can be accessed online without a price in a convenient manner. Especially for younger generation in mainland China, purchasing a CD will not be the very first thing that comes up to mind. The lack of sufficient copyright control and market regulation is one of primary reasons. If every song in a CD can be downloaded online, what is the point to spend extra money? In addition, there is no authority ranking the sales such as Oricon Japan.

2.2 An Overview: Japanese Pop Culture Communities in mainland China

This part of analysis is primarily based on qualitative data analyzing and empirical studies of the evolution of Japanese idol fan communities in mainland China during the past decade. It aims to provide an overview of how the inter-culture of such a community changes depending on all kinds of variables with time. With the variables (factors) identified, rational assumptions can be made to determine the preliminary segmentation.

2.2.1 Preliminary Phase

Early 20th century, if to be precise, between 2003 to 2006, a door to Japanese pop culture has been opened to audiences in mainland China with the popularization of household computers, internet and pirate DVDs. During these short three years, a large amount of up-to-date Japanese television dramas have been watched via various channels. However, actually, this is not the first time when Japanese television shows are imported to mainland China. During 1980s, dozens of dramas, such as Akai Giwaku and Oshin, have been on air and turned out to be great hit among Chinese audiences. The first tier audiences mostly come from port cities with relatively advanced economic development and international cultural exchange ideologies reinforced by policies of China. Especially audiences living in port cities nearby Hong Kong, such as Guangzhou and Shenzhen, channels of Hong Kong televisions can be viewed at home.

Geography can actually explain a great deal. Port cities have been pioneers to conduct cultural, economic and political communications between mainland China and the rest of the world. Residents are more open-minded, higher-educated, and financially secured (comparatively). These components are all crucial for the afterwards development of the Japanese idol fan community.

A simple survey is conducted to receive preliminary data regarding personal fandom history online. Digital survey sheets have been circulated via Sina Weibo and the longest anonymous Japanese idol fan forum and 150 answer samples have been received. Among those who state that they have been Japanese idol fans for more than a decade, 88 percent of them claim that the opportunity is watching Japanese television drama during 2004 to 2006. Most frequently brought up drama names are: Gokusen II, Dragon Sakura, Nobuda wo Produce, Boys over Flowers,

etc.

It is a very interesting period for Japanese idol fan communities to emerge when neither information exchange or tourism was prosperous between mainland China and Japan. That says, it is rather difficult for audiences living in mainland China to obtain first hand information about Japanese idols. Without sufficient information feed, the community is very small and closed. Mainstream media such as national televisions, newspaper and magazines are of very little use. Instead, the community has turned to fans living in Hong Kong and Taiwan, where Japanese fan communities have been rather mature and large in the meantime. Active members in Hong Kong and Taiwan communities have been providing updated information resources and translating them into Chinese. At this phase, idol fan community in China was very dependent in all.

Moreover, social media platforms have not yet been fully developed. Fans mainly communicate with each other in fan-built forums. However, registration is not open to every fan. Some only open periodically for membership registration and the amount is limited. Some even require identification (such as submitting images of personal collections of purchased CD or official goods of a certain idol). This is a very distinct situation happening in Japanese idol fan communities and there are several implications. Firstly, the Japanese idol fan community is **self-screening**: only people who have demonstrated their ideologies are a match to the Japan market culture along with their financial capability to support their idols are allowed to access to information and other resources. It can be argued that the community culture is deeply modified and become less and less alike Chinese fan culture. Simultaneously, the community itself is shaping members behavior.

2.2.2 Developing Phase

Since being launched in 2009, Sina Weibo (Chinese version of Twitter) has practically altered and re-shaped Chinese consumers culture and behavior in terms of social networking. So does the fan community. Essentially, the extremely fast spread of Sina Weibo forces the idol fan community to change its way of sharing information from restrained and closed forums to rather open and accessible website based platforms. Without the limitation of membership registration, the information flow tunnel flatter and flatter.

2.2.3 Advancing Phase

The key word for this phase of fan community is multi-dimensional, expanding both online and offline. In terms of online virtual communities, the increase of participating account is substantial. It is not uncommon for an influencer in idol fan community to have 40 thousand followers. For offline cultural practices, since Japanese government continue to loosening the multi-entry tourist visa to mainland China residents, more and more fans can visit Japan in person to experience events and concerts. Compared to earlier during 2008 to 2011, the currency rate has dropped to a much more reasonable and affordable level. Simultaneously, study abroad in Japan becomes more of a validate option for Chinese students when Japanese universities start to accept an increasing amount of international students.

International cultural exchange is an obvious byproduct, or so to say a main result. At this point of time, the idol fan community is no longer a dependent one and has more or less demonstrated its market value to Japanese entertainment industry players. There are essentially two pathways for fans to exchange and obtain information. One comes from influencers who live in Japan, who can personally access to Japanese media channels such as television programs, magazines and social media platforms (Twitter, Tumblr, Facebook, etc). Influencers transport information and resources into Chinese via Sina Weibo accounts. It is not uncommon a successful key influencer of a fan community can have around 40 thousand followers. Besides, more and more Japanese entertainment players begin to realize the importance and market value of Sina Weibo and open official accounts, such as Fuji Television Overseas PR accounts, Find Japan, Jin Akanishi, and even Johnnys Entertainment.

Although with an increasingly flatter structure of the fan community, hierarchy remains and even has more tiers. The previous self-screening process could not be applied to an open platform such as Weibo but the community still reinforces it in various ways. This is the most interesting analysis when it comes to fan community culture. As demonstrated in Figure 2.1, the tiers can be categorized and identified by how close can a fan accesses to resources. Key elements include Japanese language proficiency, capability to directly obtain original/first-hand information, financial status (indicates the frequency to visit Japan in person and consuming power).

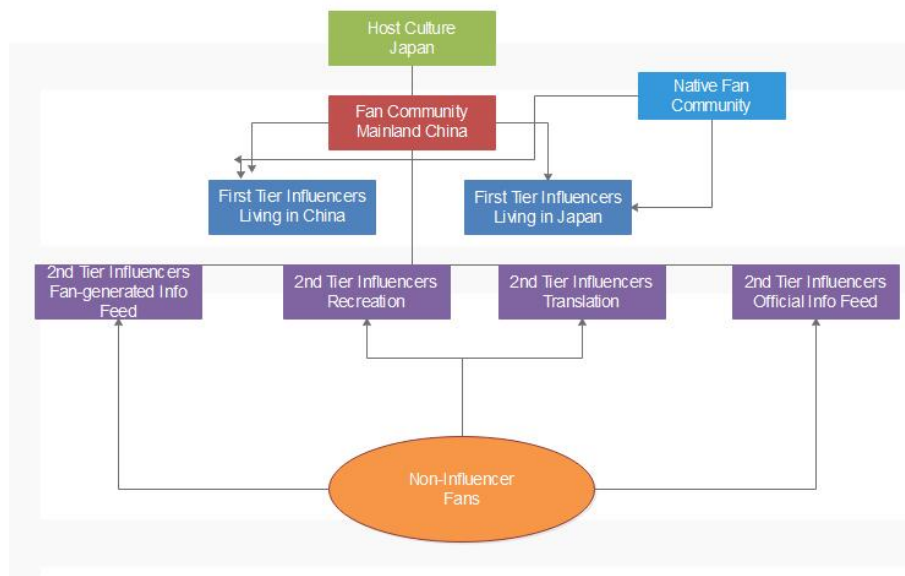


Figure 2.1: Fan Community Hierarchy

2.3 Fandom and Consumption Behavior

2.3.1 It's Social Reinforcement

Culture and economy are two primary and indispensable interests regarding fan studies. The previous section has discussed the cultural implications of fandom: on the macro level, fandom can encourage international culture communication; on the micro level, fandom can re-shape individual identity recognition and social functions. In this section, economic practices will be considered a very significant part of fandom and seek to compose a market strategy to target this specific fan community. In some studies, fans are defined as consumers as well as marketers, mediators, translators, and localizers of globalized cultures. [15] Consumption lies in the nature of fan culture. Anthony Y.H. Fung has stated in his article that The rise of popular culture and consumerism in China has triggered a public discourse. The emergence of consumerism can be seen as a token of free and liberal expression by which the public makes its own market choices and pursue its individual desires and pleasure, which people living under the authoritarian regime were not entitled to have in the past. [10] True, developing technology

and globalization provide people to choose from all different pop cultures as a process of self-re-identification.

However, I may argue that the needs to participate into the consumption in terms of Chinese fan community of Japanese pop culture are more of a social/collective reinforcement, a media saturation, rather than spontaneous personal option at first hand. As mentioned earlier, unlike the Chinese market, Japanese pop culture encourages and reinforces fans purchasing behavior until it becomes part of the nature of the consumption culture. For Chinese fans to actively participate into Japanese pop culture, identifying themselves as consumers in the Japanese market is a critical leaping process. In addition, the community and its key players have been intentionally emphasizing this consumption behavior. There are several cycles of becoming a core member of the fan community and consumption behavior is one criterion for a fan to fit into the core cycle.

With regard to the survey conducted previously, regardless of time-length, 79 percent participants consider purchasing physical products or attending events are two important qualifications to evaluate whether a fan is enthusiastic or not. On one hand, this can be formulated by the eager to fit in a community. On the other, consumption behavior stands for personal financial security status. It is as well self-fulfillment and arguably motivations. Among the above two consumption behaviors, visiting Japan to attend events or concerts becomes major.

2.3.2 Fandom Tourism as example: Animations, Idols, and other Pops

In the previous section, niche markets as a whole has been discussed: the characteristics, interactions, and implications. And the nature and mechanism of niche markets are viewed from various perspectives and fields. Nevertheless, in this one, the topic will be narrowed down to the very industry mattering solely to this thesis: tourism.

According to Robinson and Novelli, the concept of niche tourism has been brought in counter of mass tourism, implying a more sophisticated set of practices that distinguish and differentiate tourists. [19]

Hassan argues, that the competitiveness in tourism is defined as the "destinations ability to create and integrate value-added products that sustain its resources while maintaining market position relative to competitors." [12]

Before going to the data-collecting phase, understanding the niche market cases will benefit. Therefore, below will Pop-culture Tourism be thoroughly discussed. Pop-culture tourism is the act of traveling to locations featured in popular literature, film, music, or any other form of media. Also referred to as a "Location Vacation". [14]

Animations Such as mentioned in the introduction section, animation-mentoring-tourism is booming. More and more people come to Japan to re-experience the scenes that they love in the works.



Figure 2.2: Official Your Name Tour

[Figure Source: Cool Japan Demonstrative Demonstration Project [23]]¹

Idols and Concerts Another kind of pop-culture tourism may be a little different. As Japanese Idol cultures absorb more and more fans worldwide, people are coming here to attend concerts, events and any kind of festivals. This group of tourists will generally be inclined to visit places relating personally to their idols, such as places of the drama scenes, filmed in movies, or locations that have meaning to the talents of any kind. Popular locations will be: television stations, concert venues (such as Tokyo Dome), field-trip locations.

2.4 Related Services in current markets

There are rather a few website services providing organized information about idol and pop culture related tourism information. These websites provide sufficient amount of information resources and data regarding fandom tourism. Especially the website "Zenkoku Roke-chi Guide", it has a rather comprehensive filming locations categorized by updated time, media titles, talents, locations and etc. Users can access desire location information according to their own preferences and priorities.

The image shows two screenshots of Japanese websites. The top screenshot is from '全国ロケ地ガイド' (National Filming Location Guide), which provides a table of currently airing TV programs and their filming locations. The bottom screenshot is from 'Li-vvon', a website dedicated to filming locations in Tokyo, featuring a list of articles and a search bar.

番組名	放送時間	放送局	ジャンル
朝ドラ「ひよっこ」(再放送)	毎朝 08:00 NHK総合	joe	
ドラマ「ユートピア」(再放送)	月曜 21:00 フジ	yvuv	
ドラマ「ファンズ」(再放送)	月曜 26:50 フジ	録集中	
ドラマ「カンナヘン」(再放送)	火曜 22:00 TBS	録集中	
ドラマ「遠くまで」(再放送)	水曜 22:00 NTV	録集中	
ドラマ「セシルのくもくも」(再放送)	木曜 22:00 フジ	録集中	
ドラマ「ハローニッポン」(再放送)	金曜 22:00 TBS	録集中	
ドラマ「プランケット・キップ」(再放送)	金曜 22:00 NHK総合	yvuv	
ドラマ「ワタの夫は仕事ができない」(再放送)	土曜 22:00 NTV	録集中	
大河「おんな城主三太夫」(再放送)	日曜 20:00 NHK総合	joe	
ドラマ「おめん、愛してる」(再放送)	日曜 21:00 TBS	録集中	
ドラマ「アキラとあきら」(再放送)	日曜 22:00 WOWOW	録集中	
ドラマ「愛してたって、愛はあきら」(再放送)	日曜 22:30 NTV	録集中	

Figure 2.3: Related Websites in Japan

Sources: Figure content is captured from the following websites: *Zenkoku Roke-chi Guide* [4]², *NAVER MATOME* [2]³, *Li-vvon* [1]⁴

However, there are several problems for the information to be easily available to Chinese fans. These websites are highly Japanese-character based, and will hardly be reached through Chinese character based search engines, such as baidu.com (the largest and most frequently used search engine in mainland China). Moreover, these websites require Japanese proficiency to apprehend content. It takes much longer time and efforts for Chinese fans to access these website, search and receive results in Japanese, then self-translate and organize information. For instance, as

Yokohama, and she/he would like to have information about a concert venue, filming locations of different talent groups. According to common practices, a user may need to go through the following three sites: official website page of the venue, and then find various entries separately.

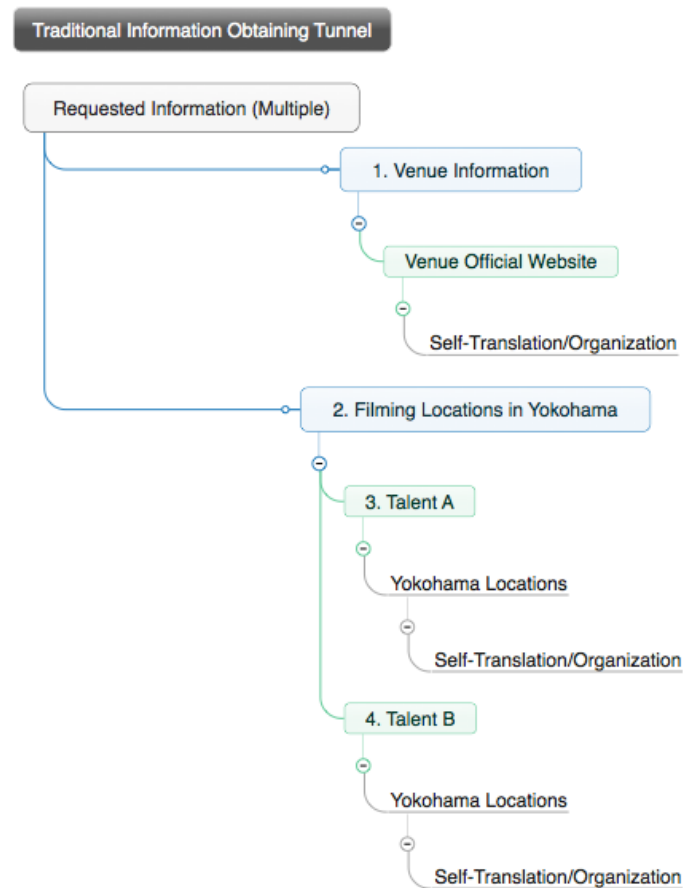


Figure 2.6:

Apart from Japanese sites, currently Chinese audiences tend to obtain information from social media channels. Sina Weibo becomes the most engaging social media platform in general and for fans (discussed in section 3.1 Identifying the Target). Resembling Twitter, Sina Weibo mostly depends on individual personal entries. Unlike the above Japanese sites, fan-generated information and individual posts require users to go over multiple entries and conduct self information

organization.

2.5 Obstacles and Future Aspiration

One difficult problem is how to enable and encourage very legal and effective cultural exchange in the modern digital era. Under the current global context, every country intends to enhance its soft national power. Frankly speaking, it is no secret that overseas fans of whatever kind of culture will, whether technically legal or not, exchange necessary information to nurture their desired spiritual food.

In mainland China, the internet regulations alter situations and make fan community in this marketplace live in a very tricky environment. Officially, the internet regulations prevent fans living in mainland China from receiving and browsing information from overseas social media channels, such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, which are platforms where overseas fans communicate and share information. Although official sites are still available and many entertainment players (individual talents or companies) have started overseas promotions to serve Chinese fans, such as start fan club services in Chinese and open Sina Weibo account, given the nature of fan culture, collective knowledge is more of an important information resource: connecting with the mother culture (Japan society) and understanding its fan culture (how Japanese fans behave).

Some fans have used virtual private networks bypassing the regulations to provide news and knowledge to the crowd. However, recently, the government starts to take stronger control over the utilization of virtual private networks, which will add more difficulties to the fan community for them to connect to the host culture and its society. In the near future, hardly can we expect the regulations will reduce rather than the other way around.

Given the growing speed of the fan base, the needs to explore Japanese fan community will not be waived either.

2.6 Chapter Conclusions

Understanding how the community evolves and the factors that affect the growth helps to perceive this community's consumption culture and behavior, in order to identify a niche market for a consumption strategy.

After examining the community nature, the niche market identified in this thesis is not equivalent to the entire subculture or fan community in mainland China as a whole. Rather, it is the higher tiers of fan communities, as demonstrated earlier in Figure. The reason for targeting this even specified segment is that with the capability to obtain multi-entry visa and travel frequently to Japan requires high financial security, a greater devote to the pop culture and to the communitys ideologies and codes.

To elaborate on the demographic characteristics of the segmentation, the business potentials will be placed to: Japanese pop culture (especially idol fans), mainly female aging from early 20s to mid 30s, with stable income, financially capable of affording the expense of traveling to Japan, highly aligned with the fan communitys ideologies and communication codes of conducts.

In the next sector, we will introduce a website services as a solutions to the information-obtaining problem to identified segmentation especially in the tourism field.

Notes

- 1 <http://wowjapan.asia/2017/01/japanese-governments-official-name-travel-tour-foreign-fans-a>
- 2 <http://loca.ash.jp/>
- 3 <https://matome.naver.jp/topic/1Lvdj>
- 4 <http://li-vvon.com/>
- 5 <http://loca.ash.jp/>
- 6 <http://loca.ash.jp/indexname.htm>

Chapter 3

Identify the target and Design Strategy

This chapter is the first step starting design a service to solve problems and satisfy the unmet needs of the targeted market and consumers. Based on previous discussion, we have understood that one major obstacle is the inefficiency to intended fandom tourism information. In the following sections, the identified problem will be testified along with consumer analysis. Finally, a designed solution as a website service will be proposed according to the obtained result.

3.1 Identify the Target Users

By definition, a niche market is the subset of the market on which a specific product is focused. The market niche defines as the product features aimed at satisfying specific market needs, as well as the price range, production quality and the demographics that is intended to impact. [17] During recent years, an increasing amount of literature starts to pay attention to this growing segment. In these small nutshells, rather strong and tight communities are born. User-stickiness as well as user loyalty are much higher than mainstream markets due to the demand and desires.

To define the term "Niche Markets", it is important to understand what the word "niche" actually accounts for. Described in *Webster's Dictionary*, a niche is "a recessed space or hollow; specifically a recess in a wall for a statue or the like, any position specifically adapted to its occupant." [5]

In the article "*Niche marketing revisited: concept, applications and some European cases*", authors define a niche market as " a small market consisting of an individual customer or a small group of customers with similar characteristics or

needs.” [8]

A highlight in the above definition is ”with similar characteristics or needs” rather than the market scope itself. On one hand, this resemblance makes the needs of the segment easier to be identified compared with mainstream markets. In the meantime, a customer who considers that himself/herself belongs to a niche, he/she will be more prone to behave according to the community cultural codes and thereby establish stronger bounds with the community.

There are couple layers of indications. Firstly, influencers are validated representatives. In the following chapters in which data-collecting will be elaborated, it will be mentioned that interviews are dedicated to social media influencers in a niche group. Indeed, commonly speaking, to avoid sampling bias or the lack of representatives, researchers will intend to acquire as much data as possible in order to draw convincing conclusions. However, under the circumstance of a niche, influencers can fairly speak for their groups, which reducing the time and efforts to eliminate marginal data.

Introduced in an article, *Opportunities in the international textile and apparel marketplace for niche markets*, authors provide a model of discovering and identifying the niche markets. The original context refers to the ”Progression from commodity markets to niche markets for the US textile and apparel industry” [9]

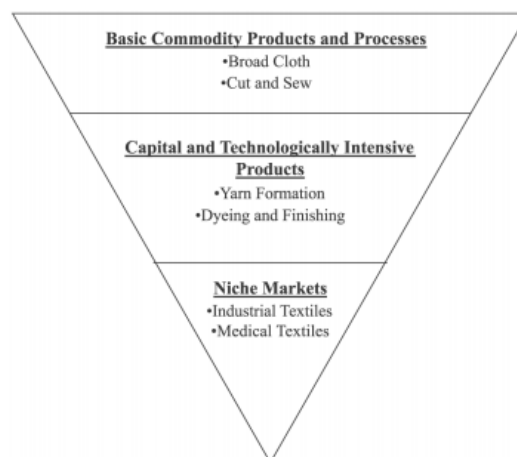


Figure 3.1: Progression to Niche Markets

Figure Source:Dodd Parrish, Erin, Nancy L. Cassill, and William Oxenham. [9]

Therefore, in this thesis, the identified niche market is not about all fans in the community. Rather, only the part that have frequent need to visit Japan to participate into host culture practices are considered as targeted consumers. This is because on one hand, although the Japanese multi-entry visa application has been simplified, the financial standard has not been loosened much. It still requires applicants to proof that they have stable job and continued financial income. Tourism consumption and purchasing power are very important elements for the following proposed services.

In order to have a basic idea regarding the portion of the intended niche market, a simple survey in fan community is conducted on Sina Weibo. People are volunteered to participate and are asked about their annual spent on idol-related practices, the number of times they have visited Japan to either travel or attend concerts/events, the most frequents. Total there are 967 copies of answers received for analyze. Among all, roughly 20 percent of all survey participants have visited Japan to attend concerts/events. Regarding the annual spending other than visiting Japan (official goods purchasing such as CD, DVD, tour official goods), the top 10 percent spend more than 3000 RMB (approximately 49000 JPY), and more than half spend approximately 500 to 2000 RMB (8000 to 32000 JPY).

In addition, the survey as well indicates that 90 percent participants consider Sina Weibo as their dominant channel to obtain fandom information. This can demonstrated that a key influencer in fan community can reach 27 thousand followers that are more than talent company's official accounts. This fan community cultural tendency will be important to future development discussed in chapter 6.

According to the above data, it can be indicated that the entire Chinese fan community is not the ideal target niche market. Rather, only the part that demonstrates needs to visit Japan and have the financial purchasing power to a certain degree will actually benefit from the designed website services. If a fan does not have any need visiting Japan, or without the financial and purchasing consistency, tourism information in Japan will be of very little use for them.

3.2 Problem Identification

3.2.1 Identified Problems

This problem should be demonstrated by its practical relevance, or it may be of relevance once solved. The problem should lead to a specification of the research question of this thesis and verifies its practical relevance. The problem should be in the interests of more than one entity such as companies, governments and social/public departments.

Presumably, based on empirical experiences as an insider, one problem undermining Chinese fans' travel experiences is the planning work required before visiting Japan. Generally fans would like to visit specific places related to their idols and loved media works, and the information is all over scattered Japanese media channels. People will need filtrate necessary information among excessive information pool. In this sector, research is conducted in order to testify and better understand what are the actual detailed problems.

3.2.2 Practical Relevance

Among all kinds of research, illustrated by Michael W. Toffel, the practical relevance matters significantly in various ways. [22] Generally speaking, research relevance will be demonstrate straightforward in terms of research questions, built hypothesis and implications. By definition of the word practical, what is calling for attention is how the result of this research can proof is value in terms of an actual environmental context. For instance, regarding management science, the practical relevance can be illustrated by how it improve the decision making process of a manager.

Narrowing down to design science, argued by Hevner, design science intends to enhance the application performance in a certain environment: the relevance cycle initiates design science research with an application context that not only provides the requirements for the research (e.g., the opportunity/problem to be addressed) as inputs but also defines acceptance criteria for the ultimate evaluation of the research results. [13] More importantly, the relevance needs to verify the results of a certain research, in terms of how the designed outcome improves and how this improvement can be measured.

With respect to this research thesis, arguably, the practical relevance will be

found on the ground whether users travel experiences can be enhanced. In details, this designed artifact will perform as following:

3.3 Data Gathering and Analysis

Apart from coding process to interpret the obtained interview data, there are couple of stages in order to elaborate the data analysis. Several questions will need to be addressed: 1) How to get data on the situation as it currently is; 2) How to make sense of the obtained data; 3) How to understand the situation/problem as a whole.

Participants Mainly, Chinese are sought to be participants for the interview, as they are this website’s major targeted users. It is relatively easy to talk to them in Mandarin in the travel spots. Also, classifying whether a person is a fan or not can be based on the appearance, conversation content and personal belongs. For instance, animation fans may carry”Ita Bag”. Idol fans may wear concert T-shirts. In addition, in certain spots in the Takeshitori, such as the shops that sell idol photos, appropriate participants can be properly picked up.

Interviews In this thesis, mainly the data coding analysis approach is applied, as the majority data obtained is qualitative data obtained from interviews with fans in the target group. Two types of interviews have been conducted with time. One is carried on the streets in popular fans-gathering around areas in Tokyo such as Shibuya and Harajuku with travelers. The other is carried online with influencers (Weibo accounts with more than 3 thousand followers) who are as well oftentimes travel to Japan with specific intentions (e.g. concerts, events).

For the on-street interviews, voice recording tools are used under consent. The on-street interviews have included three sessions and been conducted on weekends twice (one week apart). This is because generally events are held on weekends, and to avoid encountering the same events or concerts in a row.

- What is your purpose traveling to Japan? (General Sightseeing, concerts, plans made for specific reasons?)
- Are you traveling as individuals or with groups?

- Do you travel here often?
- If you are traveling with specific purpose, are you a fan of any kind?
- If you are traveling with specific purpose, how do you make plans?
- If you are traveling with specific purpose, how do you gather information such as the place that you would like to visit? item Do you find any difficulty gathering information that you are looking for?
- Have you been aware the information sources?

Among all three sessions, a total of 30 copies have been received and available for the coding analysis. Picture examples of coding process will be provided in the following pages.

To elaborate more on the analysis process, data coding is a systematic way in which to condense extensive data sets into smaller analyzable units through the creation of categories and concepts derived from the data [11] Moreover, the process by which verbal data are converted into variables and categories of variables using numbers, so that the data can be entered into computers for analysis [11] That means, the important task here is to make sense of the transcripts, to understand the motivation of a certain type of behavior along with, more importantly, its implications to future assumptions.

As summarized and demonstrated in the figure 3.2, 83 percent of the respondents are female with an average age of 24 years old. 80 percent of them have already been working from 2 to 5 years with relatively stable income resources in China, which is required in the case of obtaining a multiple-entry visa to Japan, indicating a certain level of purchasing and consuming power.

Not surprisingly, due to the selected location, that 60 percent of respondents are individual travelers who can be identified as the target segment: travelers with specific needs (fans of either idols or animations).

After coding all transcripts, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- In terms of fans, traveling is planned with regard to [themes], which are mainly events and concerts
- Visiting places pictured in televisions programs, dramas and movies is a rather important task, as identified with the term Junrei

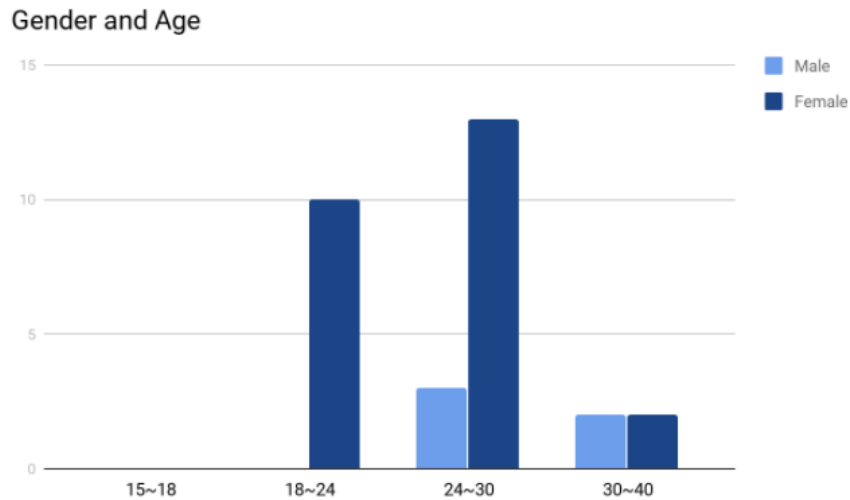


Figure 3.2: Gender and Age

- Information is basically generated by Japanese fans or Chinese fans living in Japan, and social media plays a crucial role
- Information itself is shatteringly generated without systematic input all over media platforms and is consequently rather difficult to be organized. Other major barriers can be figured out as languages and disabled Internet searching owing to the fire wall.

Table 3.1: Pre-set codes

visa	purpose	frequency	media	search

The other interview session is basically carried online. Unlike the first one (interviewees are randomly picked at popular traveling places), interviewees are chosen from influential Sina Weibo accounts based on the following criteria:

- Demonstrated profound interests in Japanese culture in terms of Idol or Animation industries
- Have been regularly visiting Japan

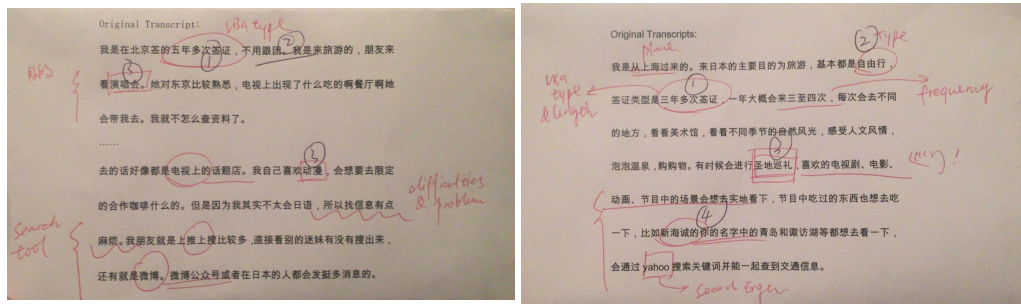


Figure 3.3: Preliminary Coding Sample

- Playing roles as information feeders (writing reports, providing location information, or uploading pictures about traveling in Japan)
- At least have 2000 followers

Frankly speaking, the second session resembles case studies more than common interviews. The reason for creating the above criteria is that key users meeting all of them are supposed to have characteristics of their niche groups. Otherwise, they will not become the influencers, as discussed in Chapter 2 that niche groups have strong tightness and community codes in terms of interactions and communications.

Robert Cialdini has argued in his book, *Influence: Science and Practice*, about the compliance and persuasion in a social environment of social influencers [6]

Given the practical situations and fortunately, from February to May, 20 accounts have agreed to answer the surveys and questionnaires. Coding is as well the primary way to interpret the data. Conclusion is on one hand to identify problems in order to create solutions. On the other hand, it proffers information to understand the cultural and behavior trends of a niche group, which contributes to the designing process of the solutions.

Conclusions from the second session:

- Key influencers will self-organize information and become feeders
- Information mostly obtained from social media channels, such as Twitter, Tumblr, and blogs.
- Proxy is necessary
- Information needs to be pro-actively sought and obtained

Given the conclusions of the two data-coding sessions, on one hand, the following results can be indicated:

On the other hand, data-coding can only explain part of the storytelling. In order to further exemplify the data, turning these qualitative narratives into quantitative variables will be necessary.

From a comprehensive point of view, the major problem encountered by the targeted niche group and reduce the satisfaction of their traveling experiences will be the two listed below:

- The information gathering and organizing process

3.4 Pre-evaluation Relevance

For design research, this includes creating a general research hypothesis in the form of a utility theory, postulating a link between the solution space and the problem. The hypothesis should have the form: if a solution to the problem is applied, some observed aspects will be changed in a way which ultimately helps the entities. The hypothesis is continuously adjusted during the research process. It has to be evaluated and represents the result of the entire research. [18]

At the end of both interview sessions, all participants have been asked the following two questions:

- If there will be a website, or an application, where you search a program's name, or even a movie title, you will get all the restaurants' names, would you like to use this website?
- If such website exists, what is the most desirable function that you would like it to have?

Qualitative data results can be demonstrated as Figure 3.4 and Figure 3.5:

As a consequence, the initial research hypothesis is that, with the designed integrated information platform, in a general way, the targeted niche segment will be able to receive direct information feed. Information obtaining process will be simplified down to one website and one search, with no need browsing tons of entries on Twitter. As byproducts, this website builds communities for this niche market group by linking social media accounts. Specifically for Chinese people, the case will be Sina Weibo and Wechat Friend Circles.

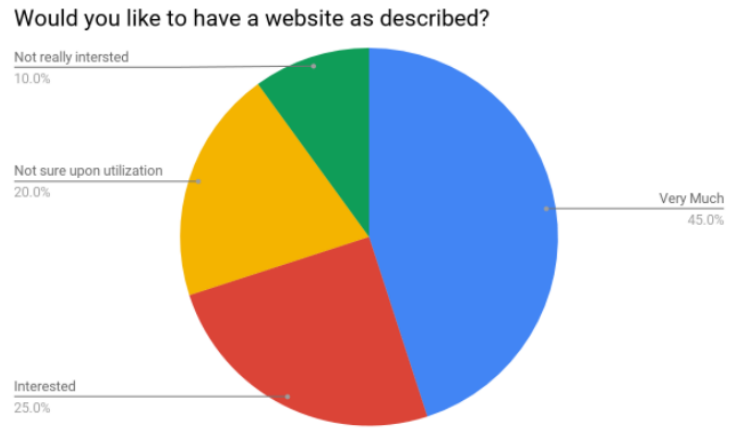


Figure 3.4: Functionalities

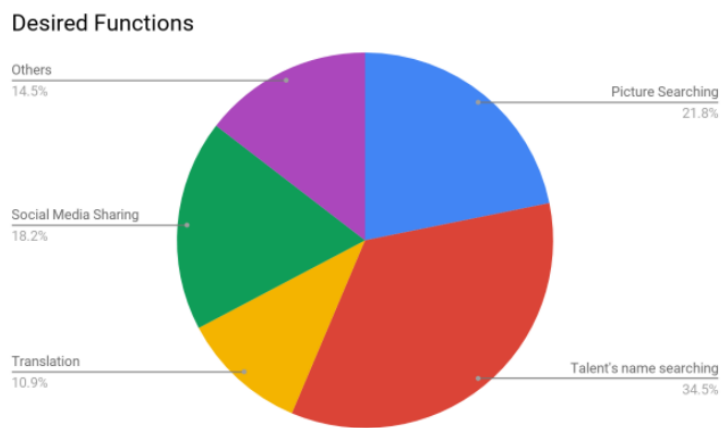


Figure 3.5: Functionalities

However, there are several problems need to be considered and discussed along with research journey as well. Firstly, how can the information be correctly generated and verified on the website? Basically, the website is still counting on user-data-generation and honestly speaking, this means that there is no guarantee for the credibility of the sources. Secondly, the timeliness of the desired results. Lets say, a fan wants to search and visit a restaurant in 2017, yet the restaurant was pictured in the television program in 2007. It is highly possible that the 2007-version information will not work after a decade. Thirdly, how to encourage or manage sustainable information circulation for the website, ultimately monetizing this service platform.

3.5 Proposed Strategy and Conclusions

3.5.1 Proposed Strategies to Problem Solving

According to interviews and researches conducted, it can be concluded that normally fans need to spend much time in finding and organizing travel information that is not easy to be found on common travel information channels such as travel guidance books and websites. People need to dive deeper into Japanese fan-generated channels to look for what they want. It takes time, efforts and the understanding of the host culture (fans tend to talk in their own community codes).

Therefore, a **website**, named FindIt, is proposed to help fans simplified their work of information searching and planning (as demonstrated in Figure 3.6) This website serves pop-cultural fans who visit Japan and want to explore around specific areas, of which information requires quite a lot time for researching, filtering and organizing according to the information-flow-channel demonstrated earlier. It intends to provide a platform where scattered information about places that are most relevant to idols and pictured in media content can be directly and conveniently found. Users can receive customized and organized information only by three steps: search the talent name, select wanted information, and will receive a organized brochure from the website.

The website is personal designed based on experiences and prior knowledge to the fan community in terms of what kind of information they will need to have when planning a fandom visit to Japan. Fandom travel experience, in this

context, refers to the traveling of which purpose is to attend pop culture related events (such as concerts and fan meeting events).

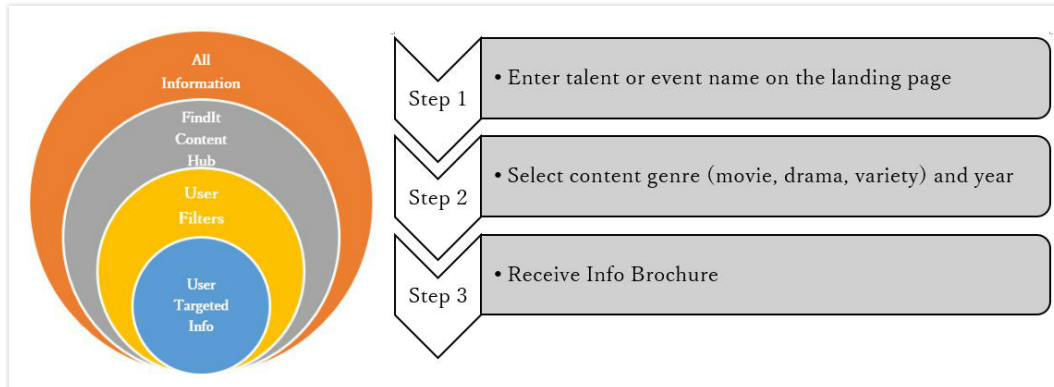


Figure 3.6: Content Hub and Request Steps

This website will work as a pre-organized information pool so that users will not need to approach all excessive amount of resources across various channels. Inside this website’s information pool, users can directly request desired content by submitting request forms. This model resembles more or less an order-made manufacturing one in order to provide the most appropriate and pin-pointing information, as a product, to our targeted users.

Detailed positioning of this website in terms of its target consumer, value proposition and others will be presented in the business model in the next section.

3.5.2 Business Model and SWOT Analysis for the strategy

In this session, a Business Model and a SWOT analysis will be presented to better introduce the proposed website services. For the Business Model analysis, a template from Strategyzer.com is used as shown in Figure 3.7.

This model demonstrates the proposed websites key elements: value proposition, customer relations, customer segments, key partner, key resources, key activities, channel, and revenues. Rather than going deep to value propositions and profit generation, this template focuses on the website service as whole and helps to establish a basic understanding about what the website provides.

Apart from analyzing the website itself, while proposing a new service to consumers, it is necessary to understand the surrounding business environment as

Key Partners 1. Proxy Purchasing Service: --Find Japan --Buyee.jp --Tenso.com --Samurai Buyer 2. Independent Travel Agencies 3. Influencers in fan communities	Key Activities Cultural Information Update Information organization and management Key Resources Official media websites Japanese mass media (magazines, books) Fan-based social media (Twitter, Instagram, etc)	Value Propositions Organize scattered information from all key resources to targeted customer segments Closed and highly engaged fandom community One-stop fandom travel services from planning to local travelling	Customer Relationships Personal Channels Designed Website (FindIt) Influencers' personal Sina Weibo Accounts	Customer Segments Japanese pop culture (especially idol fans): --female --early 20s to mid 30s --with stable income, financially capable of affording the expense of travelling to Japan, --highly aligned with the fan community's ideologies and communication codes of conducts
Cost Structure Domain and Website Maintenance Partner Services		Revenue Streams Business Partnership Potential: user donations (hinger engagement)		

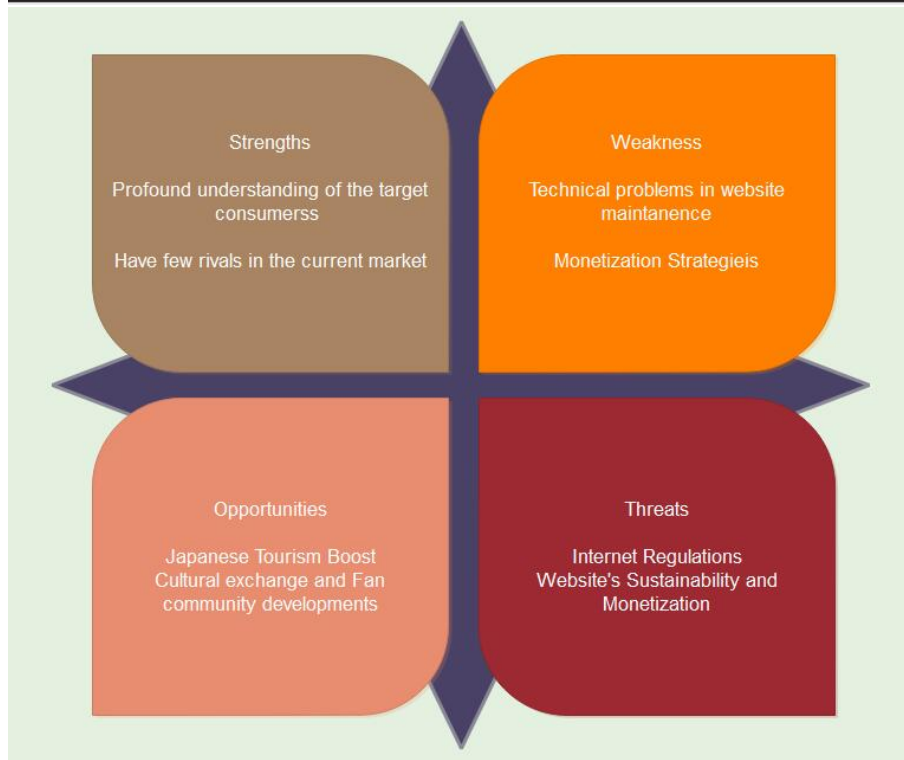


Figure 3.7: Business Model and SWOT Analysis

well. The SWOT analysis looks both internal and external factors that help to further integrate and enhance future designing and implementing processes. Analysis is demonstrated in Figure 3.7.

Chapter 4

Website Design Process

After obtaining more insights into the targeted consumers and the identified problem, in this chapter, we will step to the website design process. It starts with discussing interface designing elements, functionalities, web site map and how the information will flow to serve targeted users.

4.1 Website Structural Design

4.1.1 Design Purpose

The purpose of design this website is reduce layers for Chinese fans when they need to search fandom tourism information. By layers, there are two indications. The first is to allow Chinese fans to directly contact needed information resources. The second one is reducing the steps to reach ultimate necessary information. To achieve so, firstly the website itself is designed as a content hub that are available to all target Chinese fan users. Secondly, to user this content hub, users will not need to conduct the searching activities by themselves. Rather, they will submit request forms and the website will organize information from the content hub and then generate all needed content as a whole package to users, as illustrated in Figure 4.1.

4.1.2 Visual and Information Architecture

Visual Communication.

In terms of the interface design, focusing on visual communication will be rather important. Visual communication has becoming increasingly important with time in our modern society. The most evident phenomenon is the trend that people

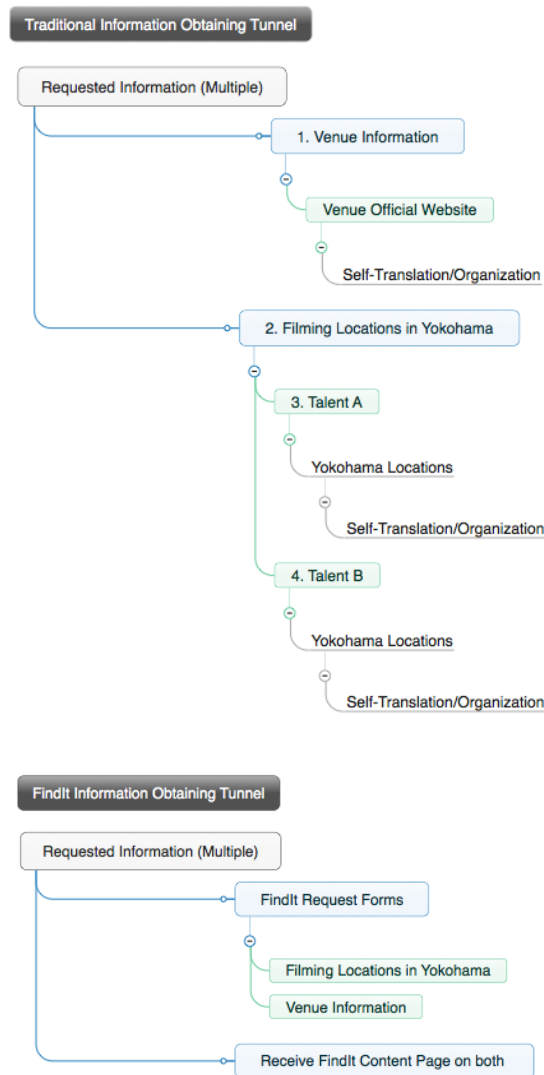


Figure 4.1: Common Information Searching Tunnel and FindIt Suggested Tunnel

are subscribing to image-oriented social media channels such as YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, Pinterest and etc. Comparing to literal words, visual expression communicates in a more straightforward and universal way, reducing the barriers caused by languages. According to the Social Intelligence Report, produced by Adobe Digital Index in 2013, the engagement of posts including images on Facebook is 650 percent higher than those without images. As one intend of this

website is reducing the information processing time and enhance user experience, engaging more pictures can be considered as an effective tool.

Earlier in the related work section, we have seen that Japanese websites have used highly text-based interfaces, which increase the difficulties and time for users to digest the content. Therefore, for the designed website, the amount of text will be intentionally controlled and content will be as visual-friendly as possible.

Information Architecture.

Information architecture refers to the structural design of shared information environment. Some argued, while designing a new website, information architecture resembles sections of human beings. That says, they are more or less invisible to both designers and users, but play crucial roles in supporting the basic website functions and user experiences.

There are two main components of the definition of the information architecture: -the identification and definition of site content and functionality. -the underlying organization, structure, and nomenclature that defines the relationships between a sites content and functionality.

4.1.3 Site Map and Information Flow

Before actually building a website, a website site map is one simple way to structure and guide users through the functionality.

Content hub is the most important part of the website service in terms of how and to what extent the website can serve targeted users. In terms of web design, Rosen and Purinton have argued in the article that how to convert web surfers to repeat visitors is a less well-understood phenomenon yet a very much crucial one. [20] The site map illustrates how the information be categorized and organized in the website content hub as figure 4.2. Since it decides how users consume the content provided, it should be designed in the most appropriate way aligning with consumers' psychology and community culture. According to earlier data analysis, basically, there are two main gateways for users to navigate and obtain information: 1) by artists; 2) by media titles.

These two gateways cope with target users' searching patterns and help users to sort out what they need more efficiently. When users start to use the service,

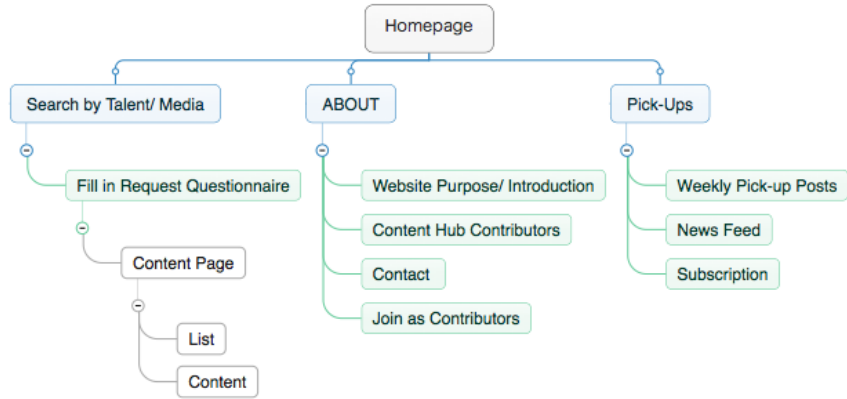


Figure 4.2: Website Site Map

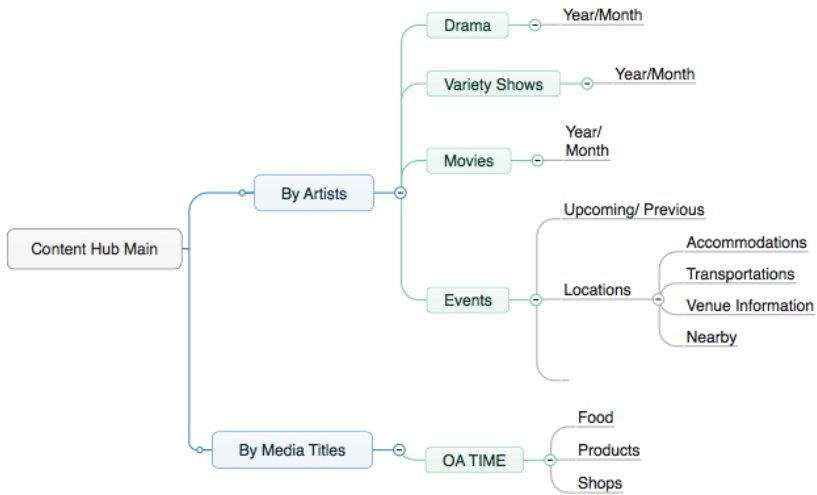


Figure 4.3: Content Hub Site Map

the first step is to categorize the information by entering either one of the above. Stepping in in a simple manner can reduce the reluctance and move users on to the next. The second layer of categorization vary from each other.

In terms of fans, psychologically they tend to organize information by their idols. Therefore, in the talents part, content will be categorized by type of attended media activities: movies, variety television programs, dramas, and concert events. Moving to the third layer, users can even narrow down to the OA year and month for detailed results of shooting spots. In terms of events, apart from year, users can select specific locations, accommodations, transportations and others for the most pin-pointing information.

Nonetheless, in terms of tourism planning, pop culture fans are as well tend to visit spots that are popular in the Japanese host culture. This is one major purpose for the media-title-search. It resembles a little as a traditional travel guide where users can find valuable tourism advice and because these are Japanese television programs, users get to experience what local people rather than tourists consider as great spots, providing a truly authentic taste of the Japanese host culture. For instance, when users enter "King's Brunch)" and specify the year/month such as 201707 and select food, they will receive a list of introduced restaurants along with specific dishes.

Content is generated collectively and details will be illustrated in the next sector—the collective content planning.

4.1.4 Summaries of Website Structural Design

To optimize the user-comprehension, balancing of the amount of text and images is crucial. Although initially, I would like to incorporate the UI philosophy as Snap Chat and Instagram that using images as the very primary demonstration tool, it turns out that this will not work out the best in some information providing sections. However, as expected, image-result-displaying still demonstrates its merits at early web-site browsing stages such as searching for more general information under certain categories.

In the future development, if possible, I would like to introduce more videos other than images in the information demonstration, as which is the new trend for mobile social media communication.

4.2 Content Design: Collective Content Planning

Content is the very crucial part in this designed website. Discussed earlier, especially in niche markets, proper content plays vital role in attracting traffic and maintain user stickiness. In order to generate sufficient and purposeful content, I decided to incorporate a collective content planning method. My personal role here in this collective content planning process are: 1) a content contributor for one of the idol groups; 2) maintain contact with all contributors and approach potential contributors; 3) supervise and make sure the contributing work continues on a daily base.

4.2.1 Procedures

Step 1: Look for content contributors. Key influencers in fan communities mostly have their own content database and sufficient knowledge of their own followers in order to feed them with useful information to engage followers. In Chinese fan communities, interestingly, fans of each idol group more or less have their own sub-community codes. In the beginning stage, content pool is limited to 11 groups of talents produced by Johnnys Associates that are most popular in China and have the most engaging fan communities both online (social media channels) and offline (tourism activities). When this collective content planning project starts, totally 30 influencers (at least 2 for each talent group) have agreed to participate.

Step 2: Content Input and Organization. A file is created for each talent group in a dropbox for influencers to input content. Each day, influencers will create content entries on Sina Weibo, and they will record each entry's content, genre, forwarded amount, comment amount (and subject matter if necessary) and the liked number as in the figure. They are also asked to input previous entries as many as possible using the same report sheet. (Figure 4.4)

Content is organized using the Google Map Tool as well. Each entry will be added on a map so that contributors can visualize the intensity of locations which helps to organize information by location for the [Nearby] Sector.

Step 3: Content Evaluation and follow-up. Each week all input will be evaluated and ranked by engaging rate, contents informative level, and time-

发布时间 (Time)	内容 (Content)	OA时间 (OA Time)	节目名称 (Titles)	归类 (Genre)	转发数 (Forwarding)	评论数 (Comment)	点赞数 (Liked)	优先度 (Priority)
2017/3/20	頂きハイジャンプ, スーパー系	201702	いただきはいじゃんぶ	バラエティ		17	23	29 中
2017/3/20	UrthCaffé 表参道店	201610	カインとアベル	ドラマ・ロケ	47			94 高
2017/3/19	前橋カトリック教会	201612	カインとアベル	ドラマ・ロケ	20			62 低
2017/3/19	よみうりランド	201612	カインとアベル	ドラマ・ロケ	93			44 中
2017/3/19	びんとこな 六本木ヒルズ店	201702	いただきはいじゃんぶ	バラエティ	54			22 低
2017/3/18	焼肉 名門	201702	いただきはいじゃんぶ	バラエティ	23			63 低
2017/3/18	来宮神社「リトルトーキョー」	201610	リトルトーキョーライ	バラエティ	107			66 高
2017/3/18	アカオハーブ&ローズガーデン	201610	リトルトーキョーライ	バラエティ	121			119 高
2017/3/17	GELATERIA MARGHERA「My」	201608	N/A	雑誌	69			71 中
2017/3/17	マリーナシティポルトヨーロッパ	201607	N/A	映画・ロケ	50			83 中
2017/3/17	舞鶴赤れんがパーク	201607	N/A	映画・ロケ	84			124 高

Figure 4.4: Content Input



Figure 4.5: Content Organization

sensitiveness. Although ultimately all entries are valuable input to the website, in order to testify the information inventory and evaluate the informations usefulness, we will filtrate the top 30 percent for the later information inventory experiment.

4.2.2 Inventory Check and References

Although in-house collective content planning can generate a great deal amount of information, it is difficult to promise that the inventory is completed. In real scenarios, it is possible that users request some information that are not yet included in the inner content hub. Therefore, it is very important to maintain an updated status of external information references, such as the national location guide website. Contributors should regularly confirm specific website services and social media accounts' update to optimize all possible resources for the content hub to provide more comprehensive content services.

4.2.3 Conclusions and Implications

Roughly, after conducting this collective content planning project for a month, more influencers have made contacts via Sina Weibo DM and are willing to participate as content contributors for their liked idol groups. According a simple questionnaire for the motivations, the most important one is being greatly interested in the content hub and would like to contribute as well as gain access to it. Until in July, there are 40 regular members along with 20 more contributors participating as content contributors.

This implies that fandom in Chinese communities are collective cultural practices. Since resources are unevenly distributed, the closer to resources, the greater social capital can be obtained in this fan community.

4.3 Design Website Models and Interface

4.3.1 Website Models

The first website building uses a free website builder. Basically the design follows the mentioned information architecture, navigation system and site map. Firstly, the following parts of the designed website will be introduced regarding their content and functions.

Homepage. Homepage of this website is simply designed with two sections for users to start choosing the path to information selection. By clicking either image, the website will direct users to the corresponding request questionnaire page where users can submit the form and receive intended content. (Figure 4.6)

About. There are two sections for this page: one introduces how to use this website with contact information (if a user would like to become contributor) and the other introduces the content hub and its contributors. Content published on this page intends to build up credibility of website providers and make connections with users. Therefore, words will be written in an informal manner and as many community codes as possible to make them look like conversations. (Figure 4.7)

Pick-Ups. Weekly updates and news feed from the content hub. Each group of contributors will organize what have been posted during a week in an entry. Sometimes, there may be some news about talents or something very interesting

The image shows a screenshot of the Findit. website's request form. The page is titled "Findit. YOUR CUSTOMIZED INFO POOL" and has navigation links for Home, About, Pick-Ups, and Contact or Join. The form is divided into two main sections: "BY TALENTS" and "BY SHOWS".

BY TALENTS section includes a list of names: TOKIO, NEWS, ft2, Sexy, 嵐, タツ, Hey! Sa.

BY SHOWS section includes a collage of show posters: 櫻井・有吉 THE 夜会, Do you Enjoy? Yes!, KING'S BRUNCH, 王様のブランチ, and ARA.

The right side of the form contains a "Request Form" with the following fields and options:

- 明星名称** (Celebrity Name): Text input field.
- Email**: Text input field with a note: "※必ず有効なメールアドレスを入力してください" (Please enter a valid email address).
- 情報来源** (Information Source): Radio button options: 电视剧 (TV Drama), 电影 (Movie), 综艺节目 (Variety Show), 演唱会 (Concert).
- 如果可以请输入该信息来源的完整名称:** (If possible, please enter the full name of the information source): Text input field.
- 请输入希望搜索的年份 (eg. 201701)** (Please enter the year you want to search for (eg. 201701)): Text input field.
- 如果信息主要选择了演唱会, 请填写演唱会的城市:** (If the information is primarily selected for a concert, please fill in the concert city): Radio button options: 东京 (Tokyo), 横滨 (Yokohama), 大阪 (Osaka), 名古屋 (Nagoya), 广岛 (Hiroshima), 有藏 (Aomori), other: .
- 请输入粉丝名称** (Please enter the fan name): Text input field.
- 请选择需要的信息** (Please select the information you need): Radio button options: 住址 (Address), 社交媒体 (SNS) (Social Media (Twitter, Instagram, etc.)), 外形特征 (Appearance), 兴趣爱好 (Interests).
- Verification**: A red "CAPTCHA" button and a text input field.

At the top of the form, there are instructions: "1. 输入明星或者组合的名称" (Enter the name of the celebrity or group) and "2. 勾选需要的相关信息" (Check the relevant information you need). A red "SUBMIT" button is located below these instructions.

Figure 4.6: Homepage Request Form

that contributors would like to share, entries can be generated as well. Users can subscribe by talent group or even by contributor, as demonstrated in Figure 4.7.

4.4 How the Website Works for the purpose

To simplify the efforts and reduce information retrieving layers, the considered method is to limit the amount of information users need to access. The concept is that the website will firstly have content contributors to process information, as demonstrated in Figure 4.8.

4.4.1 Users: Request Information

Figure 4.6 shows the page where users get to select the first tier categorization: either by talents or by shows. After choosing, on the next page users will fill in or select necessary information categorization via a request form as introduced earlier in the section according to the information site map. After submitting the requesting form, users will be directed to the page of screened information results.



Figure 4.7: About and Pick-ups Pages

4.4.2 Website: Deliver Information

When the website service first starts, the information delivery may need to be manually completed. Upon receiving the requests, contributors corresponding to the idol sector will manually filter information from the content hub database and send the result back via emails. Users can download the file for future references even when they are traveling. Scheduled delivery time will take one business day. Despite the time gap delivering information, this is possibly working for our target users because they have work during day hours.

In future movement, the delivery process should be completed by designed computer mechanism automatically. Selected content page will be shown immediately after the questionnaire is submitted and users can still choose to receive

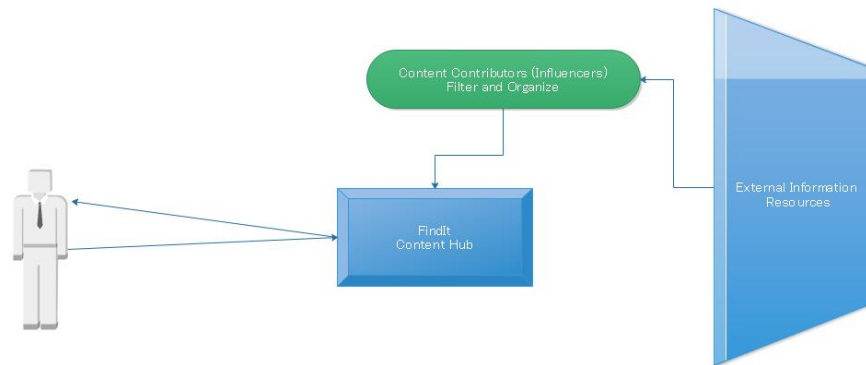


Figure 4.8: Function Model

the content page afterwards via email.

4.5 Website Implementation

4.5.1 Preliminary Launch

The website is launched via website builders and is promoted via influencers' sina weibo accounts to their followers. Since the following months are quite busy with upcoming tour schedules, experiments are conducted to testify the website concept and the content inventory (following section 5.1).

4.5.2 Potential Problems

While proceeding with the UI drafting, information gathering is under process simultaneously. The first problem will be the copyright. When integrating all information into one platform, at a rather early stage, inevitably some may need to be transported from original sites such as blogs and Twitters. Sources need to be carefully and strictly sited.

To generate more data, instead of continue gather information online, inviting social influencers in a niche group to become a regular input is as well a solution. In most cases, entries and information input by influencers are quality-guaranteed.

Although users should be more than welcome to contribute, regulations of the content at some level should be developed.

Chapter 5

Evaluations and Discussions

This thesis intends to understand Japanese pop culture fan communities in mainland China along with their cultural and economical capabilities in a global context against the stereotyped view. Along the process, by identifying a certain part of this group as a niche market, a designed website is proposed catering to the segments unmet needs. This designed website, as introduced in earlier sectors, aims to minimize target users efforts and still can be provided equivalent amount of information. To do so, the website serves as a content hub in which users can receive direct information feed based on their specific requests.

In order to prove this concept that designed request-delivery website system can achieve the above goal, two parts of evaluation are considered necessary: 1) users can spare less time and efforts when they are using the website services than they are not; 2) the information they receive is valid and useful. Two experiments are conducted to evaluate each hypothesis respectively. Both experiments are operated by **simulating** the website's service model (user-request/website-delivery) in order to obtain valid results.

5.1 Experiment I

In this experiment, the focus is to verify the first hypothesis of the designed concept that the website service model can reduce users' time and efforts searching intended fandom tourism information.

5.1.1 Content of Experiment

Participants: 10 Chinese fans who have previously visited filming locations and have the minimum capability to search Japanese site.

Procedures: 1. Participants are required to search and organized all the following information the same way as they have done searching previously:

- Tokyo Dome Venue Information including location, seat chart, transportation.
- Filming locations regarding Talent R.Y around Shibuya Area
- Filming locations regarding Drama K in Tokyo

2. Participants are required to record the following data regarding their information gathering experiences: 1) total spent time; 2) numbers of sites browsed; 3) total spent time on browsing sites; 4) total spent time on organizing information; 5) whether VPN is used; and 6) whether the participant think that all necessary information is found. After participants complete their searching, they will report the data as well as a copy of their organized information content in any way they feel comfortable. In order to record the most valid data, there is presumably no time limit pushing participants to submit their searching work. Nonetheless, considering this is an experiment, all participants are encouraged to report back within 2 weeks.

3. After each participant submit her/his report, she/he receives two links: one is the beta version of published FindIt website and a link of an information request form as designed for the website. Participants are required to fill in the request form in order to receive the same information as they have searched:

- Tokyo Dome Venue Information including location, seat chart, transportation.
- Filming locations regarding Talent R.Y around Shibuya Area
- Filming locations regarding Drama K in Tokyo

4. Each participant will receive a content page via email according to their request forms after they submit the forms. Included there is another survey regarding their two experiences searching and receiving similar scope of information. The survey includes questions as: 1) how many hours have you spent on exploring the website and completed filling the request form; 2) do you find it difficult to understand the website and fill in the request form; 3) do you think waiting for 2

business days are too long, fair or short; 4) compared with your previous searching experience, have you spent more time/efforts or less; 5) compared with your previous searching experience, have you received more information, equivalent, or less; 6) do you want to use the this request-based fandom information site again.

5.1.2 Analysis and Conclusions of Experiment I

Data on how many efforts spent by participants in their first information searching experience is organized as shown in figure 5.1.

Traditional Searching						
Participants	Total Spent Hours/ Days	Numbers of Browsed Sites	Spent hours on browsing sites	Spent hours on organizing info	Whether VPN is used	Whether all intended info is found
1	20hr/ 3 days	36	16h	4h	Yes	Yes
2	24hr/ 12 days	41	20h	4h	Yes	Not Sure
3	16hr/ 7 days	29	13h	3h	Yes	Not Sure
4	32hr/ 10 days	37	1d 6h	2h	Yes	Not Sure
5	14hr/ 7 days	23	13h	1h	Yes	Not Sure
6	12hr/ 7 days	25	10h	2h	Yes	No
7	27hr/ 9 days	34	1d	3h	Yes	Not Sure
8	36hr/ 13 days	35	1d 6h	6h	Yes	Yes
9	25hr/ 10 days	28	23h	2h	Yes	Not Sure
10	14hr/ 7 days	20	12h	2h	Yes	No

Figure 5.1: Spent Efforts Calculating Chart

According to the reported data, when researching information by themselves, the average used time per participants is 22 hours in total during 8.5 days. 6 out of 10 have spent no more than 2 hours per day to search for information due to daily job. The average number of browsed sites is 31.8 per person. All participants have used VPN service in order to search use Google search engine and Twitter.

Data according to participants second information searching experience (based on the survey) is demonstrated on Figure 5.2. The average time spent on exploring FindIt's landing pages and fill in the request forms is 36.5 minutes (0.6 hour). Due to the experiment operation, it takes two days for users to receive information about the determined content. Compared to the previous self-searching experience, the time and efforts users spent by themselves can be greatly reduced when they consider that they can still receive an equivalent or larger amount of information. Therefore, the first hypothesis of the designed concept could be considered

verified.

Participants	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6
1	1h	No	Fair	Less	Equivalent	Yes
2	30m	No	Fair	Less	More	Yes
3	30m	No	Long	Less	More	Yes
4	45m	A little	Fair	Less	More	Yes
5	20m	No	Long	Less	More	Yes
6	30m	No	Long	Less	More	Yes
7	1h	A little	Long	Less	More	Yes
8	40m	No	Fair	Less	Equivalent	Yes
9	20m	No	Fair	Less	More	Yes
10	30m	No	Long	Less	More	Yes

Figure 5.2: Survey Results

However, there are still some limitations regarding this experiment. This experiment intends to compare traditional self-searching experience and the request-delivery FindIt website model focusing on the **time and efforts** spent by participants. Possible occurred discrepancies when participants fill in request forms are dismissed. That says, regardless of the submitted request forms, users will receive the same pre-organized content page as results. And participants have been required to evaluate the received information amount according to the requested information title rather than the way they fill in the request forms. In real scenarios, users may receive different result content page utterly depending on the way they fill in the request forms.

5.2 Experiment II.

This experiment intends to testify the second hypothesis of the designed concept that the content received by users will be valid and useful. This experiment is designed as a simulation to the website serviceusers complete a request form of certain information and then the website provides corresponding content, so that users will only need one step and one website instead of all other efforts to receive what they will need for a fandom travel experience in Japan. Basically, how participants respond to this experiment will help to determine whether the concept of designing the website is of practical value.

Participants in this experiment are completely different from participants in experiment I in order to receive more valid data.

5.2.1 Content of Experiment

Participants: 10 Chinese fans who have at least 1 previous experience traveling to filming locations in Japan and would be attending a concert event held in Yokohama Stadium on July 15th and July 16th.

Procedures: 1. In order to simulate the website service flow, participants have firstly submitted identical online questionnaire as which are provided on the website. According to the requested field, after 2 business days, corresponding files are sent to each participant via email. Participants are encouraged to not do additional research and use solely the information provided to them. However, if necessary, they can use additional information but need to include this part into the final survey and report.

2. Participants are required to report their experiences and complete a survey scoring:1) the effectiveness and satisfaction of this planning experience; 2)the information usefulness level within 1 week after the concert ends.The evaluation Scoring Scale is demonstrated in Figure 5.3. Participants are asked to mainly score based on the content provided but as well as the overall planning experiences.

5.2.2 Experiment results and Conclusions

Scoring Results is demonstrated in Table 5.1 and detailed scoring distribution for content evaluation is demonstrated on Figure 5.4. 50 percent of all participants consider that information provided by the website is sufficient and is of practical use for fans to prepare for their trips to Japan. Because it is sufficient to only refer to this one website, planning time is reduced to a great extent and it feels very convenient. Arguably, this can be considered as a result that all content contributors are experienced in attending events and thus they have found understanding about what kind of information is essential to all audience.

The other half considers additional information is necessary. According to submitted additional information by participants, the insufficiency seems to be resulted from inadequate amount of personalized options. For instance, in terms of the accommodation, although the concert is held in Yokohama, hotels in tokyo

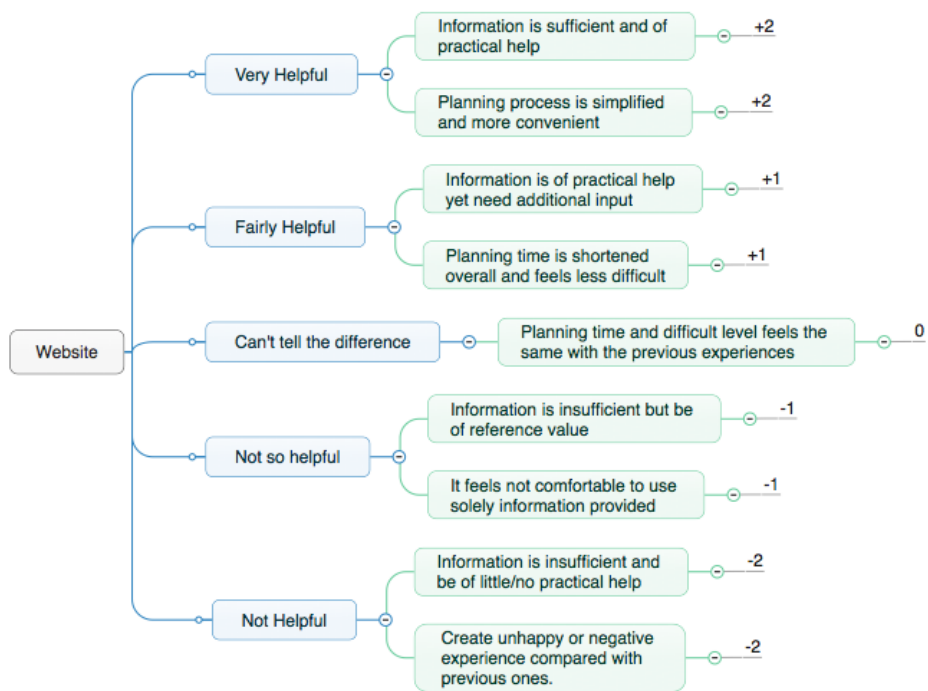


Figure 5.3: Evaluation Scoring Scale

areas such as Shibuya, Harajyuku, and Shinjyuku should be included as well. In addition, some participants are in need of location information from more than 10 years ago which is yet included in the content hub.

Additionally, 8 out of 10 participants express concerns that when they are told to only use the information provided, they were actually worried because each travel experience to attend the concert meant a great deal. However, they felt relieved while using the information because it seemed that information provider knew exactly what fans would want to know to plan a fandom travel.

Table 5.1: Evaluation Scoring Results

Participants	Scoring Results
1	2
2	2
3	1
4	4
5	2
6	1
7	1
8	4
9	2
10	4

Participants concerns somehow point to the authority as mentioned earlier. It is necessary to build up trust between the information provided by the website and the potential users. Strategies to solve this problem will be discussed later in the future development session. In addition, the feedback that participants feel that the information is right for them is very positive, and this feedback is resulted from the fact that website information provider is a long-term member who have already had profound understanding of this segment group. This feedback demonstrates that the website has a proper targeted audience and the information can indeed help to solve problems.

Participants	Very Helpful		Fairly Helpful	
	sufficient/ helpful	Simple/ Convenient	useful/ additional	simplified/ less difficult
1			1	1
2			1	1
3			1	
4	2	2		
5	2			
6			1	
7			1	
8	2	2		
9	2			
10	2	2		

Figure 5.4: Scoring Distribution

5.3 Experiment Discussions and Conclusions

5.3.1 Statement of Limitations

Surveys, considered as the second research method, however can reach a larger audience within a much shorter time to gather information with regard to peoples attitudes, beliefs and feelings. It is a comparatively simple and straightforward methods that experimenters can design questionnaires in various fashions and disseminate them either online or in person. Although surveys are convenient to conduct, there are as well some potential problems. On one hand, people may not be utterly honest while answering the questionnaires, which is a factor that experimenters usually have almost no control of, and thereby lead to less credible results or even incorrect conclusions. On the other hand, it is also very difficult to formulate perfect questions that will not result in biased answers or other flaws.

5.4 Conclusions

Overall, based on the two conducted evaluation experiments, the concept of the designed website services is verified as: 1) the website can reduce users' spent time and efforts in searching information in terms of fandom tourism. The average time is reduced from 22 hours (8.5 days) to 0.6 hour (2 days). VPN services are no

loner required and in the most ideal case, users only need to visit the "FindIt" website rather than visiting an average of 31.8 sites. Content wise, although results suggest that the current content hub could not satisfy all users to a perfect level, many of them should find the provided information corresponding to their request sufficient and be of practical help.

The implications are on one hand, the content hub needs to be updated not only on current and future matters but as well on previous ones regardless of years. One way to add input is referring to the Japanese national location guide website as it is now the most organized and comprehensive location information site among all researched results. The other implication for improvement is the add more personalized options to the request form. The current request form is in its most essential format. In the future, options will be divided down to more detailed ones in order to provide further accurate content.

Chapter 6

Strategies for Future Improvement

Considering the evaluation results above, I consider that there are mainly two parts of improvement required in the future: one is the sustainability and the other is the monetization. Sustainability keeps the user flow and monetization keeps the website running.

6.1 Increase Popularity and Maintain Sustainability

Popularity

There are two methods considered to promote this website and make it more aligned with the target consumers' culture and behavior. The first is to create Sina Weibo and WeChat public service accounts. Since Sina Weibo and WeChat are the most frequently used social media and communication tools in China, creating accounts on these platforms can increase the connecting points with users. Users can contact website providers directly via these social platforms.

The second strategy is to make the request service available on these two platforms. This intends to encourage users to use website services as a byproduct to their heavy daily use of Sina Weibo and WeChat. A system may need to be developed to receive and analyze the request elements, and finally generate the required content from database to users.

Sustainability

There are several ways to enhance the sustainability: 1) improve the websites performance regarding each of seven standards discussed earlier especially the authority part to strengthen user stickiness and raise trust level; 2) improve information inventory and optimize the resources for both audience and information providers.

Detailed Strategies will be:

- Incorporate influencer marketing strategies. In the fan community, word of mouth strategy is very effective as fans are prone to trust influencers. Therefore, bring influencers in the fan community (Sina Weibo Accounts that have more than 5000 followers and high engagement rate) to this website will raise the credibility of the website itself.
- Enhance the quality and quantity of information inventory. The amount of information that this website can provide to users is significant. To enhance the information inventory: 1) increase frequency: content needs to be updated as many times as possible during a day; 2) increase currency: new content needs to be updated as soon as possible after original resources are released. In order to complete the above two, a team is being built with influencers who are able to pro-actively obtain information from Japanese information resources in a frequent manner during a day.
- Adding more functionalities for social media connections.

6.2 Monetization Strategies

Pay per Request and Subscription

Compared with other general website, this one will not gain as much traffic due to the very specific segmentation. However, the engagement rate will be presumably much higher. Therefore, it is possible to generate profit from users. At the beginning stage, requests are free. In the future, with more requests received, the website may consider price up the service and adopt membership/subscription system.

Partnership and Advertisement

Another major considered method for monetization is to partner with services as well targeting fan communities, such as proxy purchasing companies (Buyee.jp, Find Japan, Samurai Buyer, etc) and smaller travel agency in Japan provides customized tourism services. Examples of official Sina Weibo accounts such as Buyee Japan and FindJapan are demonstrated in Figure 6.1. Currently, more and more cross border e-commerce companies are considering Japanese idol fans in China as business potentials.

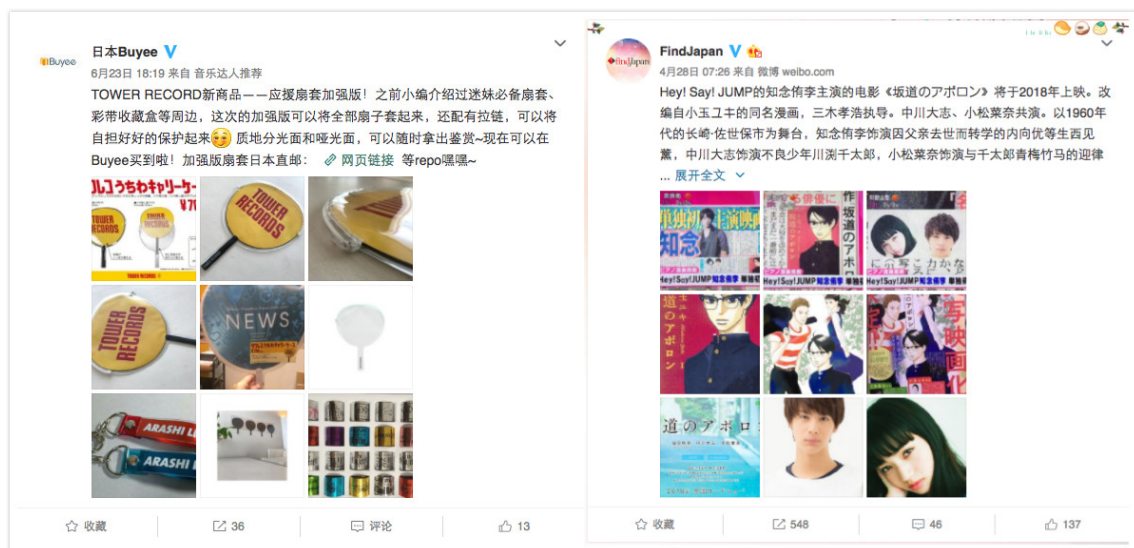


Figure 6.1: Weibo Post Targeting Chinese Fans

[Figure captured from Sina Weibo Open Pages [3]]¹²

In the potential partnership, what the website FindIt can offer to partners is the proper targeted segment. Many services are trying to use social media channels as a connecting point to attract and engage potential users. Nevertheless, general social media campaigns can take a rather long time for companies to reach their targeted users. Through the website FindIt, partner companies that can directly make input to the proper consumer hubs. As for the website itself, this partnership can be one of the value position that differentiates FindIt to other potential website services to fandom tourism.

Notes

- 1 Buyee Japan:<http://weibo.com/u/3956358028>
- 2 FindJapan:<http://weibo.com/findjapan>

Chapter 7

Conclusions

7.1 Summaries of Works and Importance

International fan communities are more enabled than ever in this globalized and internet-based world. They play active roles in global cultural communications and are loyalty consumers with strong purchasing power in the niche markets to which they belong. In this thesis, we intend and have taken a look into the Chinese fan community of Japanese pop culture to not only understand its role in cultural communications but also and more importantly its potentials as niche consumers.

In mainland China, Japanese pop culture community has evolved while dealing with some unique obstacles: historical stereotypes and internet regulations. Historical stereotype has subtly limited the audience scope and internet regulations have restrained people from obtaining information from common overseas social media channels. This results in a hierarchical fan community and a top-down information-flow mechanism in China. Influencers are crucial in terms of the community development by connecting Chinese fans to Japanese host culture and its fan communities. These influencers can access both informational and physical resources from Japanese host culture, and comparatively stable financial status to either live in Japan or frequently visit Japan. It is important to understand the fan community hierarchy because it helps to identify the key segmentation of the later proposed website services.

There are several reasons to consider the discussed Chinese fan community as a potential profitable niche market. Cultural-economical communications have been encouraged by both governments. Tourism industry is one of the most obvious examples. Chinese travelers in general have already proved their purchasing power and market value to Japanese merchandises. Further, in terms of Japanese pop culture fans, they have higher frequency travel to Japan, convey more cultural

desire and higher consumer stickiness, which make them worthwhile to be explored as niche market consumers.

Unlike general tourism, Japanese pop culture fans have their own purpose visiting Japan to participate into events and seek connections with the Japanese host culture. They would like to visit spots related to their idols or loved media content. Relevant traveling information is rather difficult to obtain because: 1) restrained visit to foreign sites and VPN utilization; 2) scattered information resources requiring language proficiency, searching ability, and organization capability.

Although indeed, the targeted consumer segment have already more or less equipped with the capability to make their way to the final destination, the time spent on finding and organizing the information is a fair load to the very busy modern people. Therefore, we proposed a website that does the work for our target consumers helping them to search and organize fandom tourism information. On one hand, the website provides pre-organized information to fans that can greatly enhance travel planning experience, reducing peoples time and efforts. On the other, the website provides partnership services with related entities such as proxy purchasing companies and individual travel agencies intending to improve local travel experiences and following daily experiences as fans.

During the researching process, we have found that content of this website can substantially shorten the amount of time that people seeking and organizing information. In addition, content provided by the website is more comprehensive and think ahead of what people will need because we perceive the information in the consumers shoes. By doing this, it helps to better connect Chinese fan communities to the Japanese host culture. As our consumers of this website are mainly first and second tier influencers who are very familiar with the fan cultures to which they belong, what information they would like to consume and how they consume the information are typical and valuable examples to continue future studies in the Japanese pop culture fan communities.

7.2 Future Development

Regarding the assumptions and results of data analysis and evaluations, several anticipated future enhancement and, however, questions as well. As content, in terms of both quality and quantity, matters significantly to users having a certain

level of related knowledge and high demands [7], how to maintain a continuous and viable data generation for this website will be a crucial problem for future development. On one hand, one solution could be that this website becomes a social media platform as well where niche customers being motivated to share information in a timely manner. Not only influencers are invited for inputting, channels for general users to contribute should be built and ensured.

In addition, although the current intension for this platform is based on the website format, and pages can be easily re-adjusted to mobile platforms, regarding the future trends, a mobile-corresponding platform should be taken into serious consideration.

Furthermore, the platform intends to build and enhance the internal sub-culture communities. Arguably, it should be brought to a more open sight to bridge multiple entities related to the niche tourism industry. That says, not only information receivers such as the users should be able to benefited from this website, the other side of the businesses, such as destination service providers, restaurants owners, travel agencies should have the opportunity to be actually benefited simultaneously.

When two sides of an industry can both be gaining from a service, this new service is ultimately proved its value and will continue to become a substantial and sustainable one. Otherwise, it is very likely that it will soon be replaced by other services at some point of time.

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