

The Illusion of Never "Collapse": the Cognitive Narratology Study of Virtual Idols

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Abstract: The production and operation of virtual idols is a cultural and economic problem, while the acceptance of fans to virtual idols is a problem of cognitive and narrative research. Although the virtual idol is a "fake" digital illusion, its narrative provides fans with a self-consistent world of possibilities. The cognitive diagram of the fans is combined with the possible world of the virtual idols, and then the integration of meaning and the transfer of emotion are completed through the mutual reference of the text. These texts break the virtual division and enter the lives of fans, create a circle culture around virtual idols. Virtual idols are actually created by humans, but they are largely treated as an independent actor. This study will analyze the narrative mode of virtual idols, and explore how fans have emotional sustenance on virtual idols from the perspective of cognitive narrative science.

1. Introduction

Virtual idol refers to the fictional image without noumenon reality relying on the presentation of modern audio and visual technology. The earliest concept of virtual idols was born in Japan. In the 1980s, Japanese companies proposed to cultivate "national virtual idols", and created the first virtual idol "Yida apricot" in 1999. However, due to the immature modeling technology at that time, and the character movements were also relatively rigid, "Yida apricot" did not attract too much market attention. The truly global virtual idol is the virtual singer "Hatsune Miku", launched by The Japanese company Criston Future in 2007. The core technology of Hatsune Miku is speech synthesis technology, relying on the sound source library behind it, users can get songs similar to real people by inputting lyrics and tones. This "input-output" mode realizes the initial interaction between people and virtual idols. After Hatsune Furoku, another important node in virtual idols is the development of artificial intelligence technology. Virtual idols equipped with artificial intelligence technology have learning ability and can complete verbal interaction with people. For example, "Microsoft XiaoBing" developed by Microsoft in 2014 has a complete AI interactive framework, with multiple roles, such as poets, painters and singers. At the same time, it also provides AI support for more than 100 interactive subjects in China and Japan [1]. Under the power of artificial intelligence technology, the new generation of virtual idols is rising rapidly, and the development of dialogue engine and multiple interactive sensory technology enables people to achieve interaction with virtual characters.

It is the development of visual presentation technology that makes virtual idols truly enter the public. Through the holographic projection, the virtual idols can perform on the real stage and interact with the real scene in real time. At the 2021 CCTV Spring Festival Gala, virtual idol Luo Tianyi took the form of AR images, singing songs with live actors. Virtual idols, like real idols, participate in concerts, advertising endorsements, live streaming with goods and other activities. They are no longer characters isolated from the screen, and have a meaning and emotional connection with people's real life.

Compared with real idols, virtual idols are a digital illusion that "you can do whatever you want", which can give fans a complete sense of trust that never collapses. "House collapse" refers to the collapse of the idol caused by the scandal. The metaphor of "House" reveals that idols, economic companies, and fans are in a common container of interests. Because real idols have uncontrollable high risk, once the real idol collapse of the house, may mean the end of the idol's career, the enterprise faces economic losses, fans loss of emotional sustenance multiple losses. Virtual idols are not troubled by scandals, which also reduces their risk factor in the operation process. American scholar John Fiske believes that the study of cultural industry can be divided into two parts: financial economy and cultural economy. The process of financial economy is "the producer →cultural product →advertisers", while the process of cultural economy is "the audience →meaning/pleasure→the audience" [2]. At present, the virtual idol business operation has been relatively mature, and the economy operation process and realization mode have also been clear, but there are still some questions to be answered in the process of cultural economy. For example, how are virtual illusions created by digital technology connected to reality and produce meaning? How do virtual characters become people's emotional sustenance? What are they chasing after virtual idols?

On the Internet, fans answered questions about Hatsune Miku about why they chase virtual idols.

"Hatsune is a software, Hatsune is a commodity, she doesn't exist. Games are software, games are also a commodity, fake, don't play. Animation is also a commodity, but also made by software, don't see. Novels are commodities, they are written by people, but that is all fake, don't read. Stories are all processed, fake, and fairy tales are all deceptive.

We face the reality, struggle for a hundred years to die, nothing, so life is false? So we love Hatsune."

About the reasons for chasing virtual idols, this comment is a representative view. Both truth and fiction are only materials to construct the meaning of life. Virtual idols are false, but they construct the real meaning. This answer seems to answer people's questions about the cognition of virtual idols, but the nothingness of the end of life still can not explain how "fans can accept virtual characters as idols, produce meaning and place emotions in the process of star-chasing". Based on this question, this paper tries to take the cognitive narrative science as the theoretical perspective, regard the virtual idol itself as a text collection, and observe the fans' cognitive strategy of the virtual idol narrative.

2. Analysis of the Possible World of Virtual Idol Narration

From the narrative point of view, the relationship between the virtual idol hides the possible world. The theory of "text/ script " is the concept proposed by scholar Zhao Yiheng about the chaotic situation of the term of "story / discourse" in narrative stratification [3]. The "script" is the abbreviation of the "narrative text", and the "text" should be understood as the narrative state before the formation of the "script". In a follow-up to the study of the narrative text, he further divided the "base" of the " text/script " theory into "text 1" and "text 2", in which the "text 1" is a collection of materials, which are selected as the "text 2". This developed three levels of "text 1-text 2-script ".

Specifically applying this theory to the analysis of the virtual idol, can put the virtual idol based on rich audio library, action and expression system resources as "text 1", and the fans interact with virtual idol, the virtual "text 1" virtual idol selected with the voice, action, expression data resources, thus forming the "text 2", these data resources for virtual idol formed the final image. In this process, two alternative options are presented. The first is the material selection of "text 1", "text 2", and the second is the form selection of the text presentation of "text 2", "script" [4].

In the process of the choice relationship between the background and the text, it contains the possible world of narrative. In the step by step choice, maybe the world will gradually appear into a real world. Leibniz first explicitly proposed the concept of the possible world, who said God can create an endless world, and only our world becomes a real world, it should be the best of all possible worlds. In other words, maybe the world exists in concepts and logic, and it is connected to the real world, but also has temporal and spatial dimensions. Possible world has two characteristics. First, Possible world must need the reproduction by the media. The real world is real and unique, and can be touched directly. However, for the possible world, the recipient must feel the possible world of narrative through the media of novels, sound and painting of movies, and combined with his own imagination. Second, the world may produce a lot of blank space, and it will certainly not be as specific as the real world. This blank space gives the possible world plenty of imagination [5].

Possible world is the bond between the idol and his fans. An idol with greater possibilities can give fans more space to imagine in the conceptual domain. Idols are a kind of assembled culture. The body of an idol is always not only a collection of flesh and blood, but also a collection of text. The shaping process of an idol is essentially a process of "entering the text and texting it". The shaping process of the real person idol can be summarized as selecting the right text label from the many original packaging materials (the "text 1"), and then integrating with the real person image to form the idol as the "text 2"). The basic semantics of a real idol lies in the real world, but its relationship between fans is rooted in the possible world.

The possible world of real idols is divided into two categories: First, it is the possible world created by using the blank of its own background. For example, the love world of a single idol is a possible world, which can give fans more imagination and comfort. If the idol announces marriage, it is actually the only real inevitable to turn the heterogeneous and self-consistent fans into reality, which will inevitably cause the collapse of the possible world of the idol itself. The second way to create a possible world is to get real idols into the fictional compartment. For example, idols acting in movies and TV series is a typical behavior of using fictional regions to shape the possible world. The idol itself exists in the real world, which is the only real one that can not be fictional, but the characters he creates can be parasitic in the fictional stories of film and television works. Idols need to keep the exposure of film and television works to provide fans with enough possible world. Fans can empathize with their idols through the possible world of their film and television characters, or even create the possible world through text poaching, and maintain the emotional relationship with their idols.

Compared with real idols, virtual idols have a difference in the possible world, which determines that virtual idols have a broader possible world. the virtual idol as an physical digital illusion, it is parasitic in the existence world, the basic semantics is the possible world, and can enter the impossible world. The basic semantics of real idols lies in the real world, which has an objective and unique correspondence with the reality. This limitation of subjectivity makes real idols need to create a possible world through film and television works or the fiction of the humanities, so as to meet the imagination of fans and maintain the relationship. However, the virtual idol itself is in the framework of fiction division. It does not have the core of subjectivity, but a kind of accumulation of text, which instead makes the virtual idol have a greater possible world in the narrative. Virtual idol Microsoft XiaoBing can play the role of singer, painter and poet at the same time to satisfy

fans' imagination of different identities of idols. Hatsune Miku and Luo Tianyi not only have a rich voice resource library for fans to sing the songs they want, but also can go on the real stage to perform with real people. Bilibili New Year's Eve party in 2020, Luo in cooperation with folk music master Fang Jinlong, Luo as a virtual character on the stage real-time modelling, change in the stage space into particles flying shuttle, let the performance by the possible world into the impossible world, create a visual spectacle.

The process of fans chasing virtual idols includes the narration of virtual idols and the interpretation of fans. If we want to find out the problem of "why people chase virtual idols", it is not enough to analyze the possible world of virtual idols only from the narrative perspective. We also need to observe the interpretation process of the virtual idols by the fans, and further analyze how the possible world of virtual idols is combined with the fans' cognition. This involves the dimension of emotional transfer between fans and virtual idols.

3. The Emotional Transmission of Fans to Virtual Idols in the Cognitive Process

In the study of the cognitive process of fans, we should not only observe the process of people's cognition of meaning, but also take into account the accompanying emotional effects. When human and the outside world interact, meaning and emotion are usually in parallel. "human, as an objective, perceptual being, is a moving being; because it feels that it is moved, it is a passionate being." [6]

In the study of cognitive narrative, there are also different views on the emotions of text recipients in the process of text interpretation. As Levinson believes that, text recipients first need to believe in the real existence of the imaginary object, in order to experience the real emotions. But some scholars believe that characters in a fictional world can also create emotional experiences. For example, the audience of dramas know that the story is fictional, but still have strong emotional fluctuations about the love story of the protagonist in the story. According to Stockwell, people feel the emotional experience when understanding fiction and the real world, but the experience effect is different at the higher level of cognition. People's emotional experience of the real world is often stimulated by the environment and combined with the individual framework. The emotional experience of the virtual world needs to be mediated by the virtual text framework and obtained through emotional transfer. Fans' emotional transfer to virtual idols is mainly conducted through two channels: the first is the layer of emotional memory based on the aggregation axis, and the second is the interpretation of the emotional cohesion and maintenance of the community based on the combination axis [7].

3.1 Accumulation of Emotional Memory Based on the Aggregation Axis

Virtual idols are a useful collection of text in a wide world of possibilities, connected to each individual fan, and providing each fan with a connecting port for text to carry emotions. For example, for the virtual singer Hatsune Miku, users can buy the official software, input the lyrics and tones for Hatsune Miku to sing, and make the singing more emotional through the adjustment of specific parameters. Virtual idols as a collection of text is shared by people, but their emotions are private and heterogeneous. This personal behavior, which fans call "tuning", is an important way for fans to establish emotional connections with virtual idols. Virtual idols carry fans' emotional memories of happiness, sadness and loneliness, which exist on the diachronic aggregation axis and accumulate over time. When virtual idols accept the mapping of fans' emotions for a long time, they will gradually transform into an existence like friends, providing fans with emotional sustenance and dependence.

Virtual idols do not have real bodies, but the emotions that fans project on them are real. Fans through virtual idol coexistence for a long time, will be in reality secret or fragile emotion on virtual

idol, this kind of emotional memory is not forgotten, and was transferred and carried to the virtual idol.

3.2 The Emotional Adhesion of the Explain Community Based on the Combination Axis

For fan groups, virtual idol is a public text symbol, which enables fans to get emotional attribution in the interpretation community in the combination axis. The combination axis is an important dimension of people's thinking. Jacobson believes that the combination axis can be regarded as a "binding axis" that functions as adjacency adhesion. In the same explanatory community, "the members must be consistent, because their eyes (and their actions) are consistent with the purpose and goal in the mind of the community, and in the eyes of the community, some view should be obvious, inevitable, and simply cannot be different" [8].

Whether real idols or virtual idols, they all form their own interpretation communities. We can think that the "houses" of idols are actually the interpretation community formed by the collection of narrative texts. The process of explaining the formation of a community is essentially a process of choice on the combination axis, which goes in reverse. While developing their own cognition of virtual idols, fans also select others' cognition on the combination axis and form a common community of interpretation.

The current development of the Internet platform allows the fans of virtual idols to quickly find their own explanatory communities in the Weibo, Douban. In explaining the community, members not only need to exchange meaning, but also produce mutual emotional bonding. This emotional adhesion on the combination axis is not only an important condition for community maintenance, but also enables individuals to obtain emotional belonging and meet the needs of people's emotional communication. In the community, idols are not only a carrier of meaning, but also an emotional bond. Fans share the text with others by sharing the second successful creation success of virtual idols, editing video sets, purchasing and displaying peripheral products, and creating and sharing humanity, so as to obtain group emotional identity and arouse emotional resonance. A fan message on the Internet reflected this emotion: "*Because I once played the song in front of my whole class. But I didn't expect that our whole class is all fans of Hatsune Miku, when listening to this song, our whole class were crying.*".

4. Conclusion

As a fusion of technology and art, virtual idol constructs a new "fan-idol" relationship. Virtual idols, there is no risk of "collapse" in commercial operation, can give fans a complete sense of trust; in the narrative, the base is open to fans, providing a more possible world for fans. Through the meaning integration and secondary creation of the background of virtual idols, fans can produce an amazing experience beyond the original cognition.

With the development of artificial intelligence and holographic technology, virtual idols are also gradually breaking through the dimensional wall, and making fans form a real emotional attachment. Virtual idol not only serves as a carrier to carry the emotional memory of fans, but also serves as an intermediary to allow fans to obtain group emotional identity in the interpretation community. we gradually treat the media as human beings. The study of the communication practice of virtual idols from the level of human acceptance and cognition provides a theoretical perspective for us to understand the relationship between people and the media today. As business operations become more mature and diversified, virtual idols will be further embedded into our lives. When people can construct their idols by "self-help", the meta-narrative core of the idols themselves is also dissolved, and this turn also provides new issues and theoretical challenges for our research.

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