

An Exploration of the Communication and Development of Fandom Culture in the Context of New Media

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Abstract:

With the advancement of new media technologies, fan community culture has transitioned from a marginal subculture to mainstream visibility. This study focuses on the evolution and governance of fan community culture driven by new media technology. The research will focus on its representation and characteristics in the context of new media, the driving forces behind its dissemination, operational logic, social benefits, and governance strategies. Methodologically, this involves analyzing dissemination characteristics through phenomenological observation and case studies, complemented by platform algorithm recommendation analysis. Fan communities build their identity through symbolic support and ritualized collective actions, while data-driven consumption models promote positive aspects such as charitable outreach. However, negative effects like online violence and consumer alienation also emerge, with issues like group polarization and impacts on public safety highlighting underlying social risks. The conclusion shows that platforms should optimize their algorithms and establish a real-name registration system for key influencers; legal frameworks should be enhanced to regulate content governance, with strict penalties for data fabrication and online abuse; and educational initiatives should strengthen media literacy to guide adolescents toward rational fandom. Fan culture, as a product of the combined influence of new media technologies, capital logic, and youth psychology, should, in line with technological advancements, be actively integrated with mainstream values. This integration aims to transform it into a positive force that promotes social progress.

Keywords: Fan community culture; new media; characteristics; influence.

1. Introduction

This study focuses on the dissemination patterns, social impact, and governance strategies of fan culture within the context of new media technological innovations. As a quintessential example of youth subculture in the digital age, this cultural phenomenon has become a critical perspective for examining cultural transmission, group behavior, and social governance in the new media environment. With the proliferation of digital media such as social media and short video platforms, fan culture has evolved from a niche gathering of early celebrity followers into a powerful cultural force that encompasses hundreds of millions of young people and deeply permeates mainstream society. Its dissemination capacity and complexity not only demonstrate the vitality of cultural innovation but also highlight the challenges faced in social governance [1]. This research holds significant theoretical and practical implications for understanding cultural shifts and social governance in the era of new media. From an academic perspective, existing research has largely focused on the subcultural attributes or negative governance aspects of fan culture, while systematic analysis of its dissemination mechanisms, value transformation, and dynamic evolution within the new media environment remains insufficient [2]. From a practical perspective, balancing the innovative vitality of fandom culture with its potential risks—such as cyberbullying and consumer alienation—while fostering its constructive interaction with mainstream values has become a shared concern for diverse stakeholders, including platforms, governments, and families [3]. This study provides empirical support for academic discussions in related fields by analyzing the technological empowerment logic, capital penetration pathways, and psychological mechanisms of youth fandom culture.

This study primarily explores three dimensions: the dissemination mechanism, the double-sided effects, and the governance pathways. At the level of dissemination mechanisms, the focus is on analyzing how new media technologies—such as algorithmic recommendations and social fission—reshape fan interaction patterns, revealing a new cultural production logic where “data equals power.” [4]. From the perspective of dual effects, systematically analyze the positive aspects of fan culture in public welfare communication and cultural innovation, as well as negative issues such as online violence and consumer alienation; in terms of governance strategies, explore a collaborative governance model involving platform responsibility, legal regulation, and educational intervention with multiple stakeholders [5].

In terms of methodology, this study employs a literature

review approach as its foundation, systematically examining relevant domestic and international literature on fan culture, new media communication, and social governance. It focuses on identifying core perspectives within existing research concerning communication mechanisms, group behavior, and governance practices. Concurrently, it incorporates case study analysis, selecting representative cases for in-depth examination to validate theoretical hypotheses and supplement empirical data. The advantage of the documentary analysis method lies in its ability to integrate multidisciplinary perspectives, providing a comprehensive understanding of historical evolution and contemporary characteristics; meanwhile, case study analysis reveals the practical manifestations of abstract theories through observation of specific contexts. Combining these approaches enhances the scientific rigor and explanatory power of the research.

The ultimate objective of this study is to systematically uncover the dissemination patterns and developmental trajectory of fan culture within the new media environment, thereby clarifying its essential characteristics. It aims to distill the mechanisms underlying its dual-sided social effects, providing theoretical foundations for balancing innovative vitality with potential risks. Furthermore, it proposes a governance framework to facilitate the rational transformation of fan culture. To achieve this goal, the research will start from the observation of phenomena, deeply describe and analyze the dissemination mechanism through cases, combine theories to distill and summarize the value logic, and ultimately propose governance countermeasures based on empirical findings, providing systematic thinking for understanding and guiding the healthy development of fan culture.

2. Representations and Characteristics of Fan Culture in the New Media Environment

Fans, first documented in the 19th century, refer to individuals who exhibit intense admiration and infatuation with film or sports celebrities. With the rise and wide spread of mass idol culture, in the current common perception, fans are groups that actively gather due to their admiration and pursuit of certain celebrities, stars or cultural phenomena. The social circle composed of multiple such groups is called a “fan circle” or “fan circle”, and this kind of circle is entirely based on fans’ pursuit activities of idols [2].

During the period dominated by traditional media, fans’ attention to their idols was often scattered and isolated,

with limited communication channels among individuals and high difficulty in group organization. Since the advent of the social media era, various online interaction platforms have experienced rapid growth. Leveraging the efficiency of internet information dissemination, fans can quickly connect and discover each other across digital spaces such as Weibo, Baidu Tieba, Douban, Bilibili, and Douyin. They rally support for their idols by establishing fan communities and setting up fan support sites. These organized groups are what we now refer to as “fan circles.” Such circles exhibit distinct group characteristics and clear boundaries, typically comprising a large membership base. Internally, they often demonstrate strong autonomous initiative and cohesive mobilization capabilities.

With the continuous expansion of the scale of the idol culture industry, the fan circle has gradually shown the characteristics of organizational norms and industrial operation. Among them, the concept of “circle” also reflects the typical model of circle dissemination in the Internet environment [3]. The fan community has evolved from a loosely organized group based on shared interests to a highly structured division of labor within fan circles. This transformation has been facilitated by advancements in media technology that enhance community organizational efficiency and also reflects the psychological need for group belonging among the younger generation growing up in the internet environment.

The transformation from the early fan form to the modern fan circle model is essentially the result of the iteration of media technology forms - fans relying on new media platforms show a higher frequency of interaction and stronger emotional connection compared to enthusiasts in the traditional mass media era [2].

The new media environment is a dissemination network of terminals and platforms supported by traditional digital technologies, integrated with emerging technologies such as big data and artificial intelligence. Its fundamental characteristics are embodied in digitalization, connectivity, and interactivity. On this basis, the new media environment presents unique communication characteristics: information dissemination is both immediate and global, and hot events rapidly spread worldwide through Weibo’s trending topics and short-video platforms. Algorithm-driven recommendation systems enable personalized and precise content delivery by tailoring offerings based on user behavior data. Multimedia convergence has become the norm, with text, images, videos, and live streams integrated into composite presentations. Social attributes leverage platforms like WeChat and Moments, allowing users to

form tiered dissemination networks through community-based interactions.

This technologically empowered communication ecosystem further redefines the role of the user. From the one-way “audience” of traditional media to the “producer and consumer” who combines information reception and production, users deeply participate in content production through creation, secondary creation and other means. The subjectivity has been significantly enhanced, allowing for the independent selection of information sources, participation in topic discussions, and even influence the direction of public opinion, such as the rise of “opinion leaders”. Meanwhile, anonymity and multi-identity features have lowered the social threshold, allowing users to switch identities on different platforms, such as Weibo secondary accounts and wechat real names, thus expanding the space for expression [4].

Overall, the new media environment fundamentally represents a redistribution of communication power enabled by technology. It has not only revolutionized the production and consumption of information but also profoundly influenced social structures and cultural forms in complex ways.

The fan circle culture in the new media environment presents a complex feature of high organization, technological dependence and circle closure. Its core feature is reflected in that, relying on platforms such as Weibo and Douyin, fans break the traditional one-way communication through real-time comments, live-streaming rewards, and data-controlled reviews, forming a virtual intimate relationship of “quasi-social interaction”. A clearly delineated organizational structure gives rise to specialized teams such as the Data Team, Anti-Black Operations Team, and Art Team, facilitating collective mobilization through standardized processes like “fundraising and investment,” “comment control,” and “anti-black operations.” Symbolic systems, including dedicated support colors, coded jargon (e.g., “yxh” representing marketing accounts), and customized merchandise, foster a sense of identity and create subcultural barriers characterized by insular enthusiasm. At the same time, the platform leverages traffic algorithms to promote the “hot search mechanism,” transforming fan behavior into data capital; talent agencies utilize fan economy models to commodify idols and tie them to consumerism, creating a closed-loop industry chain driven by “paying for love.” This cultural phenomenon not only showcases the creativity of youth communities but also exposes governance challenges such as group polarization and manipulation of public opinion.

3. The Propulsive Forces and Operational Logic of Fan Culture

The driving force and operational logic of fan culture stem from the multi-level integration of emotional economy, algorithmic power and capital logic, forming a self-consistent and complete system. The underlying logic of the emotional drive mechanism is that fans' core motivation stems from intense emotional engagement and a need for identity affirmation [6]. They translate personal emotions, including but not limited to admiration, protectiveness, and a sense of belonging, into measurable practical actions [5]. These actions include purchasing endorsed products, participating in crowdfunding campaigns to support idols, engaging in chart manipulation such as inflating view counts and votes, and creating derivative content like video edits or fan art.

This series of "powering up for love" actions not only fulfills fans' emotional projection and idealization of their idols but also fosters a sense of collective identity and value within the community through completing these "tasks" and sharing results such as unboxing posts and data displays [7]. This has thus formed a solid and complete chain of "emotional investment - consumption or labor - identity recognition", and this emotional labor constitutes the most fundamental adhesive of the fan circle culture.

Social media platforms and their algorithmic recommendation systems reinforce this logic through a traffic conspiracy mechanism. By analyzing user behavior data such as likes, comments, and favorites, they precisely capture fan preferences and continuously deliver idol-related news, fan community updates, and controversial topics, thereby creating a homogenized information environment [3]. Algorithmic recommendation systems based on user behavior data, such as Weibo trending searches and Douyin traffic pools, precisely capture fan preferences and continuously deliver idol-related content. This mechanism easily creates an "information cocoon," immersing fans in a unidimensional stream of information [4]. For instance, when negative news about a certain celebrity is identified by an algorithm as "highly interactive content", the platform prioritizes the push of related topics. This will directly stimulate fans to control comments, oppose malicious comments and conduct secondary dissemination, often leading to public opinion rapidly turning extreme. The platform directly utilizes this "emotion-first" algorithmic logic to transform the collective emotions and controversies of fans themselves into sustainable traffic dividends [8].

The deep involvement of capital in the entertainment

industry has further systematized and intensified the harnessing of fan power within fandom communities [6]. Talent agencies proactively generate buzzworthy events by meticulously crafting personas and orchestrating various incidents—such as manufacturing controversies or "scandal crises"—to stimulate fans' sense of crisis and protective instincts. Transforming crises into traffic growth opportunities to drive fans toward more intensive consumption and engagement, including increasing product purchases to boost sales volume and exerting greater efforts in anti-blacklisting and comment moderation [9]. To some extent, the fan base has become "free digital laborers", and their spontaneous actions have been ingeniously incorporated into the chain of capital appreciation, transforming crises into growth points for traffic [6]. The most typical case is the "milk purchase voting" operation adopted by a certain talent show. Fans must purchase the products of specific sponsors, namely milk, to obtain the voting QR code printed inside the packaging. The unconsumed milk was dumped in large quantities, and the consumption behavior of fans was directly transformed into the data capital of their idols. This mechanism not only achieved the traffic targets of the program producers and the platform, but also directly boosted the sales of the sponsors' products, accomplished the dual goals of brand exposure and sales conversion, and maximized the capture of commercial value.

This operational logic, driven by the collusion of emotion, algorithms, and capital, generates complex and multifaceted social effects. At the individual level, fans become entangled in continuous emotional labor and social pressures, leading to cognitive narrowing. They exhibit irrational resistance to external criticism beyond their idol and community sphere, with their self-worth potentially becoming alienated and closely tied to various ranking lists and consumption capacity. This dynamic even fosters abnormal behaviors such as "debt-driven idol worship," which surpass their personal financial capabilities. At the group level, platform algorithms further exacerbate group polarization. Communication spaces shrink between different social circles, fan communities of various idols, and even between those inside and outside the fandom ecosystem. This fosters antagonistic sentiments, ultimately triggering incidents of cyberbullying. Finally, at the cultural-economic level, capital establishes cultural hegemony through data monopolization. By controlling data distribution, it creates a "traffic hegemony." This may even imperceptibly influence and manipulate the reshaping of the public's aesthetic standards and value judgments [9]. Fan culture thus emerges as a product of the conspiracy

between capital, technology, and emotion, showcasing the formidable creativity and organizational capacity of contemporary youth subcultures. However, it also exposes profound challenges to social governance, cybersecurity, and the shaping of youth values due to its inherent and high-risk potential for loss of control [4].

4. The Social Impact and Contradictory Tensions of Fan Culture

4.1 Positive Value and Subcultural Innovation

Fan culture demonstrates remarkable creativity in subcultural innovation and social engagement, breaking away from traditional support models to establish a sustainable tripartite collaboration between idols, fans, and charitable organizations. Public welfare support has become an important breakthrough. Since their debut, SEVENTEEN has donated 13 baby goats to African children on their first settlement. Since then, they have never stopped participating in various charitable and public welfare activities. In 2024, they became UNESCO Youth Goodwill Ambassadors. Their fans have also been following in their footsteps to carry out various public welfare activities, such as donating money to disaster-stricken areas and adopting animals and plants. A more mature case is reflected in systematic public welfare projects - Yi Yangqianxi's fan club initiated the "Qianxi Forest" plan, planting 100,000 trees in the deserts of Northwest China. This model is regarded by academia as the prototype of a "public welfare community," where fans, inspired by their idols, transition from emotional consumption to the realization of social value [5].

Fan culture demonstrates remarkable cultural regeneration capabilities, with its fusion and innovation transcending subcultural boundaries. Bilibili creators blend traditional culture with dance, editing techniques, and emerging technologies to revitalize its appeal among younger audiences. Overseas fans voluntarily translate Chinese online literature and dramas, emerging as grassroots forces in cultural exports. On the economic front, fan-created derivative works have evolved into specialized professional roles, establishing a new occupational ecosystem that integrates "creativity-technology-commerce." For example, "station managers" utilize advanced photography and photo editing skills to produce visual portfolios, with individual works selling for over a thousand dollars on platforms like Etsy, thereby creating a dual value loop of artistic significance and commercial profitability [7]. These practices demonstrate that fan culture possesses the potential to

transcend subcultural boundaries and activate social resources.

4.2 Negative Effects and Challenges to Social Governance

The unregulated expansion of fan culture has generated multiple social risks. In the realm of privacy and security, obsessive behaviors have given rise to a black market industry, characterized by systematic invasions of celebrities' personal lives and repeated violations of legal boundaries. During a concert by artists under Shidai Fengjun, some extreme fans tracked the artists' hotel rooms using surveillance footage and even hired private investigators to follow them, forcing the artists to cancel their public appearances. In the Changsha Airport chase incident, fans forcibly breached security checkpoints to photograph their idols, disrupting public safety and order, resulting in significant economic losses and interruption of basic societal functions. Such behavior reveals the essence of "discourse conflict in the media space"—the possessive desire to privatize idols has degenerated into trampling on others' fundamental rights [5].

The intensification of consumer alienation exacerbates the economic difficulties faced by adolescents, with a phenomenon of "self-exploitative consumption" prevalent among this demographic. Students support idol digital album purchases through extreme austerity measures, with daily meal expenses falling below basic subsistence levels [9]. There are also related risks at the family level. There are extreme cases where minors borrowed money to raise funds, leading to family bankruptcy.

Online harassment results in systemic and organized harm, with collective attacks potentially leading to the banning of creative platforms. For example, fans of Xiao Zhan, dissatisfied with fan fiction, organized a mass report against the AO3 platform, causing it to be blocked in mainland China and affecting the rights of over 100,000 creators. Additionally, fans of a certain celebrity spread the statement "Depressed patients should withdraw from the entertainment industry" in a Douban group, triggering a large-scale online assault. These phenomena expose the erosive nature of fan circle culture on individual rights, public order and cultural ecology. Under the influence of the information cocoon, the space for rational dialogue is squeezed, eventually evolving into a collective "decline in moral value standards".

4.3 Conflict Between Social Circles and the Struggle for Mainstream Values

The essence of the conflict between fan culture and main-

stream values is the collision between the discourse power of subcultural circles and the value system of social consensus. This kind of game presents dynamic evolution through three typical scenarios. First, cultural symbol confrontation has become a typical manifestation: the fan circle builds a closed discourse system through symbol production, which directly conflicts with mainstream values. In the “227 Incident,” fan communities defended the reputation of idols by opposing the creative freedom of fan fiction circles, using reporting mechanisms to force the A03 platform to shut down. Essentially, this reflects a struggle over the definition of the legitimacy of emotional expression. Similar conflicts are evident in the sports domain, where fans attack opponents’ coaches after their idols’ team losses, transforming athletic spirit into irrational defense. Deeper underlying tensions are rooted in historical cognition; for example, BTS fans have engaged in online debates domestically and internationally to uphold their idol’s anti-war image, disregarding the weight of history and the solemnity of politics, thereby revealing the risk of value deconstruction within fandoms and their impact on collective memory.

The value conflicts driven by capital through technological means are more covert. The design of talent show voting mechanisms employs a “competitive voting system” utilizing a “multi-support” approach, requiring fans to support multiple contestants simultaneously, thereby artificially creating data bubbles and forcing teenagers into a binary opposition of “support or oppose.” Sports brands leverage Olympic champion fan bases to link the patriotic spirit of “glory for the nation” with product sales, commercializing patriotic discourse [2].

Mainstream cultural values achieve flexible infiltration through creative transformation, resulting in bidirectional interaction: CCTV launched the “Olympic Champion Vlog” series, drawing on the fan community’s “daily companionship” model; the cast of “The Age of Awakening” collaborated with Generation Z fans to develop the “New Youth” digital badge, transforming historical education into gamified interactive experiences—all facilitating a youthful shift in ideological dissemination. This dynamic reveals the evolving trajectory of subcultures and mainstream values, shifting from confrontation to negotiation. Fan communities vie for discursive space through organized actions, while mainstream values achieve flexible penetration through symbolic innovation. Ultimately, this conflict drives the reconstruction of the public value system [10].

5. Exploration of Governance Approaches and Methods

The comprehensive management of fan culture requires the establishment of a three-dimensional collaborative mechanism encompassing “platform responsibility, legal regulation, and educational guidance.” This integrated governance model addresses the complexities of fan circle misconduct—such as irrational consumption, cyberbullying, and data manipulation—by coordinating multiple stakeholders to achieve systematic rectification [5]. Platforms such as Weibo and Douyin must assume primary responsibility by implementing “Youth Mode” to limit minors’ usage time, blocking sensitive terms and extreme content like ‘fundraising’ and “comment control” that may induce inappropriate behavior. They should optimize algorithms to reduce the distribution of related extreme content and establish data traceability systems to combat fake traffic. For example, Weibo’s discontinuation of the “Celebrity Power Ranking” and the implementation of the “Super Topic Community” moderation mechanism have effectively mitigated irrational fan competition.

Legal regulation and ethical boundaries must address existing gaps, as the law often lags behind technological developments. This requires refining relevant regulations to clearly define red lines of conduct. The “Regulations on the Governance of Online Information Content Ecosystem” explicitly criminalize “inciting group confrontation” and “doxxing,” with strict penalties for malicious marketing. Additionally, the “Interim Measures for the Management of Generative Artificial Intelligence Services” mandate mandatory labeling of AI-generated content to prevent deepfake technologies from being exploited for defamation and incitement. The judiciary must also delineate the boundaries between “emotional expression” and “cyberbullying,” such as the erosion of creative freedom caused by reporting behaviors in the “227 Incident.” This requires judicial cases to clarify the reasonable limits of freedom of speech [11]. Schools can incorporate media literacy courses into their required curriculum. For instance, through themed debates like “Idols vs. Role Models,” they can cultivate a rational approach to fandom, guiding students to focus on the quality of creative works rather than chart rankings. Families can deconstruct the “data-driven” consumption logic through parent-child dialogues, exposing the pitfalls of fan-circle consumption and fostering a rational approach to spending [11].

The tension between globalization and localization will reshape the cultural ecology of fan communities [2]. In the realm of cultural conflict and identity reconstruction,

domestic idols such as table tennis player Wang Chuqin face competition between the “national team” label and transnational cultural symbols like BTS’s K-pop elements. The former embodies national ethnic identity, while the latter signifies global consumer culture. Harmonizing these conflicting symbols requires a narrative rooted in the concept of a “community with a shared future for mankind.” For example, the “fandom culture” surrounding Olympic athletes, emphasizing the spirit of “bringing honor to the country,” serves to reinforce national identity within this framework [1]. It is worth noting that localized resistance does not equate to cultural isolation, but rather achieves symbolic reinvention through “cultural hybridization.” Practices such as the idolization of scientists (e.g., the “Wu Jing effect” driving a surge in military science popularization), the IP adaptation of historical figures (e.g., the youth-oriented reinterpretation of traditional culture in *The Joy of Life*), and the shift of fan support systems toward public welfare initiatives transform the “emotional investment” of fandom into resources for cultural identity. AI-driven content creation has the potential to disrupt traditional content production paradigms, exemplified by virtual idol Luo Tianyi’s concerts sparking ethical debates over “Real Person vs. AI,” and the increased anonymity within metaverse communities intensifying online violence. This necessitates the development of affective computing technologies to identify and block extreme speech, as well as AI big data-powered “idol customization services” that precisely fulfill fan fantasies through algorithmic targeting. Future governance must strike a balance between innovation and risk, embedding humanistic care within technological empowerment to establish a co-governance ecosystem. For instance, blockchain technology can be employed to ensure transparent and visualized fan funding, or virtual reality can be used to create “virtual rational dialogue spaces.” Platform algorithms should incorporate “cultural diversity weights” to break the vicious cycle of information silos, thereby promoting a transition of fan culture towards “participatory democracy.” Future governance must balance innovation with risk, embedding humanistic care within technological empowerment to build a co-governance ecosystem enabled by technology. For instance, blockchain technology can achieve transparency and visibility in fan fundraising, while VR technology can construct “virtual rational dialogue spaces.” Platform algorithms should incorporate “cultural diversity weighting” to break the vicious cycle of information silos, thereby driving the transformation of fandom culture toward participatory democracy.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that fan community culture, as a quintessential cultural phenomenon within the new media environment, exhibits a complex interplay driven by a “technological empowerment—capital investment—psychological needs” mechanism.

Through case studies, research reveals that technological features such as algorithmic recommendations and social media viral campaigns have reshaped fan interaction patterns, establishing a new cultural production logic where “data equals power.” On the value front, fan culture exhibits both positive effects like charitable support and cultural dissemination, while also exposing negative issues such as cyberbullying and consumer alienation, forming a distinct dual-sided characteristic. At the social governance level, fandom culture requires collaborative management by platforms, legal frameworks, and educational institutions. Through algorithm optimization, real-name registration systems, and media literacy education, a multi-stakeholder governance system should be established.

The theoretical contributions of this research to the study of fan culture are mainly reflected in three aspects. First, an analytical framework encompassing the “technology-capital-psychology” dimensions is proposed, addressing the limitation of existing studies that predominantly focus on a single aspect. Second, a systematic review of the dissemination mechanisms and value transformation pathways of fan culture is conducted, offering new perspectives for understanding subcultural propagation in the digital age. Lastly, the development of a “platform-law-education” collaborative governance model provides a theoretical foundation for platform management practices and government policy formulation. At the practical level, this study provides theoretical support for regulating fan circle behavior, guiding adolescents toward rational fandom practices, and fostering positive interaction between fan culture and mainstream values. It assists diverse stakeholders in collaboratively addressing the potential risks of fan culture and promotes its constructive engagement with mainstream values.

Future research should focus on the following areas: first, deepen the study of technological ethics, with particular attention to how emerging technologies such as AI-generated content and metaverse communities are transforming the dissemination logic of fan culture; second, expand cross-cultural comparative studies to systematically contrast Chinese and Western fan cultures, revealing how cultural backgrounds influence dissemination mechanisms; third, strengthen longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impacts of fan culture on adolescent values and so-

cial cohesion; fourth, explore positive guidance strategies, investigating how initiatives like idol social responsibility advocacy can promote the rationalization and public welfare orientation of fan culture. As new technologies become widespread, fan culture will undergo further transformations, and the ongoing evolution of its dissemination forms and cultural expressions will continually challenge social governance innovation, thereby providing broad opportunities for future research.

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