Brand Communities as Safe Spaces: How Can Consumers Interact around a Stigmatized Celebrity

Xiaorou Song

A Thesis in the John Molson School of Business

Department of Marketing

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Science (Marketing) at

Concordia University

Montréal, Québec, Canada

March 2023

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY
School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

By: Xiaorou Song

Entitled: Brand Communities as Safe Spaces: How Can Consumers Interact around a
            Stigmatized Celebrity

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science (Marketing)

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with
respect to originality and quality.
Signed by the final Examining Committee:

_____Bianca Grohmann _____Chair
                 Chair's name

_____Michèle Paulin _____Examiner
                 Examiner's name

_____ Pierre-Yann Dolbec ___ Supervisor
                 Supervisor's name

Approved by   _____ Darlene Walsh_____
                     Chair of Department or Graduate Program Director

                     Anne-Marie Croteau_____
                     Dean of Faculty

Abstract

Brand Communities as Safe Spaces: How Can Consumers Interact around a Stigmatized Celebrity

By Xiaorou Song

Existing work has proposed that a brand community can create value for both consumers and the brand. Yet, when a brand community is stigmatized, consumers might face outside threats by participating in it. While we know about consumers participating in legitimate brand communities, we know much less about consumers participating in stigmatized ones. This research answers this gap by exploring the mechanism through which consumers create a vetted safe space where they can interact around a stigmatized consumption interest while being protected. To theorize the mechanisms through which stigmatized consumers establish and manage their safe space, I perform a case study of a stigmatized Chinese celebrity and his fan community and analyze a qualitative dataset composed of interviews and archival data. My analysis demonstrates five mechanisms. First, I explain how fans ensure a safe community by managing membership and restricting community entry to only other existing fan. Second, I show how fans maintain unity by establishing a collective identity, managing internal conflicts, and emphasizing the common interest. Third, I discuss how fans ensure group secrecy by preventing information leakage and avoiding unnecessary online interactions with outsiders. Fourth, I explain how safety is ensured through policing, exemplifying through the monitoring of community members and moderators. Last, I show how fans extend safety beyond the community by making public spaces safer and making close relationships safer.

I enrich the literature on brand communities by introducing the concept of safe space and theorizing how it is enacted in a consumption context. I also contribute to marketing practice by offering managerial guidelines for the management of stigmatized brand communities.

Keywords: Stigma, boundary management, safe space, brand community

Acknowledgments

I want to express my sincere gratitude to all those who have offered me invaluable help and guidance during my graduate study and thesis research. The most profound and honest appreciation goes to my supervisor, Dr. Pierre-Yann Dolbec, without whom I could not manage to finish this thesis and reach the end of the program. He gave me a lot of confidence and encouragement when I encountered a difficult time. I enjoyed all our conversations and meetings, after which I was always inspired. His continuous and professional advice helped me complete this thesis. I thank him for his support, guidance, and empathy. Also, I am grateful to all the teachers who have taught me in the past years for leading me to enter the business world and explore its beauty.

I want to thank my family for their love and support during my study. I'd like to give special thanks to my boyfriend Émile, who has always accompanied and encouraged me during the difficult process.

Finally, I thank my friends for the happiness and encouragement they have passed on to me across the oceans!

Table of Content

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction

Over the past few years, Ye (formally known as Kanye West) has become quite controversial. He shared antisemitic beliefs, wore a shirt with a white supremacist slogan, stated that slavery was a choice, and created a videoclip where he attacked his then-ex-wife's partner (Stephanou, 2022). Ye has shown his willingness to engage his fans in his personal feuds, and utilize his fan bases to silence critics. As a result, his fans have been depicted as "aggressive" and "harassment" (Tenbarge, 2022). Despite the stigmatization, these disliked fans continued to consume his work and create commercial value. This example reflects a phenomenon that has received little attention: consumers who interact around a controversial person-brand.

Importantly, like QAnon supporters or participants in the Chinese shamate subculture, Ye's fans engaged with one another online. Work on consumption communities typically emphasized how groups of consumers contribute to the co-creation of value for one another and for the brand around which they participate (Schau et al. 2009). It is assumed that consumers' participation is safe, and that their interactions with other consumers outside of the community can lead to value creation. Prior work emphasized the importance of social networking in creating value for a brand community (Muniz et Schau., 2005; Schau et al., 2009), ignoring the situation where consumers might face threats when they interact with outsiders around a stigmatized brand and the interaction with outsiders can devalue the community. Yet, in the case that the consumers are bonded by their shared passion for a stigmatized celebrity, it is likely that they might be exposed to negative consequences associated with being stigmatized. It is also unclear how participating in a community that assembles around a stigmatized brand or person-brand might create value for consumers.

Rather, the association of a consumer with something that is stigmatized should have quite negative consequences. The consequences of stigmatization can range from decreased self-esteem and mental illness to economic and social isolation (Link et al., 2001; Zhang et al., 2021). Previous studies have shown that stigma can affect the consumer experience by forcing consumers to change their consumption patterns or stop buying certain products (Pittman, 2020; Whiteford & Gonzalez, 1995). In addition, most of the stigmatized groups studied are stigmatized due to characteristics that are difficult to hide and change: physical characteristics such as sexual orientation (Tilcsik et al., 2015), race (Pittman, 2020), or the profession they are in (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Bosmans et al., 2016). From extant research, it is unclear why consumers might willingly engage with a stigmatized brand or object, or how they might limit the effects of their participation in discussions about it with others. We do not know how consumers interacting in a

stigmatized brand community create value for their brand and manage their consumption and avoid stigmatization's negative consequences.

To fill this gap, I explore the strategies that fans use to assemble online around a stigmatized person-brand and participate in a brand community safely. I derive theoretical insights from a case study on the fan community of a controversial Chinese idol of whom the fans are also stigmatized for supporting him. Although this idol has been boycotted massively on social media, his fans have created huge commercial value for him, and made him one of the most commercially valuable idols in China (Wen & Bi, 2021).

In the following sections, I first review prior research on stigma, the management of stigmatization, and the fan community to establish an analytical framework for my findings. Next, I describe the methodology I used to conduct the research. Then, I present the findings regarding the strategies used in the fan community to ensure a safe space for exchange. Finally, I conclude by demonstrating the implications and limitations of my project and proposing future research avenues.

In this research, I demonstrate five mechanisms that consumers of a stigmatized brand community can use to consume safely under stigma. First, I explain how fans ensure a safe community by managing membership and restricting community entry to only other existing fans. Second, I show how fans maintain unity by establishing a collective identity, managing internal conflicts, and emphasizing the common interest. Third, I discuss how fans ensure group secrecy by preventing information leakage and avoiding unnecessary online interactions with outsiders. Fourth, I explain how safety is ensured through policing, exemplifying through the monitoring of community members and moderators. Last, I show how fans extend safety beyond the community by making public spaces safer and making close relationships safer. Through these mechanisms, stigmatized consumers can sustainably create value for the brand and avoid the devaluation of their community due to unsafe contact with outsiders.

This study enriches the literature on brand community by focusing on a stigmatized consumer community and providing insight into how consumers who interact around a stigmatized person-brand can still create value for themselves and others despite stigma. It also contributes to boundary management in de-stigmatization studies by demonstrating specific mechanisms of establishing and managing vetted safe spaces where stigmatized groups can protect themselves from stigmatization. In contrast to the previous focus on groups stigmatized due to non-variable biological characteristics, this research extends the study to groups stigmatized due to controllable consumption characteristics (i.e., consumption choice).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Stigma

Stigma is an attribute that is deeply discrediting and reduces the bearer from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one (Goffman, 1963). Many sources of stigma exist, including professions (e.g., prostitute, garbage worker), race, mental or physical illness (e.g., depression, HIV), of appearance (e.g., weight). The concept of stigma has been applied to many circumstances, and the research on stigma is multidisciplinary (Link, and Phelan, 2001). Based on Goffman's conceptualization of stigma, many researchers extend the meaning of stigma and deploy stigma in different fields.

Broadly, research on stigma can be categorized into four levels (individual, occupational, organizational, and industry) and include different stigmatization-related processes (stigma emergence, transfer, maintenance, or removal) (Zhang et al., 2021).

At the individual level, stigma occurs when a particular individual attribute as a devalued social identity that breaks social norms (Goffman, 1963). Stigmatized individuals may internalize these stereotypes and absorb them into their identity, resulting in negative emotions such as shame (Cottle, 1994; Hecht, 1993). Then, stereotyping can strengthen the influence of the stigma by embodying it and thereby giving it legitimacy; that is the process called "stereotype threat" (Steele & Aronson, 1995). It is challenging to remove a stigma: once an individual is stigmatized, it stays with them (Bergman & Chalkley, 2007; Thomson & Grandy, 2018).

At the organizational level, organizations are stigmatized when they become profoundly discredited in the eyes of one or more stakeholders (Tracey & Phillips, 2016). Hudson (2008) has separated stigma as recoverable event-stigma and nonrecoverable core-stigma. The former stigma is related to an unusual or anomalous event that makes the organization negatively evaluated by stakeholders regardless of the category to which the organization belongs (Tracey & Phillips, 2016). The core-stigma refers to the fact that core attributes of some organizations are in perceived violation of social norms due to aggressive strategies and violent tactics (Elsbach & Sutton, 1992). The core-stigmatized organizations cannot, or will not, repair their stigmatized image to obtain broad social approval and endorsement (Hudson & Okhuysen, 2009).

Most researchers only focus on the stigma at a single level, ignoring the interactions between different levels. However, it is proven that stigma can transfer among various actors on different levels. Understanding stigma transfer is important for this research because the stigma associated with a celebrity can transfer to its fans.

2.2 Stigma Transfer

Phung et al. (2021) have found that stigma can transfer to individuals and organizations that associate with those who are stigmatized. It is also indicated that stigma by association may occur in any social setting (Kulik et al., 2008), and even arbitrary connections can transfer stigma (Pontikes et al., 2010).

At the individual level, ordinary members can suffer from organizational stigma even if they were not engaged in the behaviour that originally stigmatized their organization. The stigma of the wrongdoings of an organization can 'spill over' to organizational members (Wiesenfeld et al., 2008). Actors outside the stigmatized group will consider its members "spoiled, blemished, devalued, or flawed to various degrees" (Kreiner et al., 2006), and the well-being of such members is threatened by their relations with the stigmatized groups (Van Laar et al., 2019). Conversely, an organization can be tainted by stigmatized organizational members. Stigmatization may cause a crisis of organizational identity and trust in the organization among members, leading them to doubt the purpose of the organization (Tracey & Phillips, 2016).

2.3 Managing Stigmatization

Stigmatization significantly affects consumer behavior and can cause problems for the consumer experience of some groups. A stereotype can change the meaning and status attached to goods, and an activity such as shopping can transform, no longer being a form of leisure for the stigmatized groups, but a burden (Pittman, 2020; Whiteford & Gonzalez, 1995).

In my context, the stigmatization of a celebrity should affect how fans follow and discuss that celebrity. This is important because the success of a celebrity depends on their fans and supporters. However, there is little research on the stigmatization of a celebrity, the transfer that might occur to the fans of that celebrity, and how fans react to being stigmatized.

A key research finding is that boundary work can be an effective de-stigmatization strategy to manage stigmatization (Yodovich 2016). Given that boundary management is a key strategy used to managed stigmatization that has been used in previous research, I now turn my attention to reviewing literature on that specific strategy.

2.4 De-stigmatizing by Managing Boundaries

By managing boundaries, individuals and organizations attempt to influence the boundary between the stigmatized and the legitimate (Zhang et al., 2021). They do so by differentiating and determining who belongs to the stigmatized group and who does not (Khazzoom, 2003) and by using different coping strategies to de-stigmatize accordingly. Boundary management can reduce the exposure of certain individuals or groups to stigmatization and protect them (Hudson & Okhuysen, 2009; Tilcsik et al., 2015). Boundary management occurs at individual and organizational levels.

2.4.1 Individual Strategies

Stigmatized individuals adopt defensive strategies to protect themselves by keeping themselves away from anything related to stigmatized symbols and the adverse effects of stigmatization. To break the negative effect of stigma on consumption experience, stigmatized groups consume strategically to avoid, cope with, or resist their stigmatization (Jafari & Goulding, 2008). Some consumers may choose to keep their distance from whatever is stigmatized and hide the stigmatized identity. Others may try to destigmatize their current characteristics or release themselves from some consumption by removing the stigma of who or what they consume (Neal, 2018). For instance, some stigmatized consumers attempt to anchor their social group in positive concepts such as progress and innovation (Crockett, 2017; Eichert & Luedicke, 2022).

Depending on the group with which the stigmatized individual interacts, individual strategies can be divided into the following two categories: finding support from other stigmatized people and avoiding interacting with the stigmatizing others.

Interacting with stigmatized others. Stigmatized people can address their stigmatization by bonding with stigmatized others, using the stigma as a unifying factor to spur a sense of camaraderie and solidarity (Goffman, 1963; Mizrachi & Zawdu, 2012). When facing stigmatization threats, stigmatized individuals may seek peer support from people in the same situation and develop a peer support network (Gary et al., 2018). Within such groups, stigmatized individuals may respond to identity threats by comparing themselves with out-group people instead of comparing themselves with other in-group members to gain internal recognition (Ashforth et al., 2007).

Distancing from stigmatizing others. It is indeed difficult to change the external perception of a stigmatized characteristic, but individuals can reduce the damage to identity by condemning others (Petriglieri, 2011). For example, in some stigmatized occupations, the dirty workers condemn the condemners to enable themselves to dismiss

the condemners' perceptions. They also label their clients with negative characteristics, and the clients are in no position to pass judgment. In this way, the workers can ignore the stigmatization or negative comments about them (Tilcsik et al., 2015; Ashforth et al., 2007).

Those with stigmatized characteristics may accept their situation and hide their concealable identity in front of those threatening it (Petriglieri, 2011; Smart, 2003, p.220). They may also keep their distance from people similarly stigmatized or avoid involvement in stigmatizing activities or stigmatized groups (Ashforth et al., 2007; Hudson & Okhuysen, 2009; Neal, 2018).

2.4.2 Organizational Level

On the organizational level, the core-stigmatized organizations are vulnerable because they are considered to have a "fundamental, deep-seated flaw that deindividuates and discredits" them, and their essence is condemned by outsiders (Devers et al., 2009; Piazza & Perretti, 2015). The intense pressure associated with an organization's stigma may put them in a disadvantaged place and bring trouble to their life (Hampel & Tracey, 2017). Previous research presents various strategies for core-stigmatized organizations to manage the negative effects of their stigmatization and ensure the safety of their consumption. I summarize the strategies in the following ways:

Isolating themselves from outsiders and establishing a vetted circle. Stigmatized organizations separate themselves physically and ideologically. In terms of the former, a stigmatized organization can erect physical boundaries to hide from stigmatizing audiences (Hudson & Okhuysen, 2009). They can also focus on interactions with their inner circle of vetted people and avoid getting in touch with people that might view them negatively (Ashforth et al., 1999).

Building a distinctive collective identity. While isolating from others, stigmatized organizations attempt to bridge the tensions caused by stigmatization and underplay divisions by building a collective identity (Soni-Sinha, & Yates, 2013). The collective identity and being part of a unique, bounded community will give in-group members a sense of belonging, and stigmatized organizational members can adopt their group's attitudes toward the outgroups (Roberts et al., 2016; Tague et al., 2020; Yodovich, 2016). Their identification with a distinctive collective identity helps with resisting stigmatization and its threats.

Carrying the power brought by the collective identity, the stigmatized ones change existing ideology on the stigmatized group by infusing the group with a positive value

and neutralizing negative value, adjusting implicit standards, and emphasizing non-stigmatized aspects of the group (Ashforth et al., 1999; 2007). Change of narratives and transformation of meanings of specific stigmas may even affect the out-group's attitude to achieve de-stigmatization (Clair, 2016; Kumble, 2018).

Differently weighting outsiders' views and attempting to gain approval. It is demonstrated by Ashforth and his colleagues (1999) that "outsiders" constitute an ongoing threat to existing stigmatized organizations; although trying to avoid the interactions with outsiders, these organizations members cannot avoid all connections with the outside world. Thus, the recognition of outsiders and their social affirmation are significant for them. To avoid stigmatization, a stigmatized organizations weights outsiders' opinions differently: they support their supporters and condemn the condemners to reconcile outsiders' derogatory perceptions with their own desire for self-esteem (Ashforth et al.,1999; Bosmans et al., 2016).

Stigmatized groups also try to gain the support of neutral outsiders to enhance their legitimacy. According to Hampel and Tracey (2017), stigmatized organizations can participate in stigma elimination work to show that they are harmless to their attackers or that they play a positive role in society when faced with stigmatization based on fear.

Working to redress a stigma. Stigmatized groups can work to remove a stigma to become "normal" and "legitimate in the eyes of those who originally stigmatized them" (Zhang et al., 2021: 210; Hampel & Tracey, 2017: 2175). Low-status groups can rely on the consumption of goods, services, and experiences to help them redress stigma and highlight socially acceptable attributes in their consumption, thus making the public less discriminatory towards this group, or they can use cultural sources to change the views of mainstream society to make their stigmatized characteristics tolerant (Crosby & Otnes, 2010; Lamont, 2018; Zhang et al., 2021). For instance, in the industry of fashion, fashionistas make a "slow and uneven" change toward greater inclusion seem attainable under the condition that they continue to exert "steady pressure" on mainstream markets (Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013).

2.5 Identification and Boundary of Fan Community

A fan is defined as an enthusiastic, ardent, and loyal admirer of a particular interest (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010). Previous studies define a brand community as a specialized, non-geographically bound community based on structured social relations among brand admirers (Muniz & O'guinn, 2001). Given this implication, a fan community can be defined as organized, non-geographically bound based on their love of a certain consumption object (e.g., brand, product) or person-brand. In the research

context of this study, the fan community of a celebrity is a brand community based on the fans' passion for the celebrity. The fans in a community are bonded by their shared identity, which can be thought of as the internal connection among the members of the fan community and the sense of collective difference from others in the non-fan community. (Keller, 2003; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Yoshida et al., 2015). These two parts of building an identity (i.e., the internal connection and the difference from the outsiders) are interconnected and interact with each other.

Darling-Wolf (2004) has found that in a fan community of a celebrity, the fans define and negotiate their cultural identities and stress the common identity uniting all participants in the community and the celebrity that they consume. Fiske (1992) argues that fans and non-fans tend to segregate and distinguish between themselves. Consist with that, the fans not only shape their own identity within the fan community but also see themselves as agents in the boundary-making by remaking boundaries between insider and outsider (Korobkova & Black, 2014).

Some research examines boundary-management activities by fans who are stigmatized. Yodovich demonstrates that fans employ three boundaries to handle the criticism toward them and their fandom: between "fans" and "nonfans"; between "normal" and "obsessed" fans; and between "fans" and "appreciators." In addition to defining boundaries, women stigmatized by their gender in a community that seems to be dominated by men hide their female identity out of fear of stigmatization (Orme, 2016). It is also demonstrated that one must pass a specific border to become a certified fan (Yodovich, 2016). In the fan groups, the members distinguish and discriminate among themselves based on their level of engagement, experience, and the variety and amount of merchandise they own or purchase (Fiske, 1992).

To conclude, fans in a community determine their collective identity and strengthen their identity through boundary work. When facing stigmatization, fan groups depend on boundary management to distance themselves from it (Yodovich, 2016).

2.6 Summary

Studies now focus on stigmatized professions and rarely focus on consumers who are stigmatized because of a specific consumption interest, such as being the fan of a stigmatized celebrity. Usually, the identity of the studied subject cannot or are difficult to be changed, such as the racial, gender, and social class of the stigmatized ones. Few studies focus on the management of stigma that the consumers obtained from their consumption or strategies to destigmatize stereotypes caused by the internal members' own behavior in a stigmatized consumption community.

There are also limitations of boundary management as a measure to destigmatize. The goal of boundary management is to create a "safe haven and self-defense" from the effects of stigmatization (Moon, 2012:1341). However, there is little research on creating such a safe space. When mentioning the strategy of establishing a "vetted circle," which is the bridge linking stigmatized individuals and organizations, the researchers did not specifically explain how stigmatized groups establish entry standards for this circle or how they maintain the safety of in-group members. The interaction between the stigmatized individual and the organization (or the stigmatized group to which the individual belongs) is ignored.

Based on that, this research may fill the research gap by analyzing the strategies of fan consumers to protect themselves when consuming a stigmatized person-brand. It also develops the existing boundary management strategies used in the de-stigmatization of consumers by investigating how the stigmatized fans build and maintain their vetted community.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this part, I introduce the case based on which I conduct my research, and the methodology used to analyze the data.

3.1 Context

I perform a case study of the fan community of a stigmatized Chinese idol to explore the strategies the stigmatized fans use to consume in a personal brand community safely. Here I introduce the context of this case.

In this case, Xiao Zhan, a Chinese pop singer and actor, and his fans have been boycotted by many users on Chinese social media due to their improper behavior that happened three years ago. However, the massive boycott and stigmatization that forced Xiao to stop working for half a year have not decreased his commercial value. For example, two months after the controversial event, Xiao's new-published single attracted over 33 million purchased downloads, earning more than 112 million RMB (about 20 million Canadian dollars) in total sales, which reflected his high commercial value (Wang, 2021).

The controversial events in which Xiao was involved happened on 27 February 2020, the day when some influential fans of Xiao declared a "media war" on Chinese social media (Zhang, 2022). The reason for the "media war" was that some fans of Xiao Zhan were angered by a fictional homoerotic novel, "*Falling*," based on Xiao, which

involved adult content and feminization of Xiao (Basu, 2022). What the fans mainly did was to report several platforms where authors can publish fanfiction, including AO3 (i.e., Archive of Our Own, an open-source storage website for fanfiction), Bilibili (a Chinese video platform where users can publish fanfiction videos they make), LOFTER (a Chinese microblogging platform like Tumblr) to relevant authorities, leading to the banning of AO3 in mainland China and strict restrictions on posting content on Bilibili and LOFTER. As a result of these dire consequences, everyday users of these affected platforms began to blame the fans of Xiao and boycott Xiao's songs, TV shows, and the brands he endorsed. This incident also made Xiao's fans an image of "a selfish demand for the erasure of others' creative work" (Zhang, 2022). As retaliation for these boycotts, some fans attempted to force boycotters to stop the boycott or criticism with massive verbal attacks and reporting, which branded the entire fan group as "cyberbullies" (Jiang, 2020). Moreover, Xiao failed to use his influence to promptly stop his fans' bad behavior and prevent harmful consequences, leading to criticism like "failure to take on the social responsibility expected of a celebrity" (Wu, 2020).

The displeasure of Xiao's reaction and some of his fans affected the whole brand community, leading to a largely negative attitude towards Xiao on social media and his fans. Despite the predominantly negative attitude towards Xiao Zhan on social media and many official media outlets criticizing the behavior of his fans and blaming Xiao Zhan and his fans, his commercial value has not taken much of a hit. One month after incident, the Weibo hashtag #BoycottXiaoZhan# has exceeded 3 450 000 posts and 260 million views (Luo, 2020). However, his influence on social media platforms has remained stable for a long time at a high level (Yin et al., 2021).

As my research progressed, I discovered that many fan communities related to Xiao on social media were private, meaning that only members could see who was in the group and what they posted. Considering the incongruity of the negative comments against Xiao and his commercial value, I assumed that fans in these private fan communities were creating value for Xiao in ways that are less noticeable to non-fans.

From this case, I will analyze how consumers manage their brand community when the object of their consumption is stigmatized, and how they contribute to create value to the celebrity's personal brand.

3.2 Analysis Method

I conducted field research and collected data on the stigmatized events related to the studied celebrity and his fans' reactions to these events from online fan communities, forums, news, and magazine articles. Then I conducted semi-structured interviews with

ten fans and a second interview with four of them to explore some questions in more depth. My aim was to understand the effects of controversial events on the stigmatized celebrity and his fans, fans' consumption behaviors in their vetted community, and how they protected themselves from outsiders and created value for the stigmatized celebrity. Table 1 summarizes my dataset.

Table 1 Summary of the dataset.

Data on events of the celebrity	
Archival data	160 press articles from 2018 to 2022
	3 annual reports of social media Weibo
Social media data	945 posts
Selected events	2 events from 10 analyzed events
Data on the fans' behaviors	
Archival data	121 press articles
Social media data	962 posts
	6 online fan communities
Video data	21 videos from 3 platforms
Interviews	
First-round interview	10 interviews
Second-round interview	4 interviews

I entered the field to get a complete picture of the studied celebrity (i.e., his career development and his personal life), and study the role of controversial events related to a celebrity on fans' behaviors. To do so, I first collected archival data on the controversial events in which Xiao and his fans have been involved to explore how the stigmatization was attached to this celebrity and observe in his fans' reactions. I sorted news about Xiao and his fans from September 2018 to September 2022 using the keyword (i.e., Xiao Zhan, Xiao Zhan Shows, Spotlight, Xiao Zhan Endorsement, Xiao Zhan Incident, 227 Incident, Boycott against Xiao Zhan, Xiao Zhan fans, and Xiao Zhan Chinese Fans Community) and period (i.e., Filter by custom date range: From September 2018 to September 2022) function on the search engines and organized the news chronologically.

To supplement the collected news, I collected relevant consumer-generated data on Weibo, the largest and most influential Chinese social media platform. In this case, the analyzed celebrity has 31.23 million followers and 66 fan groups on Weibo; his published content is read by an average of 1 million people daily, with an average influence index

of 97.86/100 per week. The influence index consists of the dimension in Table 2. It can directly reflect the activity level, the influence, the commercial value of the user, and the interaction between the users and their followers. Media producers and brand investors consider influence index of a celebrity as one of the most scientific ways to evaluate the market value of the celebrity, thus securing economic revenue (Hou, 2019).

Table 2 Influence Index of Users on Weibo

Dimension	Segmentation of evaluation metrics	Percentage
Communication impact	Total reads / Reads per blog post / Original video plays / Average original video plays per post (per week)	50%
Content attraction	Total number of retweets, comments and likes/ Number of posts in community / Number of new fans / Fan group activity (per week)	40%
Activity	Number of blog posts (per week)	10%
Total		*100*

Source: User Impact Index Scoring Rules on Sina Weibo

The consumer-generated data can reflect the social media influence of the celebrity, the support he gained from his fans, and the fans' activity. By analyzing these sources of data, I identified that the fans were very active on the selected social media platform where they conduct most of their interactions. Thus, it is an ideal platform to trace the events related to the celebrity and observe fans' consumption behaviors.

After choosing the platform, I used GooSeeker, a data capture and analysis tool that converts social media content into excel tables for content analysis and text analysis, to collect raw data on the celebrity's Weibo content, hashtags, and hot topics related to this celebrity. Then, I combined the data collected from Weibo with the archival data collected from the press and chronologically coded them to develop familiarity with the change of the public opinion of him. To explore the impact of the reputation change on his image, I sorted out two of Xiao's most influential controversial events in the past four years, from the beginning of his fame to his controversial present (i.e., those still being discussed two weeks or more after they happened).

For each event, I used two social media analyzing tools to analyze the mainstream attitude towards Xiao and his fans, during and after the controversial events and also explain how Xiao's fans reacted to them: PKUVIS and WeiboReach. PKUVIS is a visual

analytic system for analyzing events on Weibo. It can provide the relations among of hot topics and events happened in a selected period on Weibo and present users' attitudes towards specific events (Ren et al., 2014; Song et al., 2014). WeiboReach is a platform for analyzing hot events on Weibo that provides dynamic tracking and data visualization analysis of the spread of events and changes in public opinion. With the help of these two tools, I added prominent public opinions on the celebrities and their fans after each event.

During this process, I found that, after each controversial event and although boycotting this celebrity seems to be a common occurence, the number of his fans and his social media influence index continued to grow. Also, in the period following the controversial incidents, the number of posts blaming Xiao was much higher than the number of posts supporting him, and user sentiment toward the celebrity was predominantly negative. However, the number of commercial endorsements and commercial value increased. Thus, I assumed that many of the fans' consumption behaviors were not public. Rather, fans might be supporting the celebrity and consuming him more subtly.

Thus, to pursue my research, I needed to find a place where fans interact around the celebrity without attracting outsiders' attention. I set my sight on private fan groups on social media. I first joined Xiao's online public fan community, observing the community members, their interactions, as well as the community rules, management, and behaviors. From the public fan community, I identified private fan groups.

Based on my readings on stigmatization and consumption communities, I identified the private aspect of fan groups and the fans' interaction around a stigmatized celebrity as an under-research area. From this point on, I became interested in how the fans establish and manage such private groups and how these private groups ensure the safety of fans' consumption. However, I was refused to enter the group due to my outsider and non-fan identity. I then asked for help from the participants I recruited in this research, who invited me to two private groups. After joining the private groups, I observed and took field notes on the entry conditions of such private groups, the management of the groups, and daily interaction among the group members inside the private groups.

I then recruited 10 participants for interviews to help me understand the role of the private groups in their experience of following Xiao. The phone interview averaged 100 minutes, and all the interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and translated into English. The interviewees were approached directly in the online fan community or recruited through snowballing. They all have over two years of participation in consuming the controversial celebrity, Xiao. Two of the interviewees became fans after a major controversy that surrounded the celebrity. While eight interviewees began to follow this celebrity before he was involved in controversial events and before the fans were

stigmatized, and their consumption experience changed significantly before and after the stigmatization of their fan group. All the fans who participated in this research had joined some private fan groups of Xiao. They had also experienced being stigmatized and their consumption experiences were negatively affected by their identity as a fan.

Respondents were asked about their consumption experience of this celebrity within and outside the private groups, the pressure they faced because of their consumption of products related to Xiao, and their reaction to being stigmatized.

Chapter 4: Findings

The findings demonstrate how the fans of a controversial celebrity creates an environment to safely consume together. My analysis finds five strategies that fans use to establish the boundary between themselves and others, and to keep their vetted space behind the boundary safe. In this chapter, I elaborate on these five strategies.

First, I explain how fans ensure a safe community by managing membership and restricting community entry to only other existing fan. Second, I show how fans maintain unity by establishing a collective identity, managing internal conflicts, and emphasizing the common interest. Third, I discuss how fans ensure group secrecy by preventing information leakage and avoiding unnecessary online interactions with outsiders. Fourth, I explain how safety is ensured through policing, exemplifying through the monitoring of community members and moderators. Last, I show how fans extend safety beyond the community by making public spaces safer and making close relationships safer.

4.1 Establish an Exclusive Community

Existing work acknowledges that the connection among the fans of a celebrity is maintained by their shared love for the celebrity (Kim & Kim, 2020). In many fan communities, fans seldom meet each other in reality because of the geographical barriers between them. Thus, most of their interactions around the person-brand occur primarily on social media. At the same time, if there is negative news or a controversial event about a celebrity, these negative issues are usually spread on the Internet, leading to subsequent repercussions, such as attacks, boycotts, and stigmatization against the celebrity and their fans. These competing dynamics make online spaces conductive to both potentially enjoyable and painful interactions. To manage online participation, my analysis finds that fans create exclusionary online communities to protect themselves and safely interact. In this section, I focus on the establishment and management of such an exclusive online fan community.

In the following parts, I explain these mechanisms based on my analysis of online communities formed around Xiao on Weibo and interviews with Xiao's fans.

4.1.1 Entry Conditions of Online Fan Groups

To isolate themselves from stigmatizing others when they share information and connect around a celebrity safely, fans create private groups on social media where access is monitored to allow only authentic fans. The group managers, usually the group owner and a few influential fans, select the members by setting strict entry conditions for these groups to make them safe.

In the fan groups I observed, the group managers are senior fans who have followed the celebrity for many years. They are usually also "influential fans" who have many followers and strong appeal on social media. These fans have a good reputation in the fan community and others trust them. Thus, community members agree to the entry conditions and management rules set for the private fan groups by group managers.

There are mainly two ways through which a consumer can join a private fan group: Proving oneself as a loyal fan or being invited by a group member. Both cases help ascertain the authenticity of the fan and safeguard the safety of the group against stigmatizing others.

Proving oneself as a loyal fan. Fans may feel shameful to acknowledge that they are someone's fans in the public space due to hostilities outside the fan group, especially when the fan group is stigmatized (Xia, 2022). Thus, the fan groups are aimed at providing a vetted shelter for the stigmatized fans and distinguish "the fans" and "the others." Since online spaces can both be positive or detrimental to fans' online participation, a first step in the creation of a safe space for fans to interact around a stigmatized celebrity is to ensure that all members are authentic followers of the celebrity. To do so, private fan groups operate on strict entry requirements that ask the applicants to show their long-term love and loyalty to the celebrity.

Although different private fan groups have different entry criteria, the common point is that applicants need to prove that they are loyal fans as there are some consumers who want to infiltrate the community to attack fans. In the case of Xiao, fans can find some private groups' links on the home page of the idol on social media Weibo or from the update of group information published by influential fans in the community. However, access to the private communities is not for everyone. In general, fans need to submit evidence that they have met the application requirements to the group managers and wait for their approval. For example, they can take screenshots of the required proof and set

all content on their Weibo accounts to be publicly visible so that managers can check whether they have met the entry standard of the fan groups. All the requirements aim to ensure that the applicants are loyal fans.

An example of such entry requirements of a private community I was part of are as follow:

Firstly, the applicants must have followed the Weibo account of Xiao, his studio, and Xiao's public community on Weibo for at least three months. The applicants can also be asked to create or retweet a certain number of positive posts about Xiao on social media. 500 posts were a common figure.

Secondly, to join a private fan group, an applicant must reach a certain level in the public fan community. On Weibo, consumers in a public community can accumulate points by doing tasks to get higher levels (See Table 3). In the case of the public community of Xiao, the higher the fan's level in the community, the more rights, and rewards they gain. For example, fans with high levels in the public community can join private fan groups and they can get the chance to interact directly with their idol. From the idol's perspective, it is shown that fans' emotional intensity can generate commercial value for the personal brand and entertainment corporate interest (Hou, 2019). Thus, when the fans are fulfilling the tasks to improve their own levels in the public community, they are also creating value for the idol.

Elo, a moderator of a private group of Xiao, explained the rationale of this entry condition: "The fans' high level is interpreted as a strong willingness to consume Xiao." Thus, checking applicants' levels is considered "one of the most efficient ways to select loyal fans to the private group."

Table 3 Tasks and Points Accumulating Rules of Weibo Community

Tasks	Points Obtained for Each Completed Task (Per Day)	Maximum Points (Per Day)
Log in the Community	+ 10	+ 10
Continuous Visits of the Community	Visit for 1 day: + 3 Visit for two consecutive days: +5 (per day) Visit for three or more consecutive days: +8 (per day)	Visit for 1 day: + 3 Visit for two consecutive days: +5 (per day) Visit for three or more consecutive days: +8 (per day)
Post Gets Commented	+ 4 (one time)	+ 16
Retweet or Comment on Posts in the Community	+ 2 (one time)	+ 16

Source: Community Rules on Sina Weibo

Thirdly, some private groups are dedicated to purchasing products related to Xiao. For such communities, fans are requested to submit purchase records of products of the brands Xiao endorsed or albums to the administrator.

While the authenticity of a consumers' fandom can be vetted through strict entry requirements, a second way that consumers can join a community is to be vetted by an existing member, which I now expand on.

Being invited by group members. In addition to setting general entry conditions, some fan groups have a membership invitation system where senior fans in the private group can apply to the group managers to invite their friends into the group. By being vetted by an existing and trusted community member, fan group managers can better ensure that new members are authentic fans, which maintains the safety of the online space. The invited new members might also need to show their love and loyalty to Xiao on social media or demonstrate a strong willingness to purchase products related to Xiao. However, demands to adhere to entry requirements are generally lessened.

Interviewee Bean, who has invited a friend to a private consumption group, shared her feelings about the member invitation system:

"No fan would like to take the risk of inviting a fake fan into the group to bring trouble to all members. We only want to protect more fans from cyberbullying, and to let them find a sense of belonging and share the simple joy of consuming Xiao."

The private group is a safe vetted shelter where the members are bonded by their common identity as victim of consuming a stigmatized celebrity and their shared belongingness. Previous studies have shown that stigmatized groups respond to identity threats by establishing peer support networks (Gary et al., 2018). Consistent with previous studies, I have found that the groups managers and members cooperate to strengthen the bond among them and maintain unity within the private groups.

4.2 Maintaining Unity within the Fan Group

My analysis finds that fans in a private fan group regard the internal unity and support of each other as important. Fans strengthen their connection and unity by establishing a collective identity, managing internal conflicts, and emphasizing the common interest. I discuss each in turn.

4.2.1 Establishing collective identity

The shared identity of the fans is reflected in what they call each other and what they call themselves when they face outsiders. In the fan groups, the members call each other sisters to show their closeness and increase their sense of belonging in the group. When facing the outsiders, like the people with dirty occupation who change the meaning and ideology of the stigmatized job to reduce the outsider threats (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999), fans appropriate stigmatizing terms that others use to designate them.

In this case, before the boycott against Xiao emerged, his fans called themselves "Flying Warrior" (Xiao FeiXia 小飞侠), representing the fans' companionship to him. After Xiao's controversial events, the boycotters began to call his fans "Useless Shrimp" (Xiao FeiXia 小废虾), which has the same pronunciation as "Flying Warrior" to show their discontent and contempt for the fans. However, fans did not show that they were offended. Instead, they have taken a series of actions to redefine the stigmatized term and add positive meanings to it. For example, they link the term "Shrimp" with fans' good behaviors, such as doing volunteer work in the name of Xiao's fans; they also create fan fiction or other positive content supporting Xiao and other fans on social media with the hashtag "Shrimp."

After the fans reached a consensus on the title "Shrimp," "Shrimp" became a code word for fans to verify whether a stranger is a fan. Cici, a fan who is proud of the term, explained:

Usually, when asked if they are shrimp, true fans will gladly admit it because we are proud of this term! It is a gentle way to counter stigma by using shrimp to describe ourselves after it has been stigmatized. Every time the anti-fans search this word on social media, they will find the shining points of the word they use to attack us. They will also find that we do not care about such stigmatization. It is also to show our confidence and optimism.

As interviewee Cici indicates, re-appropriate stigmatizing terms work to show fans' resilience when faced with the efforts of others to devaluate them. Fans will internalize these positive meanings of such a stigmatized title into their identity as fans and adopt the fan groups' attitudes towards outsiders.

4.2.2 Managing internal conflicts

Although, in most cases, members of fan groups unite to support each other because of their shared identity and encounters, conflicts can occur among the group members. Conflicts in an online consumption community can put into question the existing status quo, and erode community culture (Sibai et al., 2019). Such consequences could be particularly detrimental to a community whose members are already vilified by outsiders, and for whom the community serves as a safe space. To alleviate negative consequences following in-group disagreements, group moderators regulate conflicts and emphasize the common interest.

Intervening and ending the conflicts. When a conflict arises, the moderators will first try to change the subject in order to break up the ongoing argument, divert the attention of other members to avoid more people getting involved in the conflict. They will also re-emphasize group rules and remind conflict initiators that they need to stop violating group rules and maintain the peace of the private fan group. If the conflict evokers ignore the warning, the moderators usually use the ban function of the group to forbid all fans involved in the conflict from sending messages for some days as a punishment.

I illustrate this strategy with the internal conflict resolution process that I observed in my fieldwork. In a private fan group I joined, members are forbidden to discuss actors other than Xiao. There was a time when a member compared the performance of Xiao in a show with that of his co-star, and this fan showed a preference for the latter performance, provoking the discontent of some other members. Then, these members with different views began to argue fiercely, which attracted the moderator's attention. The moderator first emphasized the rule that no other actors should be mentioned and warned the fan who started this topic. Since there was still a member continuing this topic

after the moderator's warning, the moderator banned all the members from sending messages in the group for 24 hours, and the group returned to peace after the one-day punishment.

From this example, we can see that the instant and strict management of moderators can reduce the adverse effects of internal conflicts and maintain the long-term peace of the private group.

Keep conflicts internal. When dealing with a conflict, the moderators will also call on the group members to resolve internal conflicts internally rather than spread internal conflicts to the outside or expose them to public view. Interviewee Tina insists that fans will face potential trouble if they cannot solve their own conflicts inside the private group:

> Generally speaking, outsiders should not participate in resolving internal family conflicts. Similarly, fans are like a family, and we will resolve conflicts among ourselves instead of accepting instructions from outsiders. If we expose conflicts to outsiders, they will consider us disunited and vulnerable, and may take the opportunity to attack us. It is bad for the entire fan community.

Consistent with the opinion of Tina, the group moderators also take the chance of solving conflicts to emphasize the common interests of their members, which we will analyze in the next part.

4.2.3 Emphasizing the common interest

For the fans, the private fan group is an exclusive safe place in which they share a common interest of being free from outsiders' stigmatization and criticism. Furthermore, exposing the private group to outsiders means exposing all the individuals to the potential risk of being further stigmatized, which can affect each fan's interests. Therefore, the group owner will repeatedly emphasize the importance of the common interests of the fans to make the members realize the negative effects that may happen to them if they fail to keep the group secret. They remind the members to maintain the group's isolation by posting group announcements regularly. For example, in both of the fan groups I participated in, I found the announcements conveying the following information:

> For the good ecosystem of our fan group, each member is responsible for keeping the group private, and any form of disclosure of information about the group is not allowed.

In the following part, we will demonstrate how to avoid information leakage from private fan groups.

4.3 Ensuring Group Secrecy

Although strict entry conditions can ensure that new members are authentic and avoid the stigmatization of individual fans within the fan group, the fan group is still at risk of being criticized if their chatting history is exposed to outsiders. Thus, fans work at reducing the risk of exposure of the fan group to outsiders by preventing internal information leakage and avoiding unnecessary interactions with outsiders.

4.3.1 Preventing internal information leakage

In all the groups I examined, group rules preclude fans from taking screenshots of online conversations and posting them on social media, especially regarding what could be perceived as radical comments by outsiders,. A group member guilty of such behavior will be kicked out of the group, and information about their social media account may also be spread within the public community of Xiao so to blackmail them from further participation around the stigmatized celebrity.

Fans are also cautious about sharing information about the group with their friends or families to avoid potential risks of being stigmatized. Take, for example, how interviewee Drunk described the experience of a fan who leaked the group information by accident:

> There was a time when a fan shared some of the chatting histories of our private fan group with a non-fan friend, who then found the group and posted negative comments against us on social media. That was not a pleasant experience because we did not want others to know about the existence of our group. After that issue, we fans attempt to remind each other regularly to avoid sharing internal information with non-fans to protect ourselves from the stigmatization and attack.

These cautionary tales serve to responsibilize group members to maintain the privacy of the group. As a result, Drunk is careful about her online activities. She never shares with people she knows in the real life about her activities in the public online community or private fan group of Xiao to avoid unnecessary trouble.

4.3.2 Avoiding unnecessary online interactions with outsiders

Hudson & Okhuysen (2009) demonstrated that stigmatized groups strengthen their boundary with others by limiting their contact with outsiders and avoiding unwanted attention. Consistent with their research, I find that stigmatized fans keep their vetted circle safe by making themselves and their private groups "invisible" from non-fans. In a private fan group, the group managers and influential senior fans often remind fans to avoid unnecessary interactions with non-fans. Examples of unnecessary interactions include making comments on other celebrities, especially the ones who compete with Xiao, and conducting quarrels with non-fans.

Fans can be highly involved sleuths and negative comments on celebrity competitors are sometimes traced back to their originator and its closed group. Interviewee Bean explains:

> Fans of some celebrities are prejudiced against us. If we leave comments on their idols, they can trace our footsteps on social media and find the groups to which we belong by using some tools. It is better to save trouble by not interacting with them.

Hence, refraining from commenting on other celebrities can reduce the possibility that the footsteps of Xiao's fans are traced on social media and minimize the risk of the group being found by outsiders.

Fans also attempt to avoid conflicts with outsiders. Previous studies have shown that fans try to condemn their blamers for their stigmatization to protect their boundary with outsiders and defend their identities (Bosmans et al., 2016). However, my analysis finds that the stigmatized fans in a private group prefer to avoid arguments with their condemners on social media. They might react to some negative remarks against Xiao and his fans but seldom conduct long-term arguments with outsiders. Interviewee Kiko explains:

> We should dispel rumors of Xiao and correct non-fans misconceptions about Xiao when necessary. However, suppose they do not accept it. In that case, we do not need to keep arguing with them, especially if many group members go together to argue with certain non-fans, which can easily be interpreted as us being a bully. Our group will risk being discovered and exposed when we react together.

The fan's concern is the result of potential stigma transfer. Tracey & Phillips (2016) showed that the reputation of a group can be defaced by the presence of a stigmatized member. As a part of the "media war" conducted by Xiao's fans, some fans once insulted

many users who criticized Xiao, or sent them harassing messages (Zhang, 2022). Then some victims posted their experiences of suffering cyber violence on social media, attracting much sympathy. After that, the image of Xiao's fans was associated with negative terms such as "aggressive" and "perpetrators of cyber violence" (Wu, 2020). Today, if a consumer is found to Xiao's fan group, then they can be seen as possessing these characteristics of aggressiveness and violence. Similarly, if fans collectively clarify something, their behavior is more likely to be categorized by outsiders as collective cyber violence.

Thus, after these issues, if outsiders enter into a conflict with fans of Xiao, and especially if they band together in a way that could display concerted efforts, they could elevate an issue enough for sympathizers of the celebrity competitor to "fight back." The private community could be discovered during this process, which could lead to negative consequences. Avoiding such altercations thus became the agreed upon strategy to follow.

4.4 Policing Members

When they join, group members are asked to agree to group rules and strictly abide by them afterward. Adhering to rules ascertains the maintenance of the safety of the space by limiting its exposure to outsiders and fosters internal cohesion. Yet, members of stigmatized groups are not always in cooperative relationships or open-minded to solve conflicts. Monitoring ensures that community members follow established rules and guidelines. Monitoring is done by community members and moderators.

4.4.1 Monitoring by community members

Group moderators may not be able to detect all rule violations in large communities comprising thousands of fans. To ensure that members follow rules, group members are tasked with monitoring one another. Since ordinary group members do not have the right to enforce penalties when they witness rule violations, reporting violations to the group owner or managers is common in fan groups. Monitoring is also overseen by moderators.

In the forums in which I interacted, monitoring served two primary purposes: preventing conflicts among fans and avoiding information leakage to outsiders.

Monitoring conflicts. As mentioned before, the group moderators will work to stop conflicts when they happen. However, the private communities in which I participated are composed of thousands of fans, with thousands of messages exchanged everyday. Thus, it is unlikely that moderators are able to monitor all conflicts in due time, address

rule violations, or find perpetrators. Hence, group members also work together to monitor conflicts.

For example, when a fan uses a forbidden word or expresses a controversial opinion that may cause or have caused conflicts in the group, other members will first try to persuade this fan to stop such behavior. Fan Gigi explained:

Some new comers may not realize that they have inadvertently violated group rules, and other group members need to kindly remind them to be careful about the words they use in the future. Only in that way can we create a good ecosystem in our group together.

As Gigi describes, monitoring can help socialize newcomers in how to properly interact within the community. However, such reminders are not always effective. When public interventions from group members to rein in improper behaviors fail, community members sometimes report rule violations to moderators. Moderators will then warn the fan who has violated the group rules and give them an opportunity to apologize. These displays of power help reassert the importance of following group rules to the community as a whole. If the "troublemaker" refuses to accept the proposed solution, they may be kicked out of the private group and be forbidden to join it again.

According to fans, reporting the "troublemakers" will not decrease the trust among the fans. Instead, it is necessary to maintain the group's peace and benefit all members. Espagnole agrees with the unwritten whistleblowing in the groups:

Some fans may get angry easily or lose control of their emotion, and they may involve themselves in endless conflicts without realizing it. We are responsible for letting the unreasonable fans realize the trouble they may make and lead them in a good direction. However, if the conflict evokers do not follow others' advice, we do not have the duty to be good to them. We must report the mess they made to the authorities in the groups and let them pay for it.

Therefore, for fans, reporting conflicts is an effective way to maintain unity, preserve a peaceful atmosphere within the group, and ensure that the majority of fans' consumption experience is not disturbed.

Monitoring information leakage. Leakage of the information of the private group to outsiders is more severe than the behaviors related to a conflict. In general, the leakage of information is discovered by accident. Usually, the situation is that a member of a private fan group of Xiao finds screenshots of the group's chat records in another fan group of Xiao, in a fan group of another celebrity, or in some public communities. Where

the screenshots appear, whether others praise or dismiss Xiao, the private fan group members consider it a threat to their safety and privacy.

When a fan finds the leaked information, they will send the evidence to the group administrators privately or make them public in the group and figure out who the "traitor" is. "We can figure out the leaker efficiently by checking his or her related social media account," said interviewee Maiko, "Then we will report this fan to the group owner and let him/her be kicked out of the group."

After that, other group members may blacken the leaker's social media account and remind fans in the public community to be wary of this account. Maiko continues:

> The leakage of internal information will expose us to the risk of being criticized by the non-fans. That will also give the outsiders an excuse to deepen the stigma attached to us. Leaking group information violates group rules, and fans who do such things do not deserve our trust. We have to police them to protect the majority of fans.

Thus, monitoring group information leakage is an efficient way to protect the interests of most of the members in the stigmatized private community and prevent their safe space from being found or disturbed by outsiders.

4.4.2 Monitoring moderators

In addition to policing among group members, the group moderators will also let their group members monitor them. The monitoring of group moderators focuses on two aspects: rule violations and monetization activities.

Monetization activities. On the social media platform Weibo, users with a high exposure rate can gain some financial rewards and get the chance to profit from advertising some brands through their influence. Thus, some users attempt to attract followers and increase exposure for themselves by establishing fan groups. However, such behavior can lead to stigmatization for influential fans because other fans may feel that their idol has become a tool for making money rather than the fans' beloved one. Therefore, group moderators choose to publish the "financial benefit" record of their social media account so that the group members can make sure that they do not profit by establishing a fan group in the name of Xiao's fans or using other fans' support.

For example, in a private fan group I observed, the moderator posts every month screenshots of her "Weibo Income," the column where Weibo users can check the money

they earned on this platform, to prove that she does not make money from her position as an influential fan. ~~Figure 1 below is the moderator's income record in February 2023 representative an example .~~ At the same time, fan community members also check her account regularly to ensure that there is no advertising content in this account tied to potential commissions earned by promoting brands.

The monitoring of group moderators can increase the transparency of the management of the private community and strengthen trust among members, thus helping community cohesion within the safe space.

To summarize, in this section, we have discussed how the fans of a stigmatized idol establish and manage an exclusive private fan group to protect themselves from stigmatization from the outside world. We also demonstrated their internal measures to keep themselves united and maintain the peace of their vetted circle.

In the next section, I explore how fans react to outsiders and remove the stigma attached to them through their actions.

4.5 Extending Safety Outside of Private Safe Spaces

In addition to creating and maintaining private safe spaces in which to interact with other fans, fans of a stigmatized celebrity also engage in activities to extend feelings of safety outside of these private spaces. My analysis identifies three ways through which they do so: (1) making public spaces safer, and (2) making close relationships safe.

4.5.1 Making public spaces safer

Performing safe fan practices. The stigmatized fans of Xiao try to build a positive image to gain recognition from others by conducting safe actions, which include engaging in goodwill projects in the name of the controversial celebrity's fans.

Fans believe that the goodwill projects of their beloved controversial idol can help improve his positive image and change people's "wrong" impressions of his fans. Consequently, many fans actively participate in positive impact projects that benefit others, whether led by the stigmatized celebrity himself or organized by influential fans in the name of the celebrity.

Interviewee Fiona has participated in some goodwill activities organized by Xiao's fan community, such as donating books to the rural school library founded by Xiao Zhan

Foundation. She shares these activities on social media, hoping to show the positive side of Xiao Zhan and his fans to outsiders:

> Xiao is a kind person who cares about children's welfare, but his good qualities are overshadowed by the stigma attached to him. In the environment where Xiao and his fans are stigmatized, we hope to let the outsiders know what we are doing to benefit society through our charity activities, thus changing people's negative opinions on Xiao and our fan community.

Usually, people do not accuse the activities that create value for society. In this quote, Fiona emphasizes how as a fan of Xiao, engaging in goodwill activities might potentially reduce the stigma associated to her consumption interest.

4.5.2 Making close relationships safer

According to interviewees, the opinion of people close to them matters more than that of other non-fans. A safe, close relationship in which they can talk about the celebrity without any concern will release the pressure they have on their interaction around a stigmatized celebrity. Some fans try to let people they care about and have regular interactions with accept the celebrity and their consumption to make their close relationships safer. They recommend the work or endorsement of the controversial idol to people they know to give them a positive impression of the celebrity and prevent them from being affected by negative comments about him. In the interview, participant Seanfly said:

> The negative online comments on Xiao influenced my mother, making her think that he and his fans should be boycotted. I chose to recommend her Xiao's show and watch some of Xiao's interviews with her. After some time, my mom was influenced by his real positive image and even praised him. I was happy she got her own opinion on Xiao instead of listening to others' comments.

The safe relationship in which fans can share their consumption experience of the controversial celebrity is the extension of their safe, private community offline. The support the fans gain from people in close relationships with them can reduce the negative effects of stigmatization they face in their daily life.

Chapter 5: Discussion

In this study, I have answered the question "How can fans safely interact around a stigmatized personal brand" by presenting the mechanism of a vetted fan community

from the following perspectives.

First, the strict entry condition of a vetted community guarantees to a certain extent the identity and loyalty of consumers in the vetted community, thus reducing the risk of community members being attacks within their private, safe space. After being allowed to join the vetted and private fan community, consumers follow a series of rules to keep the community united internally and secret externally. To maintain internal unity, fans strengthen their collective identity as consumers of the stigmatized celebrity and emphasize their common interest to resist the stigmatization against them. Besides, the moderators also manage conflicts among consumers in the vetted consumption group to keep it peaceful and united. Externally, fans ensure their vetted group secrecy by preventing internal information of the consumption community from being leaked and by avoiding unsafe online interactions with outsiders.

Then, fans use the strategy of policing membership to ensure that all the rules are respected, prevent conflicts among fans, and avoid information leakage to outsiders. Fans in the vetted community monitor each other and report rule violations to moderators, who will warn or punish the reported violators. In addition, fans monitor the group moderators' behaviors to ensure they have fulfilled their responsibilities and not abused their power to corrupt.

Finally, having established a well-managed vetted consumer community, stigmatized consumers will also attempt to extend feelings of safety outside these private spaces through two measures. Stigmatized consumers try to make public spaces safe by gaining recognition from outsiders who accept their safe fan practice (i.e., goodwill projects). They also seek understanding from people in close relationships with them, thus making close relationships a safe space where they can follow the stigmatized personal brand sustainably.

5.1 Theoretical Contributions

First, this research contributes to the boundary management literature. Previous studies on boundary management, where the attempt by stigmatized actors to influence the boundary between insiders (those who are stigmatized) and outsiders (those who are not), have proposed that stigmatized individuals can draw the boundary between "us" and "them" by crafting narratives or outlining differences (Khazzoom, 2003; Zhang et al., 2021). Usually, such boundaries are vague and abstract. My research demonstrates that the boundary that separates stigmatized consumers from outsiders is protected by creating entry conditions for a safe space that shield stigmatized consumers. It also clarifies how stigmatized consumers go through the boundary and be protected as a member of the safe

space by meeting entry requirements as well as respecting community rules when interacting in the safe community.

Second, in this research, I break down the barriers of boundary management strategies between different levels by introducing the operation mechanism of the brand community of the stigmatized brand and consumers. In the marketing and management fields, existing research on boundary management typically focuses on the individual and organizational levels separately. For example, at the individual level, stigmatized individual consumers seek distance from whatever is stigmatized during their consumption (Crockett, 2017). At the organizational level, the stigmatized community engages in stigma reduction work to eliminate outsiders' hostility or attack stigmatizers to show the legitimacy of a group or an organization (Zhang et al., 2021; Hampel & Tracey, 2017). In a case study of men's bathhouses, Hudson and Okhuysen (2009) proposed that the organization can protect its consumers through isolation, integration, dramaturgy, associational, and conventional strategies. These studies only focus on individual or organizational level strategies alone, without examining the interaction and cooperation between the two. Especially, they ignored how stigmatized individual consumers can create value for a brand community in which they can consume safely. By contrast, this study builds on a link between boundary management at the individual and organizational levels by introducing the dynamic mechanisms of stigmatized consumers who establish and manage their safe space and create value for the brand community in which they interact.

Last, this study illustrates the potentially unsafe situations that may arise even in the presence of a safe space in which stigmatized individuals can interact. It also proposes insights into risk management strategies. Researchers found that stigmatized individuals can find security within a vetted circle (Ashforth et al., 1999). However, my research shows how there are risks associated with interactions in such communities, such as being exposed and suffering from the negative consequence of conflicts and so on, present within vetted community. My findings extend prior work by proposing membership policing as an internal management strategy to keep the safe space sustainable. The monitoring measures profoundly reflect the dynamic cooperation and tension among the insiders. In this research context, membership policing has shown its efficiency in creating value for the brand community and avoiding potential risks.

5.2 Managerial Implications

Last, my findings can be extended into recommendations for brands and consumers in the brand communities. My research provides avenues to potential moderators who want to set up a vetted consumption community for a stigmatized brand in terms of entry

criteria, group membership selection methods, and management principles. The group founders can filter "loyal fans" of the brand by setting a series of standards based on their consumption characteristics, and thus consume in a safe space where they are not bothered by any stigmatization. With an understanding of how vetting for online brand communities works, consumers who suffer from stigma are able to keenly find and join such private consumption communities on online platforms, adapt more efficiently to the closed space and cooperate with other consumers in the community to improve their consumption experience.

After understanding the efforts and measures of stigmatized consumers in creating safe spaces, brands can strengthen cooperation with their consumers to protect and expand safe consumption spaces and provide a better ecosystem for consumers, thus achieving a win-win situation for both brands and consumers.

Firstly, consistent with the work of Hudson and Okhuysen (2009), stigmatized brands can protect their consumers by avoiding the exposure of the private community and making the membership discreet. For example, before publishing a new product, a brand could conduct a marketing analysis to evaluate the acceptance of non-fan consumers and the risk of being boycotted and exposing fans to an unsafe environment. If the expected consumers are mainly loyal fans, the stigmatized brand can conduct promotion only in the private brand community while preventing the information leakage of products, promotion activities, and consumers. In this way, the brand cooperates with consumers in a private community to enhance the security of the community boundary with outsiders while not devaluating its commercial value.

Secondly, marketing a stigmatized consumption object comes with issues associated with negative societal reception. Hence, when marketing to fans of a stigmatized community, brands should focus their marketing efforts on targeting in-group opinion leaders (Thompson et al., 2014), in this case, which are influential fans and private community managers. By doing so, the stigmatized brand can make good use of the in-group opinion leaders by communicating with them regularly to convey their needs and update information on brand activities and strategies that need cooperation from consumers. Conversely, these in-group opinion leaders can gather consumers' ideas and deliver them to the brand. In this way, the privacy and safety of the private brand communities and their members are ensured, and the cooperation between brands and consumers can be more efficient and productive.

Finally, this study suggests that doing goodwill projects can help stigmatized consumers obtain recognition from outsiders and expand their safe space. Thus, stigmatized brands can cooperate with fans to improve their image and expand consumers' safe consumption space by taking on corporate social responsibility (CSR)

projects. For example, the brands can gather information about local community service work or volunteer work and promptly spread that to the private fan communities through in-group opinion leaders. Fans can then participate in such activities in the name of the brands' consumers, and brands can also provide the necessary support to these fans. Both brands and consumers can benefit from the cooperation, and they may get more recognition from outsiders, thus extending their safe space. This point can also apply to normal brands who want to improve their CSR and strengthen their bond with consumers.

Table 4 Summary of Managerial Implications

Dimension	Brand	Consumers in Brand Community
Keeping Exclusive Community Safe	1) Avoiding exposing private consumption communities in public spaces; 2) Making the membership discreet.	Meeting entry conditions and following community rules.
Conducting Internal Consumption Activities	1) Conducting selected promotion activities only in private communities; 2) Communicating regularly with consumers through in-group opinion leaders (or community managers).	Providing opinions with brand through in-group opinion leaders; and co-creating value with brand.
Extending Safe Space	1) Reducing stigma by implementing CSR; 2) Supporting consumers to do goodwill projects in the name of the brand.	Cooperating with brand in CSR area to seek more acceptance (e.g., doing volunteer work in the name of the brand).

5.3 Limitation and Further Research

My research focuses on the consumers' interaction around a person-brand; it would be interesting for future research to expand the strategies to other regular brands and examine whether they follow similar or different mechanisms. For example, we can apply these strategies to the consumers of a controversial luxury brand like Balenciaga, which was recently accused of sexualizing children in one of their campaigns, and whether consumers retreated into safe communities to continue discussing the brand away from potential threats from outsiders.

In addition, my research is conducted in an East Asian cultural context. The field study was conducted mainly on Chinese social media, and the interviewed participants were consumers in Chinese-speaking private fan communities. However, culture is generally perceived as one of the most important underlying determinants of consumer behavior (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010). Thus, future research can explore whether the strategies proposed in this study can be applied to another cultural background. For example, we can investigate the de-stigmatization strategies of the consumers of a controversial celebrity like Donald Trump in the American context and compare similarities and differences in consumer behavior in different cultural contexts.

Although I have conducted in-depth research on the establishment and management

of online brand communities, the specific entry rules for these vetted consumption communities can vary due to the different operating rules of online platforms. In the future, we can explore more online consumption communities and summarize a more generalized boundary management strategy for stigmatized consumers.

Reference

Ashforth, B. E., & Kreiner, G. E. (1999). "How can you do it?": Dirty work and the challenge of constructing a positive identity. *Academy of Management Review*, 24(3): 413–434.

Ashforth, B. E., Kreiner, G. E., Clark, M. A., & Fugate, M. (2007). Normalizing dirty work: Managerial tactics for countering occupational taint. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(1): 149–174.

Barlow, M. A., Verhaal, J. C., & Hoskins, J. D. (2018). Guilty by association: Product-level category stigma and audience expectations in the US craft beer industry. *Journal of Management*, *44*(7), 2934-2960.

Barreto, M., & Ellemers, N. (2010). Current issues in the study of social stigma: Some controversies and unresolved issues. *Journal of Social Issues*, *66*(3), 431-445.

Basu, S. (2022). The Xiao Zhan Controversy and the Case of Misplaced Fan Activism. *The Phoenix Papers, Vol. 5, No. 1, August 2022, 47-74.*

Beck, J., Neupane, B., & Carroll, J. M. (2018). Managing Conflict in Online Debate Communities: Foregrounding Moderators' Beliefs and Values on Kialo.

Bosmans, K., Mousaid, S., De Cuyper, N., Hardonk, S., Louckx, F., & Vanroelen, C. (2016). Dirty work, dirty worker? Stigmatisation and coping strategies among domestic workers. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *92*, 54-67.

Burgess, J., & Spinks, W. (2014). An examination of the four factors of brand resonance and their theoretical application to video games. *The Journal of New Business Ideas & Trends*, *12*(2), 37.

Clair, M., Daniel, C., & Lamont, M. (2016). Destigmatization and health: Cultural constructions and the long-term reduction of stigma. *Social science & medicine*, *165*, 223-232.

Chaney, K. E., Sanchez, D. T., & Maimon, M. R. (2019). Stigmatized-identity cues in consumer spaces. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *29*(1), 130-141.

Chen, J. S. (2007). A study of fan culture: Adolescent experiences with animé/manga doujinshi and cosplay in Taiwan. *Visual Arts Research*, 14-24.

Cottle, Simon (1994), "Stigmatizing Handsworth: Notes on Reporting Spoiled Space," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 11 (3), 231–56.

Crocker, J., & Major, B. (86). Steele., C.(1998). Social stigma. *The handbook of social psychology*, 504-553.

Crockett, D. (2017). Paths to respectability: Consumption and stigma management in the contemporary black middle class. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *44*(3), 554-581.

Crosby, E. (2012). *Exploring stigma, identity gaps, and consumption* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign).

Crosby, E., & Otnes, C. C. (2010). Consumption as a strategy for stigma management. *ACR North American Advances*.

Darling-Wolf, F. (2004). Virtually multicultural: Trans-Asian identity and gender in an international fan community of a Japanese star. *New Media & Society*, *6*(4), 507-528.

Darwan, A. (2008). The impact of product stigma on consumer behavior: The effects of self-concept and attitudes. *Case Western Reserve University*.

De Mooij, M., & Hofstede, G. (2010). The Hofstede model: Applications to global branding and advertising strategy and research. *International Journal of advertising*, *29*(1), 85-110.

Eichert, C. A., & Luedicke, M. K. (2022). Almost Equal: Consumption under Fragmented Stigma. *Journal of Consumer Research*.

Elsbach, K. D., & Sutton, R. I. (1992). Acquiring organizational legitimacy through illegitimate actions: A marriage of institutional and impression management theories. *Academy of management Journal*, *35*(4), 699-738.

Fiske, J. (1992). The cultural economy of fandom. In L. A. Lewis (Ed.), *The adoring audience: Fan culture and popular media* (pp. 30–49). London, United Kingdom: Routledge.

Frandsen, S., & Morsing, M. (2021). Behind the stigma shield: frontline employees' emotional response to organizational event stigma at work and at home. *Journal of Management Studies*.

Gray, B., Johnson, T., Kish-Gephart, J., & Tilton, J. (2018). Identity work by first-generation college students to counteract class-based microaggressions. *Organization Studies*, 39(9): 1227–1250.

Goffman, Erving (1963), *Stigma: Notes on the Management of a Spoiled Identity,* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Goffman, E. (1963). Stigma and social identity. *Understanding deviance: Connecting classical and contemporary perspectives*, *256*, 265.

Hamilton, K. (2012). Single mothers in poverty: Consumption paradoxes of stigma avoidance. *ACR North American Advances*.

Hampel, C. E., & Tracey, P. (2017). How organizations move from stigma to legitimacy: The case of Cook's Travel Agency in Victorian Britain. *Academy of Management Journal*, 60(6): 2175–2207.

Hecht, Michael L. (1993), "A Research Odyssey: Towards the Development of a Communication Theory of Identity," *Communication Monographs,* 60 (1)*,* 76–82.

Hou, M. (2019). *Fan communication on Weibo.* Diggit Magazine. https://www.diggitmagazine.com/column/fan-communication-weibo

Hu, K. (2005). The power of circulation: digital technologies and the online Chinese fans of Japanese TV drama. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, *6*(2), 171-186.

Hudson, B. A. (2008). Against all odds: A consideration of core-stigmatized organizations. *Academy of Management Review*, *33*(1), 252-266.

Hudson, B. A., & Okhuysen, G. A. (2009). Not with a ten-foot pole: Core stigma, stigma transfer, and improbable persistence of men's bathhouses. *Organization Science*, *20*(1), 134-153.

Jafari, A., & Goulding, C. (2008). We are not terrorists!" UK-based Iranians, consumption practices and the "torn self. *Consumption, Markets and Culture*, *11*(2), 73-91.

James, C. A. (2011). Communication in online fan communities: The ethics of intimate strangers. *Empedocles: European journal for the philosophy of communication*, *2*(2), 279-289.

Khazzoom, A. (2003). The great chain of orientalism: Jewish identity, stigma management, ania ethnic exclusion in Israel. *American Sociological Review*, 68(4): 481– 510.

Kim, M., & Kim, J. (2020). How does a celebrity make fans happy? Interaction between celebrities and fans in the social media context. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *111*, 106419.

Korobkova, K. A., & Black, R. W. (2014). Contrasting visions: Identity, literacy, and boundary work in a fan community. *E-learning and Digital Media*, *11*(6), 619-632.

Kittur, A., & Kraut, R. E. (2010, February). Beyond Wikipedia: coordination and conflict in online production groups. In *Proceedings of the 2010 ACM conference on Computer supported cooperative work* (pp. 215-224).

Kreiner, G. E., Ashforth, B. E., & Sluss, D. M. (2006). Identity dynamics in occupational dirty work: Integrating social identity and system justification perspectives. *Organization science*, *17*(5), 619-636.

Kulik, C. T., Bainbridge, H. T. J. and Cregan, C. (2008). 'Known by the company we keep: Stigma-by association effects in the workplace'. *Academy of Management Review*, 33, 216–30.

Kumble, S. (2018). *Investigating the Persuasive Effects of Narrative Communication and Categorization on De-stigmatization of Mental Illness*. The Pennsylvania State University.

Lamont, M. (2018). Addressing recognition gaps: Destigmatization and the reduction of inequality. *American Sociological Review*, *83*(3), 419-444.

Leetal, D. B. (2019). Those crazy fangirls on the internet: Activism of care, disability and fan fiction. *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies*, *8*(2), 45-72.

Link, B. G., & Phelan, J. C. (2001). Conceptualizing stigma. *Annual review of Sociology*, *27*(1), 363-385.

Link, B. G., Struening, E. L., Neese-Todd, S., Asmussen, S., & Phelan, J. C. (2001). Stigma as a barrier to recovery: The consequences of stigma for the self-esteem of people with mental illnesses. *Psychiatric services*, *52*(12), 1621-1626.

Lopes, P. (2006, September). Culture and stigma: Popular culture and the case of comic books. In *Sociological Forum* (Vol. 21, No. 3, pp. 387-414). Kluwer Academic Publishers-Plenum Publishers.

Mastromartino, B., Wang, J. J., Suggs, D. W., Hollenbeck, C. R., & Zhang, J. J. (2020). Dimensions of sense of membership in a sport fan community: Factors, outcomes, and social capital implications. *Communication & Sport*, 2167479520956370.

Mavin, S., & Grandy, G. (2013). Doing gender well and differently in dirty work: The case of exotic dancing. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 20(3): 232–251.

Mejia, C., Pittman, R., Beltramo, J. M., Horan, K., Grinley, A., & Shoss, M. K. (2021). Stigma & dirty work: In-group and out-group perceptions of essential service workers during COVID-19. *International Journal of hospitality management*, *93*, 102772.

Mizrachi, N., & Zawdu, A. (2012). Between Global Racial and Bounded Identity: Choice of Destigmatization Strategies among Ethiopian Jews in Israel. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 35(3), 436–452.

Moon, D. (2012). Who am I and who are we? Conflicting narratives of collective selfhood in stigmatized groups. *American Journal of Sociology*, *117*(5), 1336-79.

Muniz, A. M., & O'guinn, T. C. (2001). Brand community. *Journal of consumer research*, *27*(4), 412-432.

Muniz, A. M., & Schau, H. J. (2005). Religiosity in the abandoned Apple Newton brand community. *Journal of consumer research*, *31*(4), 737-747.

Neal, M. (2018). Dirty customers: Stigma and identity among sex tourists. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, *18*(1), 131-148.

Orme, S. (2016). Femininity and fandom: the dual-stigmatisation of female comic book fans. *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*, *7*(4), 403-416.

Phung, K., Buchanan, S., Toubiana, M., Ruebottom, T., & Turchick-Hakak, L. (2021). When stigma doesn't transfer: Stigma deflection and occupational stratification in the sharing economy. *Journal of Management Studies*, *58*(4), 1107-1139.

Plante, C. N., Roberts, S. E., Snider, J. S., Schroy, C., Reysen, S., & Gerbasi, K. (2015). 'More than skin-deep': Biological essentialism in response to a distinctiveness threat in a stigmatized fan community. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 54(2), 359-370.

Pittman, C. (2020). "Shopping while Black": Black consumers' management of racial stigma and racial profiling in retail settings. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, *20*(1), 3-22.

Pontikes, E. G., Negro, G. and Rao, H. (2010). 'Stained red: A study of stigma by association to blacklisted artists during the "Red Scare" in Hollywood, 1945 to 1960'. *American Sociological Review*, 75, 456–78.

Ren, Donghao, Xin Zhang, Zhenhuang Wang, Jing Li, and Xiaoru Yuan. "WeiboEvents: A Crowd Sourcing Weibo Visual Analytic System." In *Pacific Visualization Symposium (PacificVis) Notes, 2014 IEEE*, pp. 330-334.

Reysen, S., & Branscombe, N. R. (2010). Fanship and fandom: Comparisons between sport and non-sport fans. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, *33*(2).

Roberts, S. E., Plante, C. N., Reysen, S., & Gerbasi, K. C. (2016). Not all fantasies are created equal: Fantasy sport fans' perceptions of furry, brony, and anime fans. *The Phoenix Papers*, *2*(1), 40-60.

Scaraboto, D., & Fischer, E. (2010). From individual coping to collective action: stigma management in online communities. *ACR North American Advances*.

Scaraboto, D., & Fischer, E. (2013). Frustrated fatshionistas: An institutional theory perspective on consumer quests for greater choice in mainstream markets. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *39*(6), 1234-1257.

Schau, H. J., Muñiz Jr, A. M., & Arnould, E. J. (2009). How brand community practices create value. *Journal of marketing*, *73*(5), 30-51.

Scholz, J., & Smith, A. N. (2019). Branding in the age of social media firestorms: How to create brand value by fighting back online. *Journal of Marketing Management*, *35*(11-12), 1100-1134.

Sendroiu, I., & Mogosanu, A. (2019). Does being Roma matter? Ethnic boundaries and stigma spillover in musical consumption. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *42*(12), 2047-2064.

Sibai, O., De Valck, K., Farrell, A., & Rudd, J. (2014). Keyboard warriors in cyberfights: Conflict in online communities of consumption and its effects on community resources. *Advances in Consumer Research*, *42*, 685-686.

Sierra, J. J., Badrinarayanan, V. A., & Taute, H. A. (2016). Explaining behavior in brand communities: A sequential model of attachment, tribalism, and self-esteem. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *55*, 626-632.

Simha, A., Ahmed, S., Prasad, R., Dinesh, A. S., Kandasamy, A., & Rao, N. P. (2021). Effect of national cultural dimensions and consumption rates on stigma toward alcohol and substance use disorders. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 00207640211028611.

Slade Shantz, A., Fischer, E., Liu, A., & L´evesque, M. (2019). Spoils from the spoiled: Strategies for entering stigmatized markets. *Journal of Management Studies*, 56(7): 1260–1286.

Slutskaya, N., Simpson, R., Hughes, J., Simpson, A., & Uygur, S. (2016). Masculinity and class in the context of dirty work. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 23(2): 165–182.

Smart, L. (2003). of Hidden Stigma. *The social psychology of stigma*, 220.

Soni-Sinha, U., & Yates, C. A. B. (2013). "Dirty work?" gender, race and the union in industrial cleaning. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 20(6): 737–751.

Song, Q., Li, R., & Yin, P. (2014, October). VAST challenge 2014: Mini-challenge 1. In *2014 IEEE Conference on Visual Analytics Science and Technology (VAST)* (pp. 329-330).

Stephanou, A. (2022). *Kanye West – A List of Controversies & Crazy Moments.* Telltales. https://www.telltalesonline.com/20774/kanye-west-controversial-moments/

Tague, A. M., Reysen, S., & Plante, C. (2020). Belongingness as a mediator of the relationship between felt stigma and identification in fans. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, *160*(3), 324-331.

Tenbarge, K. (2022). *What Ye's online warfare reveals about the dangers of celebrity fandom.* NBC News. https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/internet/ye-kanye-west-kim-kardashian-instagram-pete-davidson-tenbarge-goggin-rcna16858

Thompson, F. M., Newman, A., & Liu, M. (2014). The moderating effect of individual level collectivist values on brand loyalty. *Journal of Business Research*, *67*(11), 2437-2446.

Tilcsik, A., Anteby, M., & Knight, C. R. (2015). Concealable stigma and occupational segregation: Toward a theory of gay and lesbian occupations. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 60(3): 446-481.

Tracey, P., & Phillips, N. (2016). Managing the consequences of organizational stigmatization: Identity work in a social enterprise. *Academy of Management Journal*, *59*(3), 740-765.

Van Laar, C., Meeussen, L., Veldman, J., Van Grootel, S., Sterk, N., & Jacobs, C. (2019). Coping with stigma in the workplace: Understanding the role of threat regulation, supportive factors, and potential hidden costs. *Frontiers in psychology*, 1879.

Wen, M.H. & Bi Y. (2021). *Xiao Zhan endorses Gucci: Luxury brands have targeted the young Chinese consumer group.* National Business Daily. https://www.nbd.com.cn/articles/2021-10-27/1963855.html

Whiteford, L. M., & Gonzalez, L. (1995). Stigma: the hidden burden of infertility. *Social science & medicine*, *40*(1), 27-36.

Wiesenfeld, B. M., Wurthmann, K. A., & Hambrick, D. C. (2008). The stigmatization and devaluation of elites associated with corporate failures: A process model. *Academy of management review*, *33*(1), 231-251.

Wu, Y. (2020). The Incident of Xiao Zhan: A War Without Victors. *Procuratorate Daily.*

Xue, R., Qian, G., Qian, Z., & Li, L. (2021). How do foreign customers' perceptions of product-harm crises affect their transfer of capability-and character-based stigma?. *International Marketing Review.*

Yodovich, N. (2016). "A Little Costumed Girl at a Sci-Fi Convention": Boundary Work as a Main Destigmatization Strategy Among Women Fans. *Women's Studies in Communication*, *39*(3), 289-307.

Yin, C.H., Song, H.Z., & Yang, L. (2021). *Chinese Celebrities' Influence on Consumption.* CBN Data & Bright Data. https://www.cbndata.com/report/2509/detail?isReading=report&page=1

Yoshida, M., Gordon, B. S., Heere, B., & James, J. D. (2015). Fan community identification: An empirical examination of its outcomes in Japanese professional sport.

Zhang, R., Wang, M. S., Toubiana, M., & Greenwood, R. (2021). Stigma beyond levels: Advancing research on stigmatization. *Academy of Management Annals*, *15*(1), 188-222.

Zhang, V. (2022). *Analysing Cancel Culture Through China's "227 Incident"*. F Newsmagazine. https://fnewsmagazine.com/2022/03/analysing-cancel-culture-through-chinas-227-incident/

Appendices

Appendices A: Certification of Ethical Acceptability

UNIVERSITÉ
Concordia
UNIVERSITY

CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY
FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

Name of Applicant: Xiaorou Song

Department: John Molson School of Business\Marketing

Agency: N/A

Title of Project: The role of fans in personal branding of an idol

Certification Number: 30015565

Valid From: November 02, 2021   To: November 01, 2022

The members of the University Human Research Ethics Committee have examined the application for a grant to support the above-named project, and consider the experimental procedures, as outlined by the applicant, to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

_____

Dr. Richard DeMont, Chair, University Human Research Ethics Committee

Appendices B: Interview Guide

Can you briefly introduce yourself?

Can you describe the idol you like?

How do you get interested in this idol at the beginning?

How has your relationship with this idol evolve?

What do you usually do to support your favorite idol?

Have you ever spent money on an idol? If yes, what activities about the idol did you spend money on?

Can you tell me about your interactions with other fans of your favorite idol?

Have you joined in any private community or group of this idol? If yes, please describe how did you join in it.

What are your main activities in the public and private fan communities?

How do you interact with other fans in the private fan group?

How do the people around you feel about you consuming this idol?

Appendices C: SPF

SUMMARY PROTOCOL FORM (SPF)

Office of Research – Research Ethics Unit – GM 900 – 514-848-2424 ext. 2425 – oor.ethics@concordia.ca – www.concordia.ca/offices/oor.html

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR ALL RESEARCHERS

Please take note of the following before completing this form:

- **You must not conduct research involving human participants until you have received your Certification of Ethical Acceptability for Research Involving Human Subjects (Certificate).**

- In order to obtain your Certificate, your study must receive approval from the appropriate committee:

  o Faculty research and student research involving greater than minimal risk are reviewed by the University Human Research Ethics Committee (UHREC).

  o Minimal risk student research is reviewed by the College of Ethics Reviewers (CER)

  o Minimal risk student research conducted exclusively for pedagogical purposes is reviewed at the departmental level. **Do not use this form for such research.** Please use the Abbreviated Summary Protocol Form, available on the Office of Research (OOR) website referenced above, and consult with your academic department for review procedures.

  Note that activities of this nature are considered to be a pedagogical exercise and not research meant to contribute to the body of knowledge of the field. As such, while results may be disseminated in the public domain, they cannot be published in peer reviewed journals or presented at conferences as research findings.

- Research funding will not be released until your Certificate has been issued, and any other required certification (e.g. biohazard, radiation safety) has been obtained. For information about your research funding, please consult:

  o Faculty and staff: OOR

  o Graduate students: School of Graduate Studies

  o Undergraduate students: Financial Aid and Awards Office or the Faculty or Department

- Faculty members are required to submit studies for ethics approval by uploading this form, as well as all supporting documentation, to ConRAD. Access to ConRAD can be found in the MyConcordia portal.

- If necessary, faculty members may complete this form and submit it by e-mail to oor.ethics@concordia.ca along with all supporting documentation.

- Student researchers are asked to submit this form and all supporting documentation by e-mail, except for departmental review. Please note:

  o Handwritten forms will not be accepted.

  o Incomplete or omitted responses may result in delays.

  o This form expands to accommodate your responses.

  o Please ensure that all questions are answered completely (provide as much information as possible) and that samples of all materials are provided.

- Please allow the appropriate amount of time for your study to be reviewed:

  o UHREC reviews greater than minimal risk research at the monthly meeting, which is usually scheduled on the second Thursday of each month. You must submit your study by the 1st of the month to be reviewed at that month's meeting. Please confirm the date of the meeting on our webpage/FAQ section or with the staff of the Research Ethics Unit. Expedited reviews conducted by UHREC require a minimum of 8 weeks.

- CER reviews generally require 4 to 6 weeks.

- Research must comply with all applicable laws, regulations, and guidelines, including:

  o The *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*

  o The policies and guidelines of the funding/award agency

  o The *Official Policies of Concordia University*, including the *Policy for the Ethical Review of Research Involving Human Participants, VPRGS-3*.

- The Certificate is valid for one year. In order to maintain their approval and renew their Certificate, it is the researcher's responsibility to submit an Annual Report Form one month before the expiry date that appears on the Certificate. Research must not be conducted under an expired certificate.

- Please note that all changes to an already approved protocol must be submitted for review and approved by the UHREC prior to being implemented. As such, you must submit an amendment request to the OOR.

- In order to ensure that ongoing research is compliant with current best practices and that the documents on file reflects the research activities researchers ate carrying out, complete resubmissions are required every 5 years.

- Please contact the Manager, Research Ethics at 514-848-2424 ext. 2425 if you need more information on the ethics review process or the ethical requirements that apply to your study.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR STUDENT RESEARCHERS

- If your research is part of your faculty supervisor's research, as approved, please have him or her inform the Research Ethics Unit via e-mail that you will be working on the study.

- If your research is an addition to your faculty supervisor's study, please have him or her submit an amendment request, and any revised documents via e-mail. You must not begin your research until the amendment has been approved.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING THIS FORM

- Please note that the SPF was designed to prompt reflection on the research project and all its possible implications. Please take the time to consider each question carefully in order to determine if and how it applies to your project.

- Please make sure that you are using the most recent version of the SPF by checking the OOR website.

- Please answer each question completely and provide as much information as possible; if you believe the question is not applicable, enter not applicable and provide justification.

- Do not alter the questions on this form or delete any material. Where questions are followed by a checklist, please answer by checking the applicable boxes.

- The form can be signed and submitted as follows:

  o Faculty research submitted on ConRAD will be considered as signed as per section 16.

o   SPFs for faculty research submitted via the faculty member's official Concordia e-mail address will also be considered as signed as per section 16.

o   Both faculty and student researchers may submit a scanned pdf of the signature page by e-mail. In this case, the full SPF should also be submitted by e-mail in Word or pdf format (not scanned).

o   If you do not have access to a scanner, the signature page may be submitted on paper to the OOR.

Study Title: The role of fans in personal branding of an idol

Principal Investigator: Xiaorou Song

1. BASIC INFORMATION

Principal Investigator's Status:

☐   Concordia faculty

☐   Concordia staff

☐   Visiting scholar

☐   Affiliate researcher

☐   Postdoctoral fellow

☐   PhD Student

☒   Master's student

☐   Undergraduate student

☐   Other (please specify):

Type of Submission:

☒   New study

☐   Modification or a resubmission of an approved protocol. Approved study number (e.g. 30001234)

Where will the research be conducted?

☒   Canada

☒   Another jurisdiction: China

2. STUDY TEAM AND CONTACT INFORMATION

Role	Name	Department	Phone #	Email Address
Principal Investigator	Xiaorou Song	John Molson School of Business, 1450 rue Guy, Montreal (QC)	218-790-1181	xiaorou.song@mail.concordia.ca
Faculty Supervisor (For student research only)	Dolbec, Pierre-Yann	John Molson School of Business, 1450 rue Guy, Montreal (QC)	416-578-5416	Pierre-yann.dolbec@concordia.ca

Additional Team Members

Please provide names of all team members that will be interacting with human participants or handling research data, as well as those authorized to correspond with the OOR on behalf of the PI

Role	Name	Department /	Phone #	e-mail address

Committee Members (For research conducted by PhD/Master students):

Committee Member	Department

Multi-Jurisdictional Research

Does the research involve researchers affiliated with an institution other than Concordia? If so, please complete the following table, including the Concordia researcher's role and description of the activities to be conducted at Concordia. If researchers have multiple institutional affiliations, please include a line for each institution.

If applicable, please provide a copy of any additional submissions and ethics certification from the collaborating institutions.

Researcher's Name	Institutional Affiliation	Role in the research (e.g. principal investigator, co-investigator, collaborator)	Research activities that will be conducted at this specific institution

3. PROJECT AND FUNDING SOURCES

Please list all sources of funds that will be used for the research. Please note that fellowships or scholarships are not considered research funding for the purposes of this section.

Funding Source	Project Title*	Award Period†	
		Start	End

Notes:

* Please provide the project title as it appears on the Notice of Award or equivalent documentation.

† If you have applied for funding and the decision is still pending, please enter "applied".

4. OTHER CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

a.   Will the research take place at the PERFORM Centre?

        ☐   Yes ☒   No

b.   Does the research involve any of the following (check all that apply):

        ☐   Controlled goods or technology

        ☐   Hazardous materials or explosives

        ☐   Biohazardous materials

        ☐   Human biological specimens

        ☐   Radioisotopes, lasers, x-ray equipment or magnetic fields

        ☐   Protected acts (requiring professional certification)

        ☐   A medical intervention, healthcare intervention or invasive procedures

Please submit any certification or authorization documents that may be relevant to ethics review for research involving human participants.

5. LAY SUMMARY

Please provide a brief description of the research in everyday language. The summary should make sense to a person with no discipline-specific training and it should not use overly technical terms. Please describe the project and its objectives, including any research questions to be investigated. Please also include the anticipated value or benefits to society of the research. Finally, how will results be disseminated (e.g. thesis, presentations, internet, film, publications)?
Please do not submit the thesis proposal or grant application.

The idol industry and fan economy have become increasingly popular, and fans of idols demonstrate incredible consumption power. With the development of fan economy and social media, the success of idols

depends on the support of their fans, who are empowered like never before. The commercial value of an idols is related to their personal branding. I would like to investigate how the fans help build the personal brand of their idol, and how they support the idol to increase their commercial value through consumption. This research will help better understand the consumer behavior of the fans in idol industry.

The results will be disseminated in the thesis of MSc. Marketing.

6. RISK LEVEL AND SCHOLARLY REVIEW

As part of the research, will participants be exposed to risk that is greater than minimal?

Greater than minimal risk means that the probability and magnitude of possible harms and risks implied by participation in the research are greater than those encountered by participants in aspects of their everyday life that relate to the research.

☐ Yes

☒ No

Has this research received favorable review for scholarly merit?

Scholarly review is not required for minimal risk research.

For faculty research, funding from a granting agency such as CIHR, FQRSC, or CINQ is considered evidence of such review. Please provide the name of the agency.

For student research, a successful defense of a thesis or dissertation proposal is considered evidence of such review. Please provide the date of your proposal defense.

☐ Yes Funding agency or date of defense: _____

☒ No

☒ Not required

If you answered no, please submit a Scholarly Review Form, available on the OOR website. For studies to

be conducted at the PERFORM Centre, please submit the Scientific Review Evaluator Worksheet.

7. RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Will any of the participants be part of the following categories?

Please only check a box if the category of participant is a target population for this study.

☐   Minors (individuals under 18 years old)

☐   Individuals with intellectual disabilities

☐   Individuals with cognitive disabilities

☐   Members of Canada's First Nations, Inuit, or Métis peoples

☐   Vulnerable individuals or groups (vulnerability may be caused by limited capacity, or limited access to social goods, such as rights, opportunities and power, and includes individuals or groups whose situation or circumstances make them vulnerable in the context of the research project, or those who live with relatively high levels of risk on a daily basis)

a) Please describe potential participants, including any inclusion or exclusion criteria.

The potential participants are fans who have consumed an idol, all over 18 +. At the beginning of the recruitment text, I add that only adults aged 18 or above can participate in this interview.

b) Indicate if participants are a captive population (e.g. prisoners, residents in a center) or are in any kind of conflict of interest relationship with the researcher such as being students, clients, patients or family members. If so, explain how perceived coercion will be addressed in order to ensure that participants do not feel pressure to participate or perceive that they may be penalized for choosing not to participate.

No

c) Please describe in detail how potential participants will be identified, and invited to participate. In addition, please submit all recruitment materials to be used (e.g. poster(s), flyers, cards, advertisement(s), letter(s), telephone, email, and other verbal scripts).

Note that while the snowball method of recruitment is acceptable, in order to protect the potential participants' right to privacy and confidentiality, the researcher is not permitted to initiate direct contact with a potential participant whose contact information is not publicly available. Rather, recruitment material must be provided by the researcher to their contacts for further dissemination. Those interested would then contact the researcher directly.

Participants will be approached online (e.g., by email, through WeChat, through Linkedin). Recruitment form is attached. Participants might also be recruited through snowballing. When snowballing, my email address and account of WeChat will be given to an existing participant and the participant can distribute it amongst its network (i.e., I will not gather email addresses or WeChat accounts from non-participants).

d)　　　　　Please provide the anticipated start and end date of the research project.

Note that recruitment or direct interaction for data gathering purposes with human participants is not permitted until full ethics approval is awarded. Conducting research without valid ethics approval is considered research misconduct. Only UHREC/CER approved versions of research documents can be used.

Project will start when receiving approval. End date 2022-04-01.

e)　　　Please provide a detailed, sequential description of the procedures to be used in this study. Describe all methods that will be used (e.g. fieldwork, surveys interviews, focus groups, standardized testing, video/audio taping), as well as the setting in which the research will take place. In addition, please submit all instruments to be used to gather data, for example questionnaires or interview guides for each type of participant.

Participants will be interviewed. The interview guide is attached. The interviews will be audio recorded. The interview may be conducted face-to-face in a public setting (*NOTE: During the pandemic, participants who are living in Canada will solely be interviewed by phone on or Skype or other mediated mean, participants who are living in China will be interviewed on WeChat or Tecent Meeting for the firewall issue)*. Participants are free to choose the setting in which this interview will be conducted once in-person interviews are once again permitted. Interviews might also be conducted on Skype or WeChat or Tecent Meeting, it depends on where the participant lives. If the interview is conducted by mediate mean, the consent form will be emailed to the participant, who will be asked to sign it and scan it and email it back (or mail a signed copy of it).

f)　　　Please describe any compensation participants may receive. Indicate the terms for receiving compensation, its value, and what happens to the compensation if a participant withdraws,

There will be no compensation for the participants.

g)　　　　　Do any of the research procedures require special training, such as medical procedures or conducting interviews on sensitive topics or with vulnerable populations? If so, please indicate who will conduct the procedures, what their qualifications are and whether they have previous experience.

No

h)   When doing research with certain groups of participants (e.g. school children, cultural groups, institutionalized people) and/or in other jurisdictions, organizational /community/governmental permission is sometimes needed. If applicable, please explain how this will be obtained. Include copies of approval letters once obtained.

N/A

8. INFORMED CONSENT

Please note that each participant should be provided with a copy of the consent form in addition to the one they sign, which is to be kept by the researcher.

Written consent forms and oral consent scripts should follow the consent form template available on the OOR website. Please include all of the information shown in the sample, adapting it as necessary for the research.

a)   Please explain in detail the process for soliciting informed consent from potential participants. In addition, please submit the written consent form.

Consent form attached. Consent form will be sent by email prior to the interview. It will be collected at the start of or prior to the interview, either by having the participant sign it and send it back by e-mail, or through WeChat. For in-person interviews, participants can follow the same protocol or sign it in person.

b)   Please note that written consent is the preferred method for obtaining consent. However, in certain circumstances, oral consent may be appropriate. If oral consent will be used, please submit a consent script and describe how consent will be documented.

The use of an oral consent procedure needs to be justified and its approval is at the discretion of the applicable ethics committee (either the UHREC or CER). Note that convenience cannot be used as justification.

Written consent will be obtained.

c)   Does the research involve individuals belonging to cultural traditions in which individualized consent may not be appropriate, or in which additional consent, such as group consent or consent from community leaders, may be required? If so, please describe the appropriate format of consent, and how it will be solicited.

N/A

9. DECEPTION

a)   Does the research involve any form of deception of participants?   If so, please describe the deception, explain why the deception is necessary, and explain how participants will be de-briefed at the end of their participation. If deception is involved, please submit a debriefing script.

Please note that deception includes giving participants false information, withholding relevant information, and providing information designed to mislead.

No, this research does not involve any form of deception of participants.

b)   If deception is involved, please note that participants must be provided with the opportunity to refuse consent and request the withdrawal of their data once they know the details of the study. This should take place while it is still possible to give participants this option (e.g. prior to de-identification, publication, etc.). Please explain how this will be done and what timeline will be provided to participants for withdrawal of their data. Include a checkbox in the debriefing script so participants can clearly indicate their choice and a section for the participant's signature. Please provide a copy of the debriefing script.

N/A

10. PARTICIPANT WITHDRAWAL

a)   Please explain how participants will be informed that they are free to discontinue their participation at any time without negative consequences.

This will be indicated on the written consent form as well as when during the introduction portion of the interviews.

b)   Please explain what will happen to the information obtained from a participant if he or she withdraws. For example, will their information be destroyed or excluded from analysis if the participant requests it? Please describe any limits on withdrawing a participant's data, such as a deadline related to publishing data. Note that a clear deadline such as a specific date or timeframe must be provided.

The data will be destroyed if he or she withdraws. Participants can withdraw from this study up to six months after their interview took place.

11. RISKS AND BENEFITS

a)   Please identify any foreseeable benefits to participants.

The participants will learn about their own consumption in the idol industry, the importance of consumer participation in the personal building of an idol.

b)   Please identify any foreseeable risks to participants, including any physical or psychological discomfort; emotional, social, legal, or political risks; risks to their relationships with others, or to their financial well-being. Please take the time to consider this question and mention any type of risk,
no matter how remote the likelihood of it occurring.

There will be no risk to participants.

c)   Please describe how the risks identified above will be minimized. For example, if individuals who are particularly susceptible to these risks will be excluded from participating, please describe how they will be identified. Furthermore, if there is a chance that researchers will discontinue participants' involvement for their own well-being, please state the criteria that will be used.

There will be no risk to participants.

d)   Should the risks detailed above be realized, please describe how the situation will be managed. For example, if referrals to appropriate resources are available, please provide a list. If there is a chance that participants will need first aid or medical attention, please describe what arrangements have been made.

N/A

12. REPORTABLE SITUATIONS AND INCIDENTAL FINDINGS

a)   Is there a chance that the research might reveal a situation that would have to be reported to appropriate authorities, such as child abuse or an imminent threat of serious harm to specific individuals? If so, please describe the situation, how it would be handled, and who the proper authorities are.

Please note that legal requirements apply in such situations. It is the researcher's responsibility to be familiar with the laws in force in the jurisdiction where the research is being conducted.

No

b)   Is there a chance that the research might reveal a material incidental finding? If so, please describe how it would be handled.

Please note that a material incidental finding is an unanticipated discovery made in the course of research but that is outside the scope of the research, such as a previously undiagnosed medical or psychiatric condition that has significant welfare implications for the participant or others.

No

13. CONFIDENTIALITY, ACCESS, AND STORAGE

a)   Please describe the path of the data from collection to storage to its eventual archiving or disposal, including details on short and long-term storage (format, duration, and location), measures taken to prevent unauthorized access, who will have access, and final destination (including archiving, or destruction).

Interviews will be recorded locally. The recordings will be on a password-secured hard drive in a safe in my suitcase with a combination lock that only I know the code. Data will be archived following the same system after the research has been finished. Access is secured through virtual (password) and physical (safe) barriers. I will be the only one who can access the data.

AI transcription services might be used. If the respondent were interviewed in Chinese, I would translate it into English. Respondents are asked not to vocally mention themselves or other by name during the interview. This information is recorded individually in a notebook, or redacted when it appears on the audio file. The data will be kept for a year after publication of the results and will be destroyed afterward (the hard drive will be physically destroyed).

b)   Please identify the access that the research team will have to participants' identity:

If you check more than one box, please specify the category of participants it applies to.

	Category	Definition	Category of Participant
☐	Confidential	The research team will know the participants' real identity, but it will not be disclosed.	
☐	Participant Choice	Participants will be able to choose which level of disclosure they wish for their real identity.	
☐	Disclosed	The research team will know the participants' real identity, and it will be revealed in accordance with their consent.	
☐	Anonymous	The information provided never had identifiers associated with it, and the risk of identification of individuals is low, or very low.	
☐	Anonymous results, but identify who participated	The information provided never had identifiers associated with it. The research team knows participants' identity, but it would be impossible to link the information provided to link the participant's identity.	
☐	Pseudonym	Information provided will be linked to an individual, but that individual will only provide a fictitious name. The research team will not know the real identity of the participant.	
☒	Coded	Direct identifiers will be removed and replaced with a code on the information provided. Only specific individuals have access to the code, meaning that they can re-identify the participant if necessary.	
☐	Indirectly identified	The information provided is not associated with direct identifiers (such as the participant's name), but it is associated with information that can reasonably be expected to identify an individual through a combination of indirect identifiers (such as place of residence, or unique personal characteristics).	
☐	Other (please describe)		

c)   Would the revelation of participants' identity be particularly sensitive, for example, because they belong to a stigmatized group? If so, please describe any special measures that will be taken to respect the wishes of the participants regarding the disclosure of their identity.

No

d) Please describe what access research participants will have to study results, and any additional information that will be provided to participants post-participation (e.g. resources, etc.).

I will contact participants by e-mail or WeChat after the research with a copy of the research report. Some participants might be contacted before the publication of the research for the check.

e)   In some research traditions, such as participatory action research, and research of a socio-political nature, there can be concerns about giving participant groups a "voice".   This is especially the case with groups that have been oppressed or whose views have been suppressed in their cultural location. If these concerns are relevant for the current participant groups, please describe how they will be addressed in the project.

Please note that for the purpose of this evaluation, co-researchers in a participatory research action are considered participants and must consent to participate and provide oral or written consent.

These concerns are not relevant to this research.

14. ADDITIONAL ISSUES

Bearing in mind the ethical guidelines of your academic or professional association, please comment on any other ethical concerns which may arise in the conduct of this research. For example, are there responsibilities to participants beyond the purposes of this study?

N/A

15. DECLARATION AND SIGNATURE

Study Title: How we experience games

I hereby declare that this Summary Protocol Form accurately describes the research project or scholarly activity that I plan to conduct. I will submit a detailed modification request if I wish to make modifications to this research.

I agree to conduct all activities conducted in relation to the research described in this form in compliance with all applicable laws, regulations, and guidelines, including:

- o The *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*

- o The policies and guidelines of the funding/award agency

- o The *Official Policies of Concordia University*, including the *Policy for the Ethical Review of Research Involving Human Participants, VPRGS-3*.

Principal Investigator Signature: _

Date: __2021-08-28