

# A Study on the Impact of Young Fans' Emotional Investment in Idols on Their Emotions

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**Abstract:** *In this era of universal star-chasing and idol cultivation, fans invest a significant amount of emotion in their idols during this process, primarily through time and financial investment. This process allows fans to experience excitement, pleasure, and a sense of belonging, specifically influenced by their time and financial investment. This study examines the relationship and influencing factors between fans' emotional investment and emotional gain. This research confirms that fans' emotional investment in idols influences their emotional state, with both time and financial investment influencing these changes. Time investment, by comparison, is more specific, possessing a stronger influence than financial investment and is a significant factor influencing emotional change.*

**Keywords:** Fan group, Emotional investment, Emotional state.

## 1. Problem

Idol worship is a person's social identification and emotional attachment to the person they like. The emotional attachment of fans to idols leads to a series of fan investment and fan culture in the process of chasing stars. In a sociological study on adolescent fan investment and fan culture, researchers investigated the idol worship and fan investment of adolescents in H City, including time investment and money investment. The study found that adolescents in H City spend money on chasing stars every week, and the vast majority of them spend more than 100 yuan. These expenses are mainly used to buy idols' CDs, photos, film and television DVDs, posters and official peripheral products, participate in idol concerts, meet-and-greets, variety show recordings, competitions, etc., as well as buy idol-endorsed products, give idols birthday gifts, make support items, etc. [1]. In addition, adolescents in H City spend time on chasing stars every week, and the vast majority of them spend more than 10 hours, which is mainly reflected in the time they spend on collecting the latest information about idols, such as browsing official websites; searching for the latest information about idols through Weibo; chatting with fan groups; watching idol competitions, film and television productions, concerts and other film and television materials through the Internet.

Why are teenagers so "loyal" to their idols and invest a lot of time and money in them when they lack independent financial ability and have heavy study tasks? Some scholars point out that fans' investment of time and money in idols is a manifestation of emotional investment. In this process, fans gain excitement, pleasure and a sense of belonging [2]. When fans invest a lot of emotion in their idols, what are their emotional gains and emotional changes? Therefore, this paper mainly studies the impact of fans' emotional investment in idols on their emotions, that is, which factors in the emotional investment process can significantly affect their emotional changes.

## 2. Research Theory and Research Review

### 2.1 Emotional Labor Theory

Emotional labor originates from the Italian Autonomist

Marxist school, which points out that emotional labor originates from emotions and is an aspect of immaterial labor, involving interpersonal interaction and communication. The core of emotional labor lies in the creation and manipulation of emotions, which is unquantifiable and focuses more on the subjectivity of the labor process [3]. At present, research on emotional labor mainly focuses on the following aspects: discussion of emotional labor practice from a feminist perspective, exploration of emotional labor in the service industry, emotional labor in the digital game industry, and discussion of emotional labor in fan culture.

In the study of the emotional labor of idols and fans, the current research on the emotional labor of fans mainly focuses on the cultural and relationship levels, especially the productive behavior of fans, that is, how to transform the consumption desire and loyalty of fans into quantitative indicators for commercial exchange [4]. In the fan group, emotional expression is no longer a simple emotional catharsis, but has evolved into a series of multi-faceted interactive emotional mobilizations, which in turn burst out astonishing digital productivity. The rise of fan culture and support culture in the field of Chinese popular culture marks the rise of "emotional labor" in the context of the Internet [5]. This means that the discussion of emotional labor has spread from offline to online, and has gradually become a form of labor that Internet users in the virtual world cannot ignore. This type of fan labor mainly includes creating hot topics, voting on charts, controlling comments in rounds of blogs, and increasing the sales of magazines (or albums, etc.). The support culture that has been formed is also constantly upgrading [6]. In the logic of fans, the essence of star chasing is to seek pleasure, and group labor such as "rounds of blogging" has evolved into a "carnival of star chasing."

Therefore, from the perspective of emotional labor theory, fans' "fanaticism" stems from their deep and sustained emotional and affective investment in the objects they follow.

### 2.2 Related Research

Fans voting for idols is actually a kind of "emotional projection" of fans on idols. They invest emotions, time and money in voting for idols, collecting data, and improving idols' popularity. They also project their ideal self, personal

emotions and values onto idols [7]. The victory of the ranking means the confirmation and demonstration of one's own voice and status, which is directly related to the individual fans. Individuals in different fan circles, under the effect of social influence, are prompted to continuously spend a lot of time, energy and money for the victory of their respective groups [8]. Fanatical fans can spend a lot of time and money on controlling comments, rotating blogs, and ranking for idols. They will also fight with other fan groups or non-fan groups for idols. In this process, fans get psychological satisfaction and emotional catharsis [9]. The level of super topic and the "iron fan" logo have become symbols of fans' emotional investment in the fan circle, proof of their love for stars, and proof of how much data work fans have done. The higher the level of super topic, the more time and labor they have spent. It must be admitted that fans will feel happy and gain positive energy in the process of chasing stars. "Emotion = money = labor = data = traffic", the investment of time and money is a manifestation of emotional identification [10].

From the perspective of emotional labor, in the era of emotional capital, fans and idols benefit from each other in a mutually beneficial relationship: fans gain emotional satisfaction from idols, while investors gain economic benefits from fans. It can be said that fans' emotional investment can provide them with a certain degree of emotional satisfaction. Therefore, this article proposes the following research hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Fans' emotional investment in idols can influence their emotional changes;

Hypothesis 2: The more time a fan invests in their emotional investment, the greater the impact their emotions will have.

### 3. Study Design

#### 3.1 Data Sources

The data for this study comes from a self-made questionnaire. The survey used an online questionnaire and sampled 120 followers from WeChat and Weibo fan groups. To ensure the credibility of the study, the data was cleaned and those who filled in "no super topic" or "super topic did not sign in" were excluded from the analysis. Finally, 114 valid samples were obtained. The descriptive statistics of each variable are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Descriptive statistical analysis of variables N = 114

variable name	Variable properties	Variable description and assignment	count *(N)	percentage
gender	Categorica l variables	Male = 1	16	14.04 (%)
		Female = 0	98	85.96
Are you single?	Categorica l variables	Yes = 1	81	71.05
		No=0	33	8.95
When did you start following idols?	Ordinal variables	1 year ago = 1	30	26.32
		2 years ago = 2	19	16.67
		3 years ago = 3	16	14.04
		5 years ago = 4	49	42.98
How long have you been a die-hard fan?	Ordinal variables	Within 1 year = 1	43	37.72
		1-2 years = 2	25	21.93
		2-3 years = 3	18	15.79
		More than 5 years = 4	28	24.56
How much time do you spend	Ordinal variables	Within 1 hour = 1	59	51.75
		1-2 hours = 2	36	31.58

browsing your idol's information every day?		2-3 hours = 3	14	12.28
		5 hours or more = 4	5	4.39
Number of visits to idol chat rooms per day	Ordinal variables	Within 5 times=1	77	67.54
		5-10 times = 2	24	21.05
		10-15 times = 3	9	7.89
		15 times or more = 4	4	3.51
Would you open a Weibo membership for your idol?	Categorica l variables	Will = 1	34	29.82
		No = 0	80	70.18
How much money do you spend on supporting idols?	Ordinal variables	Within 100=1	61	53.51
		100-200=2	20	17.54
		200-500=3	20	17.54
		More than 500=4	13	11.4
How much money will be spent on idol endorsement products?	Ordinal variables	Within 100=1	59	51.75
		100-200=2	15	13.16
		200-500=3	18	15.79
		More than 500=4	22	19.3
How much money would you spend on idol merchandise?	Ordinal variables	Within 100=1	62	56.14
		100-200=2	25	21.93
		200-500=3	14	12.28
		More than 500=4	11	9.65
Dependent variable				percentage
I feel nervous or in pain	Interval variable	Not at all =4	39	34.21
		Sometimes = 3	93	55.26
		Most of the time = 2	9	7.89
		Almost all the time = 1	3	2.63
My heart is full of worries	Interval variable	Not at all =4	32	28.07
		Sometimes 3	68	59.65
		Most of the time = 2	12	10.53
		Almost all the time = 1	2	1.75
I suddenly felt panic	Interval variable	Not at all = 1	43	37.72
		Sometimes = 2	53	46.49
		Most of the time = 3	15	13.16
		Almost all the time = 4	3	2.63
I feel happy	Interval variable	.Not at all = 1	8	7.02
		Sometimes = 2	36	31.58
		Most of the time = 3	56	49.12
		Almost all the time = 4	14	12.28
I can laugh and see the bright side of things	Interval variable	.Not at all = 1	8	7.02
		Sometimes = 2	33	28.95
		Most of the time = 3	50	43.86
		Almost all the time = 4	23	20.18
I look forward to everything with optimism	Interval variable	.Not at all = 1	7	6.14
		Sometimes = 2	32	28.07
		Most of the time = 3	60	52.63
		Almost all the time = 4	15	13.16
I am still interested in the things I was interested in before	Interval variable	.Not at all = 1	6	5.26
		Sometimes = 2	35	30.7
		Most of the time = 3	57	50
		Almost all the time = 4	16	14.04

#### 3.2 Research Variables

Fans' investment in their idols is an emotional investment, specifically expressed in the form of time and money. Emotion = time = money. Fans gain emotional satisfaction and emotional catharsis in this process. This article examines the relationship between fans' emotional labor and emotional gains. Emotional investment is operationalized into two components: fans' time investment and their financial investment. Fans' emotional gains are the emotional changes during this emotional investment process, operationalized as positive and negative emotions.

Using the emotional state of the past month as the dependent

variable, we operationalized this into specific questions using a psychological questionnaire. There are seven related questions: 1) I feel nervous or distressed; 2) My heart is filled with worries; 3) I suddenly feel panicky; 4) I feel happy; 5) I can laugh and see the bright side of things; 6) I can laugh and see the bright side of things; 7) I am still interested in things I used to be interested in. Questions 1-3 are negatively scored, while questions 4-7 are positively scored, with higher scores indicating a positive emotional state.

The independent variables of this study are time investment and money investment. Based on the understanding of the time dimension and money dimension and the characteristics of the research object, and with reference to relevant literature, time investment and money investment are operationalized into different specific problems.

1) Time Investment. Four questions were selected from the questionnaire to measure time investment: "When did you start following your idol? How long have you been a die-hard fan? How much time do you spend browsing your idol's information each day? How many times do you visit your idol's super chat each day?" The questionnaire instructed participants to choose the answer that best matched their emotional state, with responses ranging from "not at all, sometimes, most of the time, almost all of the time," and

scored 0, 1, 2, and 3, respectively. Respondents were asked to select from the responses, and valid responses were coded, analyzed, and verified.

2) Financial investment. Four questions in the questionnaire were selected as the measurement of financial investment: "Would you become a Weibo member for your idol? How much would you spend annually on supporting your idol? How much would you spend annually on products endorsed by your idol? How much would you spend annually on merchandise related to your idol?" Respondents were asked to select from the answers. Valid questionnaires were coded, analyzed, and verified.

In addition, the demographic variables of the respondents were used as covariates in this study, including gender, marital status, etc.

## 4. Statistical Results and Analysis

### 4.1 Correlation Analysis

First, SPSS13.0 software was used to conduct correlation analysis on the data to examine the correlation between independent variables such as time investment and money investment.

**Table 2:** Correlation analysis between variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1 Gender	1									
2 Marital/Dating Status	-0.024	1								
3 Whether to open membership	-0.159*	-0.055	1							
4 When started following the idol	0.032	-0.112	0.026	1						
5 How long been a hardcore fan	0.101	-0.040	0.274**	0.645**	1					
6 Daily money spent on browsing idol information	-0.039	0.199*	0.228**	-0.120	0.121	1				
7 Daily times entering super topic	0.074	0.136	0.138	-0.050	0.109	0.516**	1			
8 Idol's support fee	0.044	0.079	0.414**	-0.018	0.219*	0.372**	0.360**	1		
9 Spending on idol's product endorsements	-0.015	0.056	0.427**	-0.104	0.078	0.421**	0.296**	0.700**	1	
10 Purchasing idol's merchandise	-0.033	0.090	0.364**	-0.045	0.148	0.419**	0.331**	0.782**	0.756	1

\*P<0.05, \*\*p<0.01.

As shown in Table 2, gender, a demographic variable, was significantly negatively correlated with willingness to open a Weibo account for an idol ( $r=-0.159$ ), while marital status was significantly positively correlated with daily time spent browsing idol information ( $r=0.199$ ). Furthermore, whether or not one had a Weibo account, a financial variable, was significantly positively correlated with how long one had been a die-hard fan ( $r=0.274$ ), daily time spent browsing idol information ( $r=0.228$ ), idol support fees ( $r=0.414$ ), idol endorsement product fees ( $r=0.427$ ), and purchases of idol merchandise ( $r=0.364$ ). The time spent following an idol was significantly positively correlated with how long one had been a die-hard fan ( $r=0.645$ ). The time spent as a die-hard fan was also significantly positively correlated with the amount of money spent on idol support. The amount of time spent browsing an idol's information was significantly positively correlated with the number of times one visited a super topic daily ( $r=0.516$ ), the idol's support fees ( $r=0.372$ ), the amount of money spent on idol endorsement products ( $r=0.421$ ), and the amount of money spent on idol merchandise ( $r=0.419$ ). The number of times one visited a super topic daily was significantly positively correlated with the idol's support fees ( $r=0.360$ ), the amount of money spent on idol endorsement

products ( $r=0.296$ ), and the amount of money spent on idol merchandise ( $r=0.331$ ). The amount of money spent on idol support was significantly positively correlated with the amount of money spent on idol endorsement products ( $r=0.700$ ) and the amount of money spent on idol merchandise ( $r=0.782$ ). From this, we can see that there are varying degrees of correlation between demographic variables and money variables and time variables, and there are varying degrees of correlation between time variables and money variables. In addition, there are varying degrees of correlation between the sub-variables of time variables and the sub-variables of money variables.

### 4.2 Partial Correlation Analysis

Data analysis using software examined how the relationships between variables changed after controlling for these variables. It can be seen that after controlling for singleness, the correlation coefficient between positive emotions and time investment was 0.179, which decreased compared to the 0.185 correlation coefficient without controlling for singleness. This suggests that positive emotions are influenced not only by time investment but also by singleness.

After controlling for singleness, the correlation coefficient between positive emotions and financial investment was 0.122, which decreased compared to the 0.131 correlation coefficient without controlling for singleness. This suggests that positive emotions are influenced not only by financial investment but also by singleness. After controlling for gender, the correlation coefficient between positive emotions and financial investment was 0.131, which remained unchanged compared to the 0.131 correlation coefficient without controlling for gender. This suggests that positive emotions are influenced by financial investment but not by gender. After controlling for gender, the correlation coefficient between positive emotions and time investment was 0.198, which remained unchanged compared to the 0.198 correlation coefficient without controlling for gender. This indicates that positive emotions are affected by time investment but not by gender.

From this, we can conclude that the correlation between positive emotions and time and money investment may be real.

After controlling for gender, the correlation coefficient between negative emotions and time investment was 0.194, which was lower than the correlation coefficient of 0.195 without controlling for gender, indicating that negative emotions are influenced by gender in addition to time investment. After controlling for gender, the correlation coefficient between negative emotions and financial investment was 0.189, which was higher than the correlation coefficient of 0.185 without controlling for gender, indicating that negative emotions are influenced by gender in addition to financial investment. After controlling for single status, the correlation coefficient between negative emotions and time investment was 0.183, which was lower than the correlation coefficient of 0.195 without controlling for single status, indicating that negative emotions are influenced by single status in addition to time investment. After controlling for single status, the correlation coefficient between negative emotions and financial investment was 0.180, which was lower than the correlation coefficient of 0.185 without controlling for single status, indicating that negative emotions

are influenced by single status in addition to financial investment.

#### 4.3 Multiple Regression Analysis

We established multiple regression models to further explore the relationship between each variable and emotions. All variables were annotated before the regression. Detailed results are shown in Tables 4 and 5. Model 1 is the baseline model, in which all control variables are included in the regression equation. Models 2 through 4, respectively, include time and money in the regression equation. Finally, all predictor and control variables are included in the regression model, resulting in Model 5.

As shown in Table 4, in Model 1, in addition to gender, marital status significantly influenced positive emotions, leading to significant results in Model 1, explaining 0.3% of the variance. Model 2 results show that, after controlling for demographic characteristics, the time spent as a die-hard fan significantly positively impacts positive emotions, while the time spent following an idol negatively impacts positive emotions. Compared to the baseline model, the inclusion of time in Model 2 increased the explanatory power of the regression equation for emotions by 1.5%. Model 3 reflects the impact of time investment on positive emotions. When fans invest more time in their idols, their positive emotions are higher. Time investment significantly positively impacts positive emotions, increasing the explanatory power of emotions by 1.7% compared to the baseline model. Model 4 results show that, after controlling for demographic variables, financial investment in idols significantly and negatively impacts positive emotions to a certain extent. Compared to the baseline model, Model 4 increases the explanatory power of positive emotions by 3.3%. In Model 5, demographic, time, and money variables were included simultaneously. The regression equation explained 10.9% of the variance in emotions, increasing the explanatory power by 2.1% compared to the baseline model. Table 4 shows that time, money, and recognition variables all have a significant impact on positive emotions.

**Table 4: Positive emotions**

Demographic Variables as Control Variables					
Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Gender	-0.050(0.170)	0.086(0.170)	-0.078(0.171)	-0.152(0.174)	-0.164(0.176)
Single or not	0.163*(0.132)	0.153(0.132)	0.115(0.134)	0.086(0.134)	0.090(0.135)
Time Investment					
When started following the idol		-0.074(0.062)	-0.051(0.064)	-0.066(0.065)	-0.065(0.065)
How long been a hardcore fan		0.130*(0.065)	0.103(0.067)	0.133(0.071)	0.139(0.072)
Daily time spent browsing idol information			0.091*(0.084)	0.097(0.085)	0.093(0.089)
Daily visits to idol's super topic			0.034*(0.088)	0.022*(0.089)	0.024(0.090)
Monetary Investment					
Whether to open membership for idol				-0.281(0.149)	-0.305(0.154)
Money spent on idol support				0.060*(0.065)	0.070(0.095)
Money spent on idol's product endorsements					0.064*(0.082)
Money spent purchasing idol merchandise					-0.077(0.109)
F	0.818	1.421	1.328	1.468	1.236
RS	0.015	0.050	0.071	0.102	0.109
ARS	-0.003	0.015	0.017	0.033	0.021

Note: \*P<0.05, \*\*p<0.01.

**Table 5:** Negative Emotions

Demographic Variables as Control Variables					
Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Gender	0.302(0.158)	0.275(0.159)	0.271(0.159)	0.259(0.161)	0.263(0.160)
Single or not	0.114*(0.123)	0.119(0.123)	0.083(0.125)	0.080(0.124)	0.072(0.123)
<b>Time Investment</b>					
When started following the idol		-0.010(0.058)	0.012(0.060)	0.027(0.060)	0.027(0.059)
How long been a hardcore fan		0.082*(0.061)	0.057(0.063)	0.029(0.066)	0.012(0.066)
Daily time spent browsing idol information			0.052*(0.079)	0.019(0.079)	0.057*(0.081)
Daily visits to idol's super topic			0.087*(0.082)	0.050*(0.083)	0.044*(0.082)
<b>Monetary Investment</b>					
Whether to open membership for idol				-0.025(0.139)	0.039(0.141)
Money spent on idol support				0.131*(0.061)	0.221*(0.087)
Money spent on idol's product endorsements					-0.141*(0.075)
Money spent purchasing idol merchandise					0.005(0.099)
F	2.208	1.783	1.691	1.932	2.021
RS	0.039	0.062	0.088	0.130	0.167
ARS	0.021	0.027	0.036	0.063	0.084

Note: \* $P<0.05$ , \*\* $p<0.01$ .

As shown in Table 5, in Model 1, in addition to gender, marital status significantly influenced negative emotions, leading to significant results in Model 1, explaining 3.9% of the variance. Model 2 results showed that, after controlling for demographic characteristics, the time spent as a die-hard fan significantly positively influenced negative emotions, while the time spent following an idol negatively influenced them. Compared to the baseline model, the inclusion of time in Model 2 increased the explanatory power of the regression equation for emotions by 2.7%. Model 3 reflects the impact of time investment on negative emotions. When fans invest more time in their idols, their negative emotions are higher. Time investment significantly positively influences negative emotions, increasing the explanatory power of emotions by 3.6% compared to the baseline model. Model 4 results show that, after controlling for demographic variables, financial investment in idols significantly and negatively influences negative emotions to a certain extent. Compared to the baseline model, Model 4 increases the explanatory power of negative emotions by 6.3%. In Model 5, demographic, time, and money variables were included simultaneously. The regression equation explained 16.7% of the variance in emotions, increasing the explanatory power by 8.4% compared to the baseline model. Table 5 shows that time, money, and recognition variables all have a significant impact on negative emotions.

## 5. Conclusion

From a psychological perspective, this study, informed by theories of emotional labor, constructs hypotheses related to emotional investment and emotional gain. Based on the research design, it empirically explores the impact of fans' emotional investment in idols on their emotional gain. The results show varying degrees of correlation between demographic variables and both time and money, and between time and money. Furthermore, after controlling for demographic variables such as gender and marital status, when time and money were included in the regression model separately, both variables had significant effects on both positive and negative emotions. When both variables were included simultaneously in the regression model, the explanatory power of the model was stronger than when either variable was included individually, and each variable still maintained a significant influence on emotions.

Specifically, when considering only the demographic variables of gender and marital status, marital status has a significant positive impact on positive emotions. However, when the time variables of when one starts following an idol and when one becomes a die-hard fan are added, the effect of marital status on positive emotions disappears. Now, the time spent as a die-hard fan significantly and positively impacts positive emotions, explaining that marital status does not necessarily affect positive emotions. When other time variables are added, the influence of the duration of being a die-hard fan disappears, while the amount of time spent browsing the idol's information and the number of times one visits the super topic each day positively impact positive emotions. When the monetary variable is added, the number of times one visits the super topic each day still has a significant impact, but the influence decreases. Now, the amount of money spent on supporting the idol significantly and positively impacts positive emotions.

Similarly, when considering only the demographic variables of gender and marital status, marital status has a significant positive impact on negative emotions. However, when adding the time variables of when one started following an idol and when one became a die-hard fan, the effect of marital status on negative emotions disappears. In this case, the time spent as a die-hard fan significantly and positively affects negative emotions, explaining that marital status does not necessarily affect negative emotions. When other time variables are added, the influence of duration as a die-hard fan disappears, while the amount of time spent browsing idol information and the number of daily visits to the super topic positively influence negative emotions. When financial variables are added, the number of daily visits to the super topic still has a significant effect, but the influence decreases. In this case, the amount of money spent on idol support has a significant positive impact on negative emotions. Finally, when considering the demographic, time, and financial variables simultaneously, the influence of the demographic variables disappears. Now, the time and financial variables jointly influence negative emotions, with the amount of time spent browsing idol information and the number of daily visits to the super topic exerting the greatest influence.

This study examined the impact of fans' emotional investment in idols on their emotions and confirmed that emotional

investment and its sub-variables significantly influence emotions. The greater the emotional investment, the greater the emotional impact. Looking at the individual variables, time investment is more specific, having a stronger influence than financial investment and being a significant factor influencing emotional change.

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