

Fanatical labor and serious leisure in the Internet age: A case of fansubbing in China

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The proliferation of web technologies and applications has generated mixed feelings about the agency of media users in the new media environment. Although these users have more freedom and greater means to engage in a participatory culture, some question whether their online labor is a sign of autonomy, or rather is exploitation in disguise.

In view of the debate surrounding the shifting notions of Internet users, this study focuses on a unique group of new media users, namely, fansubbers, who are known for their fanatical practices and enthusiastic participation in the new media landscape. The findings of a survey of 80 active members of a fansubbing group in China demonstrate how technologies have transformed fansubbing and enabled its participants to overcome the barriers of time and space. Instead of interpreting their fanatical labor in economic terms, this study suggests that young, well-educated urban Chinese are using fansubbing as both a form of serious leisure and a learning platform. The social implications of the evolution of communities of practice in this case are also discussed.

Keywords: fandom, fansubbing, fan culture, labor, prosumption, serious leisure, communities of practice.