

**More than Basketball: The Social Identity
Construction of Chinese NBA Fans Through
Tencent Live Streaming Services**

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the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

under the supervision of Dr. Kate Delmo and Dr. Amelia Johns

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I, Liang Xiao declare that this thesis, is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Arts and Social Science at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation aims to investigate Chinese Tencent users' behavioural intentions towards adopting the Tencent NBA live streaming service, and to unpack the formation of fans' social identity, including fan subcultures in the virtual community. The aims are addressed using mixed methods, which involve a quantitative survey and qualitative semi-structured interviews.

In the quantitative section, a total of 306 users completed an online survey facilitated on Wenjuanxing (an online survey application, equivalent to Qualtrics in China). Based on Uses and Gratifications Theory, the research found that, in terms of use patterns of Tencent NBA live streaming service, male users had more years viewing the NBA, longer daily usage and more years paying for the NBA live streaming service than females. Older users (over 24 years old) spent more years viewing the NBA and paying for the NBA live streaming service than younger users (under 24 years old). In terms of the differences in behaviour intentions between the two age groups, the findings indicated that users under 24 were primarily driven by convenience in their usage. In contrast, older users were more driven by viewing costs than their younger counterparts. This study also found that three factors impacted the behaviour intentions of accepting Tencent NBA live streaming service, they are: perceived enjoyment, social benefits and viewing cost.

To add depth and quality of insight, following the quantitative analysis, 16 Chinese NBA fans were interviewed about their perceptions of Tencent's sports live streaming service, fan's digital practices, and sports nationalism, among others. Grounded Theory was used to analyse the data and generate new insights about NBA sports fans in China, drawing from Social Identity Theory and existing knowledge about fan subcultures on the premium streaming platform, Tencent. Qualitative findings suggested that there were differences in terms of consumption, social identity formation and fandom between digital generations (what are described in the thesis using the concepts of digital natives and digital immigrants). Findings showed that digital immigrants are more rooted in traditional aspects of fandom (e.g. following their favourite team and skillful players) and less influenced by the fan practices that

characterise the digital era. In contrast, the generation of digital natives is more fluid and dynamic, reflecting the diverse and interconnected world in which they live. Second, the study identified fragmentation in the virtual community on Tencent due to differences in how fans interact with content, i.e., analysing real-time data, barrage, and gifting commentators. These digital practices shape different subcultures in the online fans' community that digital immigrants tended to resist. Findings describe that despite the diversity and conflict among fan communities on Tencent, which may suggest digital media dilutes and fragments media audiences, there is also a reunification of fans around national identity and national sentiments as a result of diplomatic rifts and tensions between the NBA, the Chinese government and fans.

These findings show that macro and micro level events and controversies ripple through Chinese fan communities, dividing but also unifying supporters, and finally suggesting the NBA fandom is about much more than the game.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

As media technologies have spread worldwide, the globe has become increasingly linked. In this process, a global village has been formed (McLuhan, 2013) where the entire world has been integrated into a single multinational marketplace (Poll, 2012). In the context of China, Chinese people's demands as they entered this new era have been continually satisfied with the introduction of television sets and modern communication and leisure products into Chinese households in the early 1980s; for example, Chinese viewers had the chance to learn about other cultures through television screens in their living rooms. The show Zhengda Variety (Zhengda Zongyi, 正大综艺), which began showing once a week on CCTV in April 1990, offered quizzes on travel experiences from across the world, and it broadened Chinese viewers' foreign perspectives and maintained their understanding of the world (Zhao, 2000). The television series A Native of Beijing in New York (Beijingren zai Niuyue, 北京人在纽约), first aired in 1994 on CCTV, and showed Chinese television viewers what life is like for Chinese people on the opposite side of the world when East meets West. Before every episode, the TV producer invited viewers to consider if New York was paradise or hell, as well as whose heaven and hell it is. It reflected that Chinese people started to think about how to balance the cultural gap between the US and China (Wang, 1994; Zhang, 1994).

In 1979 Coca-Cola returned to China lifting a ban on the product that had been in place since 1949, a sign of the economic reforms that were opening up China to the world (Yao, 2017). Another American beverage brand, Pepsi, began its investment in China in 1981 with the establishment of its first bottling facility in Shenzhen; while KFC and McDonald's established their first stores in the Chinese market, in 1987 and 1990, respectively (Cai, 2017; McDonald, 2020; Shi, 2021; Yunzhang & Cai, 2017). In 1994, the China Film Bureau authorised the importation of ten foreign films each year. With the year-on-year expansion of the Chinese film consumption market, the quota for Chinese imports was raised to 34 films in 2012 (Liang, 2021).

In addition to purchasing Western cultural products in stores or watching American culture on TV and at the cinema, Chinese people were becoming increasingly aware of American cultural elements through sports programming from the US. China Central Television (CCTV) commenced broadcasting National Basketball Association (NBA) games regularly in 1986 (Zheng, 2008) while showing McDonald's and Coca-Cola emblems on the billboards in basketball courts. In the early 1980s, David Joel Stern, who was the commissioner of the NBA at that time, targeted China as a potential market of over one billion people. He believed that once Chinese people commenced watching the NBA games, they would not be able to stop watching it (Zheng, 2008). NBA China was founded on January 14, 2008, to handle the NBA's operations in China, Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan. The NBA primarily relies on broadcast rights fees, China tournaments, sponsorship, and franchises to generate revenue in the Chinese market. In 2019, the NBA's annual revenue in the Chinese market was approximately US\$1.2 billion, representing 10% of its total revenue, and the revenue from the Chinese market is still growing (VOA, 2019). The NBA reported in 2018 that 800 million people in China watch NBA games on TV, digital media, and smartphones, almost 2.5 times the total population of the United States. The NBA's digital media rights agreement with Tencent for the 2020-2025 cycle has reached US\$1.5 billion over five years, up from US\$500 million in the previous cycle (X. Wang, 2019). Since 2015, Tencent has acquired the exclusive digital rights to the NBA in China, despite the fact that the NBA has been featured on traditional media CCTV since the 1980s.

In recent years, Tencent has grown into a significant competitor to CCTV in live sports broadcasting, building a range of consumer services around NBA content. This was made evident in a report released in 2019 (Tencent, 2018), which described the evolution of China's domestic basketball industry. According to the report, the entire size of China's sports business has increased yearly since 2012, with RMB 950 billion in 2012 predicted to expand to RMB 359.7 billion by 2022. Although males are more likely to be sports lovers than females in China, more than half of female internet users are interested in sports.

But despite the popularity of NBA in China, diplomatic rifts and tensions have emerged since 2019, causing turbulence in the NBA's Chinese market. One significant case related to a debate with Hong Kong around the local government's introduction of a bill to amend the Fugitive Offenders Ordinance regarding extradition (TIME, 2019). This caused several demonstrations against the Chinese government and clashes with local police. The protests, and the police suppression of them, led to global outcry and support for the Hong Kong protesters among western media outlets and on social media. The protests intensified into a large-scale social movement on the 9th of June, as protests broke out across Hong Kong. On the 4th of October, the general manager of the Houston Rockets, Daryl Morey, posted his support for Hong Kong's protesters on Twitter with six words: 'Fight for Freedom, Stand with Hong Kong' (Gonzalez, 2019). The post generated diplomatic tensions between China and the US, with the Chinese government referring to the commentary as foreign interference, and a challenge to China's national sovereignty. Subsequently, there was a heavy backlash from fans, sponsors, and business partners of the NBA in China, who criticised Morey's position. The fallout posed such a threat that the NBA issued an apology for Daryl Morey's tweet, which deeply offended many NBA's friends and fans in China (Perper, 2019). This is a multi-faceted issue, including political conflicts, national sentiments, and the commercial interests of NBA in China. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss the role of commercial organizations in sports diplomacy. As (Postlethwaite et al., 2023) has pointed out, there have been several studies investigating the role of governments and international organizations in sports diplomacy, and growing numbers of commercial organizations are trying to be sensitive to these issues .

For fans, the fallout was immediate. The incident caused the NBA games to disappear from the programming of China's state-run television, CCTV, for a year. However, NBA's exclusive digital partner, Tencent, skipped two pre-season matches but continued its programming, deciding to provide live NBA services to its users, except for games with the Houston Rockets. Joseph Tsai¹ responded by emphasizing Chinese citizens' unity regarding China's territorial

¹ Joseph Tsai, co-founder of the Chinese company Alibaba and owner of the Brooklyn Nets in the NBA.

integrity, and indicating that the incident had caused significant harm, which would take time to repair. The NBA's initial response, which appeared to prioritize financial interests over human rights, drew criticism globally. The NBA acknowledged that Morey's views had offended many in China but also highlighted the league's values of individual expression. The association hoped to use sports as a unifying force. Meanwhile, Chinese NBA fans both united and fragmented in response to this incident on social media. A Chinese Houston Rockets fan wore his NBA team colours and threatened to burn China's national flag, arguing for team loyalty over patriotism; nonetheless, most Chinese NBA viewers declared that they would not watch NBA games nor buy its merchandise anymore, even though they had been consuming broadcast NBA for at least 20 years on the television screen. Tencent made several efforts in reaction to the criticism from fans and user opinion on Chinese social media, including managing refunds for some of those who had acquired Tencent memberships.

1.2 Sports Broadcasting in China: In Brief

Sports broadcasting refers to the distribution of sporting events and information via mass media. There have been three stages in Chinese sports broadcasting: CCTV monopoly, local TV stations joining and exiting the market, and the advent of the Internet resulting in digital media shattering CCTV's monopoly. Three factors directly impact broadcast copyright competition in China: China's media regulating policy, China's sports sector growth strategy, and media communication technology development. According to the literature, Chinese sports broadcasting can be separated into three stages based on the advancement of media communication technology as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1.1 Three stages of sports broadcasting in China

Phase	Time	Characteristics
1	1958-1995	Exploration Stage, Traditional Broadcasting (CCTV)
2	1995-2008	Cooperation and Growth Stage, Cable TV and Satellite TV
3	2008-present	Competition Stage, CCTV, Online Media and Digital Media

1.2.1 Phase 1: Exploration Stage (1958-1995)

CCTV was the dominant broadcaster in this phase (He, 2018). Sports broadcasting has been

an essential element of CCTV's programming since its predecessor, Beijing TV, first aired in 1958. On 19 June 1958, CCTV live broadcast a friendly match between the Chinese People's Liberation Army team and the Beijing basketball team at the Beijing Gymnasium in black and white format. Since then, CCTV has offered a number of international and domestic sports events on its screens (Zhang & Huang, 2009). When the soccer World Cup was held in Argentina in June 1978, CCTV presented all games in a recorded format for the first time in China. Four years later, the China state-run media live broadcast the World Cup 1982 for the first time, which became the initial memory of many Chinese football fans. In the minds of Chinese fans, the World Cup and CCTV are inextricably linked (He, 2018).

CCTV's live sports programming is deeply linked to Chinese national sentiments (Xu & Billings, 2020). An example is the live broadcasting of the winning FIVB World Cup 1981 in Japan by the Chinese women's volleyball team. Thousands of Chinese people were surprised and burst into tears when they watched the presentation on CCTV and heard the commentary on the TV screen (Bai, 2021). This was the first time a Chinese team had won a championship in the international basketball, volleyball, and football tournaments. Moreover, "People's Daily", a China state-run newspaper, published an editorial article titled "Learn Women's Volleyball, Revitalize China" on 17 November 1981 to connect Chinese nationalism and Chinese athletes' performance internationally (Bai, 2021; He, 2018).

In addition, CCTV has carried the Olympic Games to thousands of households in China since 1984. Although CCTV's commentators were unable to travel to Los Angeles, the host city of the 1984 Olympic Games, because of the limited budget, they presented this international mega sports event to the audiences in mainland China from the studio in Hong Kong, including the game in which Chinese pistol shooter, Xu Haifeng, won China's first gold medal in the Olympics history (Wen, 2008). Based on the initial experience of live broadcasting of the Olympic Games, CCTV achieved the goal of posting reporters and commentators to the 1988 Olympics host city, Seoul (South Korea). In 1992, CCTV provided the live broadcasting of the Barcelona Olympic Games and the Olympic News Bulletin (Xin, 2008).

Furthermore, CCTV launched a program, "All about Sports (Titan zongheng, 体坛纵横)" and embarked on broadcasting the sixth game of the 1985 NBA Finals between the Los Angeles Lakers and the Boston Celtics . This was the first time that Chinese fans had watched the NBA in its entirety on television. CCTV televised the NBA Finals for the first time in 1994, and Chinese fans were surprised that basketball could be played in a higher level (He, 2018).

1.2.2 Phase 2: 1995-2008

In the 1990s, the development of broadcasting technology, including satellite TV and cable TV, led to the evolution of the media landscape in China. The significant change was that the number of television channels available to Chinese audiences rapidly expanded. China had 554 television channels by the end of 1990. By the end of 1991, the mixed coverage rate of Chinese television had reached 80.7%, and the country had 200 million television sets (Zhu, 1993).

Chinese TV viewers' demands grew rapidly. After numerous years of sports broadcasting and reporting efforts, CCTV5, a TV channel full of content about sports, was formally established on the 1st of January 1995 for Beijing viewers. On 30 November of the same year, CCTV5 broadcast to thousands of Chinese households via cable TV systems using encrypted satellite feeds. CCTV5 has established itself as China's first and largest sports channel (Zhang & Huang, 2009).

Furthermore, with China's reform and opening, as well as the process of China's media reform and media industrialisation, CCTV's monopoly began to give way to market-oriented competition in China's TV sports broadcasting. ESPN, an international satellite TV station, targeted its market in China . Star Sports in Hong Kong and ESPN obtained cable TV subscriptions in Asia for most sports games in the early 1990s. In 1995, the CCTV5 team attempted to negotiate with ESPN to share the copyright of certain sports events for cable TV in mainland China. Although the negotiation failed, CCTV realised that if it did not participate in the competition to purchase sports broadcast copyrights, the development of

CCTV5 would be under pressure from other TV media. Hence, CCTV paid an additional \$100,000 for CCTV5, the cable channel broadcast of the 1996 Atlanta Olympics Games (Ma, 2012).

In the mid-1990s, local television entered the copyright purchase competition. Chinese national football, basketball, volleyball, and other sports tournaments began experimenting with market-driven transition. The number of sports games aired on CCTV failed to meet fans' demands nationwide, which created an opportunity for local television stations. For example, Sichuan TV station paid RMB 580,000 for the exclusive broadcasting rights in China for the 1998 International Flying Women Race (Women's 100 meters race), and ten other television stations paid RMB 100,000 for joint broadcasting rights to this event. At the end of the 1990s, various provincial-level radio and television groups were established in China, one after the other. Local cable television stations merged with local wireless television stations with the growing idea of channel specialisation, and various specialised channels, such as the channel that only broadcasts sports content, were launched (Lu, 2010).

To reach more Chinese fans, the NBA sold the live broadcast copyright to Chinese local television stations and CCTV. In 2002, for instance, more than 12 Chinese television stations broadcast live images of the NBA games (Xiao, 2002). Although the number of sports channels on local television stations remained high, the business of these channels was challenging owing to governmental regulations. The State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television of China issued "Notice on Strengthening TV Reporting and Broadcasting of Sports Competitions" (the "Notice") in 2000 to "prevent uncoordinated phenomena and incidents in the reporting and broadcasting of national and international major sports competitions" and to "avoid driving up the price of reporting rights and conducting vicious competition." CCTV negotiated and acquired exclusive broadcasting rights for major international and domestic sports events in China, including the Olympics, Asian Games, and World Cup. This strategy had the consequence of ensuring CCTV5's entire monopoly in market competition leading numerous television stations to withdraw from the partnership (Zhou, 2010). More than 100 television stations were dedicated to airing sports programming in China in 1995, but that

number dropped to 28 in 2012 and 26 in 2017 (Zhou, 2018).

As local television sports networks began to fade out, internet media began to enter the game. The primary viewing mode was still television during the 2006 World Cup in Germany. However, other online media already covered the games live in text (Qian, 2018). This set the stage for the subsequent live video streaming of sporting events on online media.

1.2.3 Phase 3: 2008-Present

This phase encompasses the convergent media environment in China. In this stage, traditional televisual media, web media, and digital media competed for the rights to broadcast sports games in the country.

In this stage, CCTV's dominant position was broken, and the internet and digital media market in sports broadcasting took a giant leap forward. With the sale of sports broadcast rights, competition in the internet media sector was solid. Using the opening ceremony of the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games as an example, 842 million Chinese people watched the live broadcast of the Beijing Olympic Games on TV in real time. Over 32 million people saw footage via the live streaming service of nine Olympic-accredited websites (CCTV, Olympic official website, Sohu, Sina, NetEase, Tencent, PPS, PPlive, UTV). Although traditional TV was still the most critical medium in 2008, during the Beijing Olympic Games, the emergence of internet media posed a significant challenge to CCTV (Min, 2008).

The Chinese Super League (soccer) was the initial driving force behind China's revolution in sports marketing. It was established in 1994 with the name of Chinese Football League Group A, but it was restructured to the Chinese Super League in 2004. After 20 years of operation and development, the league sold its broadcast copyright separately in 2014, earning a profit of 80 million yuan. Out of this amount, approximately 30 million yuan came from four major Internet media companies: Sina, Sohu, Tencent, and NetEase. A local satellite TV station contributed 20 million yuan, while the remaining 10 million yuan was earned through

copyright contracts. Every merchant had a one-year copyright to the Chinese Super League for a very low price. The Chinese Super League was sold to China Sports Media Co., Ltd. (Ti' ao dongli) in 2016 for 8 billion yuan over five years. In the first year, the price was one billion yuan, and China Sports Media Co., Ltd distributed broadcast licenses to CCTV, local satellite TV, and internet media. The Chinese Super League's broadcast copyright fees increased significantly in 2016 (Hu, 2017).

The copyrights for online media of the Olympic Games, World Cup, and Asian Games were also negotiated by CCTV and handed to Chinese online media, according to government regulations. However, since 2015, CCTV has been at a competitive disadvantage in the race for copyrights in China's top professional leagues. In 2021, Champions League, Premier League, Ligue 1, La Liga, and Bundesliga did not appear in the program of CCTV, because the copyrights were owned or shared by PPTV, LeTV, Tencent, and others (Wei, 2021).

Today, the NBA is an exception in China. CCTV has worked closely with the NBA to broadcast events for four decades, and the internet media has also divided its broadcast market. Internet media corporations, including Tom, Sina, Sohu, and Tencent, collaborated with the NBA to broadcast NBA games in the late 2000s. Sina signed a three-year contract with the NBA in 2010 for around \$7 million annually. According to the terms of the contract, Sina could broadcast one NBA game per day and acquired online exclusive broadcast rights from the second round of the playoffs, the Eastern and Western Conference finals, to the Finals.

During this time, Sina seized control of China's NBA online live broadcast, while Tom and Sohu lost the privilege of live broadcast, and Tencent could only broadcast a small number of non-core games. Tencent purchased the NBA's exclusive digital rights in China for \$500 million in 2014, then Tencent renewed this arrangement for another five years in 2019 for US\$1.5 billion (Hu, 2017).

1.3 Tencent NBA live streaming in China

Tencent is a media and marketing platform widely used in China with a complete ecological chain of its own. The company has plans to use the NBA's intellectual property (IP) as the core for diversified content production (Tan, 2018) . In early 2015, Tencent acquired the NBA's digital media rights in China from Sina for RMB 3.1 billion over five years, along with the broadcasting rights for all the NBA's 30 teams' games. Tencent's deal with the NBA included the broadcasting rights to over 1,500 games throughout an entire season, covering the NBA's summer league, pre-season, regular season, playoffs, and finals on digital media. Tencent has built one of China's most substantial media libraries for the NBA teams and players that users follow most. To improve user experience, Tencent has 30 team correspondents in 28 cities across the United States. In addition, Tencent operates and manages the NBA's official Chinese website and has established the NBA's only official Chinese community (Zhang & Chen, 2019; Zhang, 2018).

Presently, Tencent NBA live streaming service provides various types of live images, enabling the switching of the game's main view, the players' , and the audience's view. Based on its own social attributes and advantages, Tencent has established an NBA fan community, gathering fans around teams and players (Zheng, 2018). In terms of interactions among fans, Tencent has launched a Barrage section and utilised Tencent's social platforms, such as WeChat and QQ. Users are encouraged to engage in a virtual fan community, where fans opinions and game videos are posted and shared. Female commentators appear in the Tencent NBA live streaming service to appeal predominantly to male fans, encouraging them to stay tuned in during breaks in the game. In addition, Tencent NBA live streaming service offers real-time statistics of players and teams, which is a different presentation from that in traditional broadcasting. It creates the possibility for users to consume more than basketball.

The Tencent NBA live streaming service has payment options that offers users free and paid access. The games provided by Tencent for users who have not purchased membership include the All-Star Game, the Eastern and Western Conference Finals and the Finals. During the regular season, non-member users can watch at least one game every day. Paid members

are granted additional benefits. There are two types of paid Tencent Sports memberships: Tencent Sports VIP and Tencent Super VIP. Table 1.2 below shows each membership category's itspective fees and paid content benefits.

Table 1.2 2023-24 season Tencent Sports member categories, fees and content benefits

	Monthly Price	Quarterly	Annually	NBA	Others
Tencent VIP	¥30	¥68	¥233	8 tickets every month	WNBA, FIBA, Chinese Football Association Super League (CSL),
Tencent Super VIP	¥88	¥128	¥388	All games	WNBA, FIBA, Chinese Football Association Super League (CSL), NFL, F1, Tennis, WWE, etc.

In addition, both Tencent Sports VIP members and Tencent Super VIP members are awarded the benefits of functions, identity, and purchasing of merchandise, see Table 1.3:

Table 1.3 2023-24 season Tencent Sports member benefits of functions, identity, and purchasing merchandise

	Details
Functions benefits	1080P, Multiple angles, English commentary, Users generated commentary, Team icon
Identity benefits	Member icon, Customized Barrage, Customized team theme
Merchandise benefits	Member gifts, Vouchers, Off-line activity, Season gifts, Birthday gifts, Merchandise sales for members, etc.

Aware of the global spread and use of digital media and mobile internet, a large number of scholars have begun to study how users' media consumption has been impacted by this transformation, with a smaller number considering how sports consumption and fandom has been impacted by these changes, although most of the literature produced in the field is focused on Western media consumers and neglects to address how different social contexts impact consumption and behaviour. A great deal of academic research on digital media in China has focused on social media, for example, studies on the Weibo accounts of Chinese celebrities (Li, 2020), WeChat communication and the construction of individual discourse

(Chen, 2018) and the presentation of the individual image in a group through WeChat interaction (Tang, 2018), among others. There is currently little research by either Chinese or Western scholars on the consumption of US sports media, NBA specifically, which focuses on Chinese digital media users and sports fans.

Live streaming services are an emerging phenomenon in the era of digital media in China. However, this is underexamined. The number of mobile internet users in China is in the hundreds of millions, which provides an excellent opportunity for researchers. However, for those Western scholars interested in Chinese digital media users, the language barrier is inescapable, so qualitative research in the form of interviews, for example, is difficult. However, if only quantitative research is conducted, for these non-Chinese speaking scholars, only the "what" question can be answered, while the "why" and "how " need to be answered in an immersive exchange.

The current research is different from previous research on sports fandom and live streaming services. The major reason for taking an international perspective is to unpack an emerging identity built through digital media consumption, that is, synthesising Chinese consumer behaviours and fandom in relation to American cultural products. I am well placed to carry out this study as a native Mandarin speaker who was born in China and studied overseas. For me using Chinese digital media is an important part of my life. Moreover, as an NBA fan, I started to watch NBA in 1994. I have an experience of exploring the phenomenon of NBA sports fandom from the traditional broadcasting perspective through to the live streaming service of NBA games which creates a virtual community of fans on Tencent. This is an essential viewpoint for me to conduct this study. Furthermore, I obtained a master's degree in Australia, majoring in journalism. Subsequently, I worked in Australia for a Chinese website as a reporter. In this position, besides the daily regular reporting, I have covered a series of local and international sporting events held in Australia, including contributing to Tencent's basketball coverage, as such, I have some experiential knowledge of Tencent Sports user community, which has helped me to have a more accurate grasp of the research subjects in this study, and has helped the process of developing new research to answer the research

questions posed in this study. Through reviewing the literature and key theories related to media consumption and social identity, and existing research about subcultures in this study, I will address the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the similarities and differences of accepting Tencent NBA live streaming service across demographics?

RQ2: How do Chinese fans construct social identity through the consumption of Tencent NBA live streaming service?

RQ3: How do Tencent NBA live-streaming service users engage in the virtual community?

1.4 Overview of chapters

This dissertation includes six main chapters: introduction, literature review, research design, quantitative survey and qualitative interview findings, discussions, and a conclusion with recommendations for future research.

In the introduction (chapter one), the background of the study concerning the transition of traditional sports broadcasting and OTT service, and the expansion of Tencent NBA live streaming service, the statement of problems, and the research questions are detailed. In chapter two (literature review) I review the theoretical models relevant to this thesis. This includes Uses and Gratifications Theory and various models to determine the intentions of media usage and the studies about OTT. Next, studies about social identity formation are discussed, and then the research about sports fans' practices and fan identity are summarised and compared. A detailed description of the methodology used for data collection and analysis is highlighted in the research design chapter (chapter three). It covers the quantitative method of surveying 306 Chinese NBA fans. The qualitative approach of interviews and the grounded theory analysis is then used to explore the data of 16 semi-structured interviews.

The findings of the study are presented in chapters four and five. Chapter four presents the results from the online survey examining NBA Tencent consumption and behaviour adopting a uses and gratifications lens. This chapter first reveals the relationship between Tencent NBA live streaming service users' intentions and frequency of media usage. Chapter five presents the outcomes from the grounded theory analysis of interviews conducted with 16 NBA fans differing by age, gender, and socio-economic background. Derived from the interview data, four themes emerged, namely, behaviours relating to consuming sport, social identity and belonging with a focus on generational differences among fans, fragmentation and boundary policing in Tencent's virtual community as a result of competing generational and subcultural identities and practices and the reunification of the fan community around national identity in the context of diplomatic tensions arising from the Daryl Morey incident.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter introduces fundamental concepts that set the scene for the investigation of Chinese NBA fans on Tencent Livestreaming service. The chapter will review the state of the field, applying the following three theories to the RQs outlined in the Introduction: Uses and Gratifications Theory, social identity theory and subculture studies.

The chapter begins by defining what affects NBA fans' behaviour intentions when accepting novel media technologies. This will set up the discussion of why consumers decide to opt for one media technology over another.

This offers a starting point for the next stage of the review, which will focus on social identity theory. The literature included in this section sheds light on how media choices and media consumption practices help to construct the social identity of Chinese NBA fans. The concept of a sense of belonging, as defined by social identity theorists, is also discussed in this chapter. Gaining perspectives on the sense of belonging and collective emotion in online settings is necessary to examine how social identity is formed through group members' activities in the digital era.

This chapter then provides an overview of the literature relating to fandom in NBA subcultures. This section begins by defining fandom in the Internet age, providing a basis for exploring the membership activities of the NBA's online fan communities. As an essential component of subculture, a large body of research has distinguished between sports fanship and fandom to push the issue towards the study of sports fandom in China, concluding with literature that discusses the transnational subjectivity of fans in a cross-cultural context.

2.1 Uses and Gratifications Theory

2.1.1 Uses and gratifications theory and motives of media usage

Before the uses and gratifications theory (U&G) emerged in the 1970s, the mass

communication theories of media effects, such as the 'Magic Bullet Theory' or the 'Hypodermic Needle Theory,' emphasised mass media's dominant position in the communication process. It regarded the media as invincible and irresistible while its audiences were passive. The messages conveyed by the media could elicit an instant reaction in the recipients, as if a bullet had struck the body or a medication had been injected into the skin, with the messages being accepted by media audiences, impacting people's attitudes and ideas, as well as directly dictating their behaviour. These hypotheses are sometimes known as the 'Communicator-centred Theory', which was proven wrong in the 1940s (Cai & Liu, 2004). Scholars (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955) realised that the audiences did not use media uncritically, but rather focused on certain messages in response to specific social or psychological demands or beliefs. Since then, audience-centred studies have emerged. A few qualitative investigations (Berelson, 1949; Herzog, 1940; Suchman, 1941; Wolfe & Fiske, 1948), published during the 1940s, listed a series of functions that specific content or media can serve: engaging in intellectual challenges by matching one's wits with others, acquiring practical information or suggestions for daily life, providing a structure or routine for one's day, culturally preparing oneself to meet the expectations of upward mobility, or being reassured about the dignity and usefulness of one's role. These studies suggested that the production of mass communication effects was an extremely complicated social process in which both of media and its recipients impacted each other. These findings guided researchers to introduce a new approach to the study of communication by changing the focus on the audience's point of view in mass communication (Cai & Liu, 2004; Katz et al., 1973; Kippax & Murray, 1980).

U&G theory was first noted in the early 1960s. Katz and Foulkes (1962) started from the assumption that individuals' and groups' social and psychological features drove their use of mass media rather than the other way around. It (Katz & Foulkes, 1962) asked what people did with the media instead of what the media did to people. The U&G model indicated five elements: 1) the audience is conceived of as active, 2) in the mass communication process much initiative in linking the needs and gratifications and media choice lies with the audience member, 3) the media compete with other sources that satisfy user needs, 4) many of the

goals of mass media use can be derived from data supplied by individual audience members themselves, 5) value judgements about the cultural significance of mass communication should be suspended while audience orientations are explored on their terms.

Under the umbrella of U&G, Blumler and Katz (1974) stated that media usage was a four-step process involving social and psychological demands that impact individuals' media expectations, media exposure, and generated media gratifications. McQuail (1994) classified four types of media usage motives to obtain gratification in media consumption: information gathering, personal identity, integration/social interaction, and entertainment. Individuals consume news stories, documentaries, websites, or books to acquire new knowledge and educate themselves. Personal identity motivation states that consumers of media understand themselves by engaging with the characters from books, movies, and TV shows. They tend to share the values constructed in media consumption with friends and family to integrate social connections. Media content also satisfies the demands of killing time and the aim of obtaining enjoyment in daily life. In a word, audiences are active participants in media consumption rather than the content receivers.

U&G theory from Blumler and Katz (1974) and McQuail (1994) were supported in other research (Blumler, 1979; Payne et al., 1988; Rubin, 1981, 1983; Towers, 1985), but they are challenged by an increasing number of scholars who are examining the gratifications generated in emerging media based on the Internet. Unlike traditional mass communication tools such as television, radio, and newspapers, Steiner and Xu (2020) suggest that emerging media technologies, such as streaming video, are becoming more interactive, mobile, and smarter. Sundar and Limperos (2013) emphasized that new and distinctive gratifications arise in the consumption of emerging media .

Interactivity (i.e., the degree to which audiences can control or exchange roles in mutual discourse), demassification (audiences' control over medium) and asynchronicity (messages could be sent and received at different times) becomes increasingly examined in the growing online environment (Ruggiero, 2000). Studies have examined the users' motivations and

behaviours when they were using media in the Internet environment, such as Instagram (Ko & Yu, 2019), live streaming service (Hsu et al., 2020), WeChat and Weibo (Gan, 2018; Gan & Wang, 2014).

Two research studies (Gan, 2018; Gan & Wang, 2014) have analysed the motives of users of two prominent Chinese social media platforms, Weibo and WeChat. Both studies found that the general gratifications of using these two social media platforms were information sharing and social fulfilment, with Gan' s study (2018) adding hedonic (pleasure and enjoyment derived from using social media) and affection (emotional and relational satisfaction acquired from social media consumption) gratification. For example, users of Douyin (Chinese version of TikTok) scroll through short videos for relaxation and entertainment, while Chinese people use Moments in WeChat to interact with friends and family members through comments or likes. Because Gan and Wang' s study (2014) applied an interview approach, it may not be feasible to measure the degree of the varied gratifications. The findings of Gan and Wang' s study (2014) suggested that Weibo users seek seven types of gratification: information seeking, social interaction, entertainment, passing time, self-expression, information sharing, and social networking. Whereas WeChat users seek five types of satisfaction: private social networking, social interaction, convenient communication, high-quality information provided, and information sharing. However, Gan' s study (2018) conducted a quantitative method, and the results demonstrated variances in the degree of different gratifications; for example, information gratification was the most significant motivation for using Weibo, whereas affection gratification was the most essential motivation for using WeChat to help individuals feel emotionally fulfilled and socially connected. Furthermore, Weibo may better fulfil people's information and hedonic gratifications, but people chose WeChat for social and affection gratifications. These studies have understood the motivations of Chinese social media, but nothing about the users of Chinese sports digital live streaming service.

Based on U&G, Hsu et al. (2020) predicted what drives user loyalty to live streaming services. In his research, live streaming service is a term used to describe internet media that broadcasts and records real-time video and audio data from an event. Compared to video on demand,

live streaming services offer real-time contact between the streamer and the user—a crucial feature that accounts for much of the appeal (Hsu et al., 2020). Creators of content, also referred to as streamers, can use mobile apps and Internet platforms such as Twitter, YouTube Live, Facebook Live, and Periscope to create live, interactive events based on their personal experiences such as video game plays, sporting events, talent shows, product experiences, and online auctions, among others. Their survey data was collected from 295 consumers who responded about their perceptions of such services. According to Hsu et al.'s (2020) findings, perceived media richness and gratifications such as entertainment and sociability are predictors of loyalty, with quick feedback being the most prominent aspect of perceived media richness.

U&G theories have also been introduced into the sport fandom studies to analyse the motivations and behaviours of sports fans who follow the social media accounts of sporting organisation. Li et al. (2019) compared sports fans from two different cultural backgrounds who followed the Los Angeles Lakers' NBA team on Weibo and Twitter. It examined data from an online poll of people who followed the Los Angeles Lakers on Twitter (n = 299) and Weibo (n = 796). Findings revealed that Weibo users were more motivated to find information, amusement, technical knowledge, passing time, and to escape from their lives than Twitter users, while Twitter followers were more motivated to demonstrate team support than Weibo users. According to the findings, Weibo users had strong motivations for acquiring information and showing team support, and they were also more participatory. Twitter users were more likely to communicate with a sports organisation if their goals of acquiring amusement and technical knowledge were accomplished. This research is an early bird to study sports fans' motivations and behaviours from different backgrounds based on U&G.

While not related directly to sport media consumption, other applications of U&G theory, as it pertains to live-stream shopping, are also instructive for my study. For example, a study by Ma (2021) blended U&G theory, perceived network size, perceptions of digital celebrities, and experience-focused shopping intentions and discovered that individuals were driven by gratifications that were (1) hedonic (reported enjoyment), (2) utilitarian (relating to self-

presentation), and (3) social (relating to social presence and interaction). Furthermore, the perceived network size predicted reported satisfaction, social engagement, social presence, and usefulness, indicating that the bigger the platform and the more members it has, the more products and services it attracts, increasing its benefit. The associations between perceived enjoyment, self-presentation, social interaction, and live-stream shopping intentions were mediated by experience-focused buying orientation. Finally, the functions of digital celebrities in moderating the links between perceived network size and perceived usefulness, perceived engagement, social interaction, social presence, and self-presentation were verified. The study (Ma, 2021) guided the current research to address RQ1 and design the online questionnaires including the variables to test sports live streaming service users' intentions, for instance, the social benefits, costs, service quality and entertaining values.

2.1.2 Other concepts around technology acceptance

In academic research, four major model have been introduced to understand the intentions to accept and use media technology, Diffusion of Innovations Theory (DIT) (Rogers, 1983), Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989), Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991), and Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) (Venkatesh et al., 2003). DIT (Rogers, 1983) explained how innovations were adopted through communication over time within a social system and emphasized factors such as relative advantage, compatibility, malleability, and complexity. However, recognizing individual user demand led researchers to develop other models, for instance, TAM and TPB.

TAM (Davis, 1989) was created to explain computer usage behavior by linking perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use to a user' s attitude and ultimately their intention to use technology. In contrast, TPB (Ajzen, 1991) extends this framework by integrating social influence and perceived behavioral control to predict intentions and behaviors. Both models have been widely used in understanding technology adoption.

To integrate these perspectives, UTAUT (Venkatesh et al., 2003) was introduced by combining

components from TAM, TPB, and other models. UTAUT identifies four key constructs—performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions—as predictors of behavioral intention and actual use of technology, moderated by factors such as age, gender, experience, and voluntariness. This framework was later extended to UTAUT2 by adding constructs like hedonic motivation, price value, and habit to explain consumer behavior.

These four models have been used to explore digital media adoption across different cultural backgrounds. However, their application to sports live streaming services remains limited. Combining Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory with UTAUT2 (Venkatesh et al., 2012) can offer new insights into the motivations behind media usage, particularly in the context of live sports streaming. For instance, research in the U.S. (Whittle, 2018) found that viewer intentions, perceived convenience, and viewing cost significantly influence sports live streaming frequency, although the study did not focus on a specific sports event or league.

Building on this, the current study investigates the behavioral intentions of NBA sports live streaming services in China, with an emphasis on the transition from traditional to digital media. As NBA popularity expands in China, understanding a certain sociocultural context and demographic differences in acceptance of Tencent's NBA live streaming service is essential for advancing global sports consumption research.

2.1.3 The switch from traditional broadcasting to live streaming

Traditional television is no longer just available through a linear service. For example, HBO, an American pay television network, unveiled HBO Go in 2010, which is a deal to bring a new online streaming video service to its users (Szalai, 2010). Over-the-top (OTT) refers to a service or application given to a user over the Internet or other Internet Protocol (IP)--based transmission path (*Annual assessment of the status of competition in the market for the delivery of video programming; sixteenth report (30 FCC Rcd. 3253)*, 2015). The goal in this scenario was to extend the audience of an existing cable channel by allowing some or all of

the live programming material to be seen online and via mobile devices such as phones and tablets (Saikia & Nirmal, 2022).

Internet streaming services usually refer to "premium" content services. Customers who have a solid internet connection can enjoy a much better viewing experience with increased sound and video quality. This increases the consumer's demand for high-quality service (Kokaram et al., 2015). There are two genres of live streaming services; the first one is professional content provided by the OTT service, for instance, drama series, films, sports and so on (Singh et al., 2022; Zhao, 2017); the other one is individuals being able to create and stream their own amateur content on live streaming social media services such as YouTube Live and Twitch (Lu et al., 2018). Live event organisers are recognising that giving a live feed of their events to people who may live great distances from the event may considerably increase their audience size. Furthermore, many types of education, entertainment, and community content can find an audience through streaming technology in ways that traditional delivery mechanisms simply could not (Lu et al., 2018). Previous studies have focussed on OTT from different aspects, such as technology, regulations, and users' usage.

Improving the viewing quality is the primary target of studies about OTT technology or live streaming services, but users' preferences are a key topic among some of this research and are strongly related to U&G theory. Customers' willingness to pay (WTP) is a crucial attribute of OTT. Under the ambitions of international expansion of US OTT providers to the Asian market, Kim et al. (2017) attempts to understand the users in China and South Korea. They found recommendation algorithms, resolution, and watching options major OTT service product qualities that impact Chinese and Korean consumers' WTP. The resolution was the most significant feature for Chinese livestream service users, followed by the recommendation system and watching options. The suggestion system was chosen as the most valuable characteristic by Korean customers, followed by viewing options and resolution. The aggregate WTP of Chinese customers was 22.6 yuan (3.4 USD) per month, while Korean consumers' willingness to pay for OTT services was 3530 won (3.1 USD).

Today, OTT providers have become part of the media market and been influencing the behaviour of consumers worldwide. Tengeh and Udoakpan (2021) used a convenience sample strategy to conduct quantitative research. 391 people in South Africa responded to online survey questionnaires published on recognised social media networks. According to the study, more TV viewers are binge-watching and streaming material online. Furthermore, male respondents spend more than five hours every day online watching television material. All demographic groups share their OTT TV login details with relatives and acquaintances.

2.1.4 Existing research on live streaming services in China

There is an increasing number of studies concerned with OTT streaming in the Chinese market. The major focus of existing studies is the policymaking of China's government, which has a larger influence on market relations than in other contexts owing to more state involvement in media technology selection and advancement, rather than in contexts where competition among private actors is more prevalent. This influences users' media adoption and behaviours and challenges the existing theoretical frameworks. Zhao (2017) argues that it was a difficult road to the evolution of OTT service in this country, which has the largest population size in the world. It cannot be denied that the decoupling of content and distribution platforms has irreversibly altered television. Television became a strategic focus for important stakeholders, including business actors and state authorities, because of the potential prospects provided by the convergence of telecommunications, broadcast, and Internet networks. Wang and Sun (2021) investigated the emergence of Chinese OTT TV and triple-network convergence in the context of global media and communication policy. The State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television, the regulatory body for China's broadcast sector, has sought to balance market innovation with content gatekeeping by adopting a policy of "select commercialization" for relevant OTT TV and triple-play² policy (China, 2015). Wang and Sun (2021) indicate a logic that has inevitably resulted causing a complex policy

² In August 2015, the State Council of China issued the "Notice on the Promotion Plan for Triple-play policy," which means that telecommunications networks, the Internet, and cable TV networks achieve interconnection and resource sharing through technological upgrading and transformation and can simultaneously provide comprehensive media services, including voice, data, images, etc.

framework. The future of Chinese OTT streaming industry is increasingly organised and shaped as an ecosystem economy, which is distinct from the model seen in the United States.

Following the regulations issued by the Chinese authority, OTT service providers responded to the competing forces driving Chinese platformisation. Wang and Lobato (2019) explain that iQiyi must comply with the state's political necessity to maintain consistency in service and content formats throughout its broad user base, as well as to provide a national mode of address similar to television. As a result, its use of hyper-individualised customised suggestions (as is found in western markets) has been limited. Although iQiyi may alter in the future, it has followed a different route than its counterparts in the United States. Individualisation, decentralisation, user empowerment, and disruption, commonly linked with digital platforms, may have limited application in the case of iQiyi.

2015 was a watershed moment in the economic models of China's OTT video media companies, notably Youku Tudou, iQiyi, and Tencent (Lai, 2018). Youku Tudou, iQiyi, and Tencent Video announced the introduction of new membership payment schemes after revising their initial advertising support arrangements. In addition, the users of OTT streaming are gradually coming to the attention of scholars, and this has become the second focus of research.

According to an investigation by Lu et al. (Lu et al., 2018), viewers strongly prefer the true, uncensored quality of live streaming as well as the communities that the OTT services have built. The content is less important than the way the streamer (if amateur) performs it. However, live streaming methods in China vary in a number of ways to other global streaming services and content. One significant distinction is that political or civic content streams are uncommon in China. Lu et al. (Lu et al., 2018) suggest that all live-streaming sites demand users to authenticate their identities before consuming or commenting in China, which may have a self-censoring impact. In addition, WeChat or Weibo are used more for following news, whereas live streaming is utilised more for pure amusement or learning.

To find out what elements influence people's ongoing viewing and consumption intentions in live streaming in China, a mixed-methods study (Hou et al., 2019) was carried out. The semi-structured interview method was used to create a research model as well as a live-streaming typology. A survey was then utilised to conduct an evaluation of the research model. The results indicated that sex and humour appeals, social status presentation, and interactivity play considerable roles in live streaming viewer behavioural intentions, and their impacts vary across different live streaming types. In terms of interactivity, several digital practices have been studied. These include virtual gift-giving and barrage, which are two such practices focused on in the literature.

Virtual gift-giving is one practice that has become the focus of the research on OTT services in China. Goode et al. (2014) argue that the virtual gift is a digital product delivered through the internet. Chinese people value social connections in their online interactions, hence, researchers (Lu et al., 2018) suggested it was one reason why amateur streamers are rewarded with virtual gifts. They may perceive the rewarding process as both a consumer behaviour, such as an impulse purchase, and a social interaction for the purpose of circulating social connections. Virtual gifts may also be used to foster social conversations, as "money" for social capital and as keepsakes. Regarding the intentions of consuming virtual gifts, Xu et al. (2022) explored different factors impacting users' virtual gifting behaviours while accessing live streaming services. For example, if users feel happy, they have more positive attitudes to send virtual gifts, and a positive atmosphere could encourage users to consume virtual gifts as part of group behaviours. In addition, sending virtual gifts is a method to present support to the streamers. The high-quality content may encourage users to purchase and send a virtual gift.

Barrage is also a significant phenomenon in the live streaming service research. The term "Barrage" originated in Japan (Danmaku in Japanese) and later became popular in China (Danmu in Chinese). It is popular as a technique for user commenting and interaction on various video streaming websites, where user comments are instantly displayed in the form of moving texts on the livestream. The moving texts on the screen are called "Barrage" because they seem like dense bullets on the screen in a flying shooting game, and in English,

they translate literally as bulletin curtains and figuratively as barrage (Ma & Jinping, 2014). In live sports streaming services, barrage could be used for interaction between fans and commentators (Zhu, 2019). Zhu (2019) argued that audience demands for Barrage in live sports streaming services include emotional, informational, and social needs. Wang et al. (2019), studying the Douyu platform in mainland China, discovers that demographic criteria, such as education and income, influence active barrage engagement.

Existing research on live streaming services in China have focused on policy or users. In those studies that have focused on their users, they have mainly analysed the motivations of users but have not revealed the relationship between behaviour intention and frequency of use. In my study, I developed a hypothesis addressing RQ1, based on a review of the existing literature about the Uses and Gratifications Theory. there are various factors that could predict the intention to stream live NBA games on Tencent. Reviewing the existing literature on uses and gratifications theory and studies about media consumption, this current study develops one hypothesis to address the first research question, namely, examining the behaviour intentions of using Tencent NBA live streaming service according to variables of age and gender.

To address RQ1, the hypothesis below is proposed:

Hypothesis₁: There are differences regarding use patterns towards Tencent' s NBA live streaming service in terms of demographic information (gender and age).

Hypothesis₂: There are differences in the attitudes towards Tencent NBA live streaming service based on the demographic information (age, gender, city, income, education) in China.

Hypothesis₃: There are differences in behaviour intentions to live stream NBA on Tencent between users aged under and over 24 in China.

2.2 Social Identity Theory

2.2.1 Social identity and self-categorisation

Social identity theory offers a viewpoint on how self-identity is shaped by membership of groups and collectives (Olsson & Gustafsson, 2022). The systematic study of social identity in social psychology began in the 1960s and 1970s when scientists offered an experimentally grounded social identity theory. Social identity theory (Tajfel et al., 1979a) explains how humans develop in-groups and discriminate against out-groups. Categorisation, identification, and comparison are psychological processes that emphasise intergroup distinctions, resulting in a more pronounced 'sense of borders' (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). The division of humans into different categories is referred to as social categorisation, which shapes people's sense of belonging and connection to their group, as well as their isolation from others (Crisp & Hewstone, 2007; Krueger & DiDonato, 2008). People compare themselves to other group members, contrast themselves with members of other groups, and contrast their group with others. Hogg (2000) indicates that these comparison processes generate group norms, structure, and intergroup interactions, which serve as the foundation for group-based social comparisons.

Sarbin (1968) suggested that the social world could be divided into "them" and "us" based on these categories. If an individual sees himself or herself as similar to people from the same background, class, or occupation, it is referred to as "us," and if they perceive themselves to be different, it is referred to as "them." People then engage in a dual movement that combines in-group similarities with intergroup or categorial difference. By engaging in this dual movement, individuals enhance a sense of identification with a group and define boundaries between their group and others. Peggy and Lauren (1997) suggest that social identities can also be called social selves. These social selves are socially formed and classified in ways that individuals accept as descriptive of themselves or their peer group.

Eppich and Schmutz (2019) state that these concepts of in-group and out-group frequently produce a 'we-against-them' mindset. In addition, Bochatay et al. (2019) explains that conflicts and group processes are related in two ways: (1) through group membership

procedures, such as when participants struggle to join a relevant group, and (2) through intergroup borders, such as when participants believe that power differentials harm their group.

As people enter the digital era, social media users have become a focus for social identity studies. Social media has become an effective platform for information-exchange, discussion, and even protest. Lüders et al. (2022) emphasise that online users creatively and strategically exploit the affordances provided by platforms and technologies to construct and perform collective identity. Moreover, community construction, norm consensualisation, and emotional alignment are recursive dynamic processes that provide a functional basis for social identity formation online. The virtual communities formed by online interaction can be divided based on interests, hobbies and professions. The online interaction could generate a set of commonly accepted values among community members. By sharing emotions, the members of the online communities achieve a consensus. It enhances the cohesion of community and sense of belonging.

2.2.2 Sense of Belonging generated by media consumption

A sense of belonging refers to a subjective feeling of worth and regard drawn from a mutual connection with an external object based on common experiences, beliefs, or personal traits. External connectedness is anchored in the context or referent group to which one selects, desires, and feels approval to join (Hagerty et al., 1992; Mahar et al., 2013; Rogers, 1965). A sense of belonging is generated in a group or community. Mahar et al. (2013) conceptualise five aspects of a sense of belonging in the social community: subjectivity, groundedness to an external referent, reciprocity, dynamism, and self-determination.

From the perspective of social identity, Kolesovs (2021) suggests that the sense of belonging represents psychological association with a group at various levels of social networks. It is one of the elements of social identity (e.g., self-categorization, exploration, values). From the micro perspective, Baumeister and Leary (2017) indicate that belongingness is a key demand

of forms of social participation. Individuals form a social attachment and feel belonging in a group or community because this desire to belong is a powerful, fundamental, and extremely pervasive human motivation.

Schiefer and Van der Noll (2017) identify that a sense of belonging is critical to foster the quality of collective togetherness. Raw et al. (2022) discussed the issue of sense of belonging from the perspective of sports fandom and argued that sport was not only social participation but also the consumption of sports products by the public. In the context of globalization, consumers express their identity through consumption of various products. How consumers of different generations generate a sense of belonging and promote social cohesion when using the same sports services is also an important factor.

2.2.3 Sports participation, fandom and social identity

Sports team identification is found to be a source of belonging which, in turn, promotes well-being (Wann et al., 2017). For sports fans, Wann et al. (2017) show that a sense of belonging could mediate team identification and meaning of fandom in life. This study explores how college students developed team identification with their college men's basketball team. While it explains the relationship between a sense of belonging and social identity, the study does not explore the influence of media on the relationship.

Lianopoulos et al. (2020) evaluate self-esteem through sports team identification in the context of local and distant fans. The researchers emphasised that team identification enhances self-esteem for local and distant fans. The reason is that team identification plays a role of creating and maintaining team-related social-connections. Phua (2010) goes further to explore media use in the relationship between fan identification and self-esteem. It found that fans use media to learn about the team they support; in particular, the consumption of media would increase when the team they support wins.

Social identity theory provides a framework for an individual's perceptions of the socialised

self, based on group membership. However, the literature should not ignore the social identity construction of fans in a virtual community. Social categorisation, social identification and social comparison are integrated to interpret mechanisms of social identity formation.

2.2.4 Media rituals and collective emotions

The term "collective emotions" conceptualises the range of feelings experienced by participants in ritualised social occasions (Knottnerus, 2014). Media often is a source to create social rituals for its users. In a variety of contexts, Couldry (2003) defines media rituals as circumstances in which media "stand in" or appear to "stand in" for something larger, something related to the basic organizational level on which we are, or believe ourselves to be, united as citizens of a society. Furthermore, Trillò et al. (2022) suggest that rituals effectively classify popular content categories and track the values they communicate because they are typified social practices that define and articulate shared values.

CCTV's annual Chinese New Year Gala on the eve of the Chinese New Year is a typical media ritual created by CCTV for Chinese people. Scholars have used the televised Spring Festival Gala to analyse the construction of Chinese collective memory and have suggested that collective memory can strengthen the emotional cohesion of a social group (J. Wang, 2019). J. Wang (2019) highlights the role of the family in the construction of collective emotions, especially based on Chinese society and culture, where the Chinese New Year is a time of family reunion. Television is designed to connect hundreds of millions of individual families at the same time through ritualised content, thus creating social identity. Liu and Wan (2014) explore media rituals and the formation of shared emotions in terms of the use of cultural symbols in the process of mass media communication, emphasising that the presence of indigenous Chinese cultural elements in a media ritual such as the Spring Festival Gala can evoke group memories.

Hong and Dong (2015) state that sports media events have evolved into a widespread contemporary rite, presenting mega sports events as ceremonial showcases. Wang (2012)

emphasises that ritualised televised sport has replaced people's practice of sport and evolved into a common way of life for contemporaries, that is, a form of cultural consumption.

While studies exist that prove the generation of shared emotions among fans in media rituals, one point that has been overlooked is how collective emotions are expressed among fans who consume sports and cultural products through digital media, where experiences of consuming the same product are not equally shared, but where fans engage in different digital and virtual practices and engage as critical consumers.

2.2.5 Sports fan engagement

In sports management literature, a few studies have indicated how fan identification forms behaviour and engagement in the context of sports, including fan role salience (Shuv-Ami & Toder Alon, 2023), engagement on social media (Steiner et al., 2023), psychological benefits, fan rivalries and the impact of commercialisation.

Shuv-Ami and Toder Alon (2023) indicated that the extent of social identity was not the same as individual identity. A basketball fan with high social identity salience tends to feel more optimism and satisfaction when the team he or she supports wins and becomes more passionate about being involved in team-related activities. Conversely, a fan with high personal identity salience would remain more engaged in the sport after games because of their interest in the sport itself rather than the team's performance, and regardless of the team's outcome.

Steiner et al. (2023) found that different platforms serve specific roles in shaping sports fan engagement, for example, Facebook and Twitter were used for textual interaction while Instagram and YouTube were more visual media favoured for identity formation.

Yoshida et al. (2014) defined sports fan engagement as a multidimensional concept covering management cooperation, prosocial behaviour, and performance tolerance. Management

cooperation suggested that sports fans support and attend to the team' s management. Prosocial behaviour highlighted interactions among sports fans. Performance tolerance indicated fans' commitment to supporting a team even during poor performance periods.

These studies demonstrated that sports fan engagement was a dynamic process. Although some research has examined this topic in the context of digital media, the area of sports live streaming services still needs further understanding.

2.2.6 Sports fans and nationalism

Based on social identity theory, a few (Billings et al., 2019; Scott et al., 2019; Scott et al., 2018; Xu et al., 2019) studies explored nationalism in the context of international sport events, such as the Olympic Games and Rugby World Cup. The existing literature points to the evidence that a series of strategies for contributing to underpin a collective national identity, including focusing on the achievement of home athletes, which maintains a sense of pride and unity of nation' s citizens. The frame of national successes on the international sports games is to highlights of country' s power and strength. In addition, media frame constructed the concept of in-groups and out-groups which differentiated "us" from "them" and created internal united while formed a sense of rivalry with others.

Media framed nationalism in the coverage of international sports events generates a sense of in-groups and out-groups. Scott et al. (2018) indicated the significance of nationalism in media' s narratives of sports games and how media reporting enhanced the audiences' identification with their home country. Media always emphasised the performance of home teams to generate the dichotomy between "us" and "them" , in which the sense of national pride was created and amplified. Scott et al. (2019) went further to focus on the Australian media' s reporting about Australian athletes and suggested that the media contributed to a feeling of national superiority by showing winning images of Australian athletes while downplaying their opponents. The concept that national athletes represent the in-groups and foreign athletes the out-groups is essential to the media organizations'

strategy of national identity during international mega sports events.

Billings et al. (2019) studied the users' media consumption and nationalism and argued that the Olympic Games served as an international celebration of national achievement. Firstly, the media users' desire for national identification significantly predicted their media consumption behaviours; namely, the more users identified with their country, the more likely they engage in media delivering Olympic content. Secondly, Olympic media users demanded experiences that were consistent with their in-group identity, which promoted a sense of national identity.

Xu et al. (2019) indicated that gender was a critical element in the media's portrayal of nationalism. Although male and female athletes received almost equal primetime coverage, the former was always framed as the showcase of national pride and images, while the latter was often connected to such stereotyped images of mother or wife.

2.3 Studies Relating to Subcultures

2.3.1 Fans in the age of the Internet from the western cultural view

Stuart Hall's encoding and decoding model, first published in 1973, argued that individual audience members and fans of particular media or media entertainers would interpret media messages differently depending on their cultural background and personal experiences. Hall and Morley (2018) stated the different degrees of acceptance and ignorance individuals can hold towards media content. This output indicated that interpretation was not the same for all fans but was impacted by personal experiences and social contexts. In the 1970s, scholars (Hall & Jefferson, 2006; Hebdige, 1979) explored the young people's subcultures in British society and showed it challenged cultural hegemony and social norms by showing young working class people's practices of creatively reappropriating commercial products and images as a form of symbolic resistance toward mainstream social and cultural norms. Following these findings, researchers began to examine the relationship between these practices of mixing and matching media to subcultural 'style' and identity

formation.

Subcultural studies have also influenced and shaped the field of fan studies, which started in the early 1990s. Gray (2017) divides fan studies into three waves, each with its own set of goals, conceptual reference points, and methodological approaches. The first wave was preoccupied with issues of power and representation. Early fan studies researchers considered popular mass media consumption a place of power battles. In such conceptual works, fandom was represented as an act of subversion and cultural appropriation against the dominance of media producers and businesses. The second wave of fan studies extended beyond the "incorporation/resistance paradigm" (Hall, 1980). It emphasised the reproduction of social and cultural hierarchies inside fan cultures and subcultures. The third wave of fan studies attempted to widen the field of study to include a diverse spectrum of consumers and motivations, reflecting fandom's rising cultural currency. These studies offer deeper understanding of how culture is consumed, transformed and imagined within fan communities and provides insights into different perspectives on broader cultural and social issues. Peng (2017) suggested that the emergence of the internet was profound to subcultures, even though there have been a few studies about fans, the subcultures that emerge through online fandom should be more closely examined. This is because the internet strengthens the clustering of fans and expands the productive nature of fandom.

The evolution of fan culture is a topic in the existing digital media studies literature also. Jenkins (2012) portrays media fans as active producers and skilled manipulators of program meanings, namely, he considers fans to be wandering "poachers", who construct their own culture from borrowed materials. This locates fans as a social community defined by its cultural preferences and consumption practices, rejecting stereotypes of fans as cultural dupes and mindless consumers who are easily manipulated. From an insider's perspective and using vivid examples from fan artifacts, Jenkins (2012) initially provides an ethnographic explanation of the media fan community, its interpretive strategies, social institutions and cultural practices, and complex relationships with the mass media and consumer capitalism. Before the understanding of Jenkins (2012), fans' actions were fraught with social shame and

were not recognized by the press or academics. Jenkins (2012) and Jenkins (2006) highlight what was going on among American fans (and, to a lesser extent, English-speaking fans overseas) during a critical juncture in the creation of participatory culture. It was a step in the fan community's process of redefining its identity, asserting a more public voice, and defending its activities against outside parties (Zhang, 2017).

Bacon-Smith (1992) revealed the fans of science fiction genre television series who reproduce and share literature and art created based on their favourite series. In addition, the author emphasises the global fan community includes members from various backgrounds, such as, housewives, librarians, secretaries, and professors of medieval literature. They tweak the locations, rewrite the narratives, develop new characters, and construct new relationships among old characters from science fiction and action-adventure shows. The resulting stories and art are published in journals known as "fanzines" and sold through a sophisticated network of conventions, word of mouth, cross-advertising, and catalogues.

Gray et al. (2017) went further and described how fans' habits shape the expression of their social identity and suggested that fans' interpretive communities (as well as individual acts of fan consumption) are embedded in existing social and cultural structures. These relationships highlight how subcultural practices may create multiple layers of in- and out group behaviour within fan communities, with the practices of subcultural fan communities resisting more mainstream fans and fandoms. In addition, Chinese academics joined the second wave of fan culture research, for example, Cai Qi, who analysed Chinese fan culture from the perspective of discourse and rights (Cai, 2005), media economy (Xia & Cai, 2007), sociology (Cai & Ouyang, 2007) and consumerism (Cai, 2008). These studies push fan research from the individual level to fan groups. By examining fan groups from perspective of discourse and rights based on the understanding of subculture, Cai (2005) indicated Chinese fans collectively positioned and challenged hegemonic cultural narratives. From the perspective of social identity formation, a few studies (Cai, 2008; Cai & Ouyang, 2007) stated that fan groups organized voting campaign for idols, collective buying albums, and protests to defend idols to interpret identity by group efforts.

With the development of communication technology, particularly digital technology, the research about fans transferred to reflect upon the growing fragmentation of audiences in the online environment. Fandom has evolved as an increasingly essential part of life worlds where digital media is an enabler.

On the micro level, Gray et al. (2017) have investigated fans' intrapersonal enjoyment and motivations, focusing on the link between fans' selves and their fan digital objects, for example, fandom activities are not simply external hobbies but integral to fans' sense of self and individual narratives. It also broadened the conceptual focus beyond hegemony and class to today's broader social, cultural, and economic context on the macro level, for instance, global connectivity, digital devices, and the commodification of fan culture shaped fan experiences and fans navigated and resisted cultural narratives when consuming culture products.

De Kosnik (2016) investigates the archiving process in the print-to-digital media shift, focusing on Internet fan fiction archives. According to De Kosnik (2016), media consumers currently see mass culture as an archive from which they might redeploy content for their works, i.e. producing fan fiction. De Kosnik (2016) also suggested that media consumers engage negatively with media text and images inevitably, for example, they are not simply destructive but also productive, critical and innovative and create new interpretations and contributions to the cultural landscape.

Click (2019) focused on the negative feelings of fans, including disgust, dislike and hatred in the digital era and stated that anti-fans were a sub-culture created by their shared opposition to certain texts, people, or cultural phenomena. The community of anti-fans also actively thrive on digital media where they engaged in performative practices such as generating memes, blogs and satirical commentary. By creating a collective identity in an online community and presenting their critical positions about cultural and social issues, anti-fans differentiate themselves from the mainstream and contribute to alternative narratives within pop-culture (Click, 2019) .

Gray (2003) considered fans' negative engagement with media texts as an expression of anti-fandom. Anti-fans invest emotions and form communities to discuss their opinions with like-minded individuals. The identity of anti-fans is constructed based on the opposition to the text and images in the media. However, the existing literature about anti-fans and anti-fandom tends to be focused on media consumers of TV dramas. The sports fans group is ignored by the scholars.

2.3.2 Chinese fans in the age of the Internet

Research on Chinese fan culture has developed new insights to the western literature. These can be divided into two parts. The first part focuses on cultural products native to China and their fans. These studies focus on phenomena ranging from "super girls" (Qiao, 2008; Wang, 2007; Xu, 2005; Yang, 2009a, 2009b; Zhang, 2010)、kuso (Cai & Ouyang, 2007; Li, 2007; Qin, 2008; Xie, 2021; Xu, 2010; Zhao, 2006; Zuo & Liu, 2008)、"nurturing idols (Yangchengxi Ouxiang,养成系偶像)" (Cui, 2020; Fang, 2018; Liu, 2021; Liu & Wei, 2021; Liu, 2019; Shen, 2021; Sun, 2016; Zhou, 2020; Zhu & Han, 2017)、and "Tanbi culture" (耽美) (Ran; & Zhang, 2020; Zhu; & Zhao, 2015). The second part focuses on cultural products imported from abroad that are consumed by Chinese fans, for instance, "Korean wave" (Hu, 2018; Jiang, 2016; B. Li, 2019; H. Li, 2019; Liang, 2018; Liwei & Xiangshu, 2015; Pu, 2011)、" American drama fans" (Cao & He, 2012; Cheng, 2016; Jian, 2020; Sun, 2014; Wei, 2018; Wen, 2017) "fansubbing" (字幕组)(Sun, 2018; Zheng & Zhang, 2022; Zheng, 2020). These contributions are summarised as follows:

Super Girls is a talent show launched by Hunan TV station in 2005, which is a Chinese version equivalent to American Idols in the US. Wang (2007) indicates that the talent show combined with reality show has popularised idols. The emerging internet has made it easy for fans to come together and get deeply involved in reality TV shows. Based on social identity theory, Qiao (2008) indicates that the emergence of 'fan groups' is attributed to the fact that the perceived norms of opinion of the group are likely to be exaggerated in the minds of its

members. In addition, people themselves take responsibility for upholding what is perceived as the group norm. They are more likely to express this exaggerated norm, thus consolidating the various types of 'fan groups'.

Kuso is a popular internet culture in East Asia that includes diverse types of camp and parody. This cultural phenomenon is featured by the playful nature of its fandom, which is closely tied to the construction of identity and self-empowerment of its members. Xie (2021) indicates that this playful process involves fans deconstructing and reassembling existing texts, allowing them to play with their subjectivity. Fans are able to take the power to create symbolic meanings from the outside world and apply it to themselves, thus empowering themselves and establishing their own identity. For example, parody videos remix audio clips from celebrities or popular characters into rhythmic, comedic songs on Bilibili (a video sharing platform in China). Yang and Wang (2020) suggested that the production process generated fun to fans and strengthens their participation with cultural identification.

Social media has allowed fan culture to flourish, and under the 'cultivating' idol model, the immersive experience of following idols has become an emerging trend. Diao et al. (2022) explains that the Cultivating idols are initially presented to the audiences as an amateur. They appeal to TV audiences with their talents and specific personalities. The audiences desire to become their fans, vote for them in the talented show or reality show, and follow them to the moment when they win a debut spot in the TV show as real idols. Scholars underscored (Liu, 2021; Shen, 2021; Zhou, 2020) that the emergence of the 'cultivating' idol model has broken agencies' previous monopoly of star-making power. The role of fans has shifted from passive acceptance of idol personas to active participation in forming idols' personas, and the ability and participation of fans have been significantly enhanced. Fans of 'adult' idols exist in online communities.

Tanbi is a Japanese word meaning indulging in man's beauty. In China, it refers to males who are good looking and emphasises the love attitudes between two men without involving sexual acts. The fans of Tanbi culture are predominantly female, engaging in textual writing

and gendered practices. Tanbi literature is different from the conventional romance between man and woman, but between two men. Ran; and Zhang (2020) outlined that fans of Tanbi literature use online platforms to express their views, generate new content, and engage with commercial forces. They gain a certain power and agency in the cultural and commercial landscape, namely, this production by fans could be further spread alongside the original works.

'Little Fresh Meat' is a term coined by Chinese fans in 2014 to describe Korean celebrities. It is a statement laced with sexual innuendo originally. The phrase was quickly used to describe young male superstars (actors, singers, models) who wore excellent make-up, had delicate skin, and exuded excessive elegance in China (Zhang & Negus, 2020). Wang, Mao & Smith (2022) investigate the incidence of different identity threats to sports fans and coping methods in the context of Chinese fans' opposition to NBA advertising starring Xukun Cai, a Chinese idol belonging to the stigmatised 'little fresh meat' group. NBA culture is generally related to concepts of toughness, strength, and athleticism. However, Xukun Cai, as a member of the "little fresh meat" group, displayed a softer image that conflicts with these traditional masculine values. This contrast can be understood as a challenge to the established norms of what it means to be a sports fan, particularly an NBA fan, in China, as this study also builds upon. This outcome indicated that identity, masculinity, and fan culture intersect. There is a hierarchy of sports identity, with individuals identifying with one or more levels ranging from sports, basketball, the NBA, and teams, to player. Whether supporters identify as team fans, league fans, or other types of fans depends on the social settings in which a certain identity emerges.

Bilibili is a leading Chinese Danmu platform in China's streaming industry. One study (Wang, 2022) argues that despite users' visually chaotic manner, the social interactive patterns of Danmu commenters contribute to community building. Wang (2022) also indicates that Bilibili users have come up with a number of inventive methods to start a social conversation with one another. The social goals of Danmu remarks, Danmu groups, and Danmu language are at the centre of their ritualized performance in the Bilibili community, all of which reinforce

their sense of virtual community on the dimensions of participation, impact, and absorption.

Bilibili is a cultural community and video medium appealing to China's younger population. Lv et al. (2022) analyse factors of Bilibili users' overuse behaviour and showed that entertainment motivation, learning motivation, social need, stress relief, sense of belonging, and peer influence have significant positive effects on Bilibili users' addictive behaviour.

Liang and Ning (2015) have explored the constituent manifestations of Korean Wave subcultural community members in China, revealing three ways in which the group's identity is expressed: Korean Wave fans create an ideal virtual identity online; Korean Wave fans engage in 'fan practices' and 'cultural creation'; and 'group polarization' in online discussions.

Jian (2020) has studied the motivations for fan practices among fans of American dramas in China and found that fan production behaviour takes the form of social and sharing behaviour and peripheral production behaviour. In addition to emotional regulation, the psychological motivation for fan production in China is to gain a sense of social identity and find a sense of social presence.

Zheng (2020) explored translated subtitles for theatrical films and found that the style of fan subtitling groups influenced the official translated subtitles for films, with the latter trending closer to the former, thus suggesting a two-way interaction between fans' online practices and the creation of films and dramas.

These existing studies offer an understanding of the impact of Chinese fan culture, which is a subset of subcultural studies, and how fan cultures evolve in the changing media landscape. Fans play an essential role in cultural production, and they are engaging with fan communities in the entertainment industry. However, few scholars have paid attention to the fandom of Chinese sports fans and their digital practices.

2.3.3 Characteristics of a digital generation

A few researchers have examined digital use and literacy in relation to generational differences. This has implications for fan cultures, too. Prensky (2005) initially introduced the idea of digital natives and digital immigrants to explain differences between generations of internet users. According to Prensky (2005), digital natives are the generation born after 1980, and they have grown up in a world in which digital technology, for example, electronic games, computers and the internet are ubiquitous. Compared to the older generation, digital natives have adopted digital devices from an early age. This process allows the younger generation to be familiar with and comfortable with digital technology. Digital immigrants may have to accept digital devices, but their ability to adapt to them varies greatly. Some are quick to adapt, while others are slower. Furthermore, Prensky (2001) emphasises that digital natives' involvement with digital devices profoundly impacts their thinking patterns and communication styles. Consequently, an increasing number of researchers have examined the characteristics of digital native fans, for example, behavioural patterns, digital literacy, online community engagement, and social media influence.

Jenkins states that digital content generation is a significant aspect of digital fan behaviours, ranging from producing fan fiction, videos, and art. These production activities have had a strong impact on fan studies (Burgess & Green, 2018). Fans' digital literacy extends the basic technological competence to further understand digital content production, curation, and distribution. Burgess and Green (2018) argue that such literacy is essential in navigating the complexities of online fan communities, for instance, fan etiquette and the ethical considerations in content sharing.

The online community is a virtual platform for fans to collaborate, share ideas, and form subcultures. Engaging with the virtual community generates fans' sense of belonging and identity that emerges from interactions with other community members. For example, Baym (2015) notes that these communities are not just passive congregations but active participatory cultures. Social media, such as Twitter, Instagram, and Reddit, allow fans to practice their identities online. Fans post their opinions through digital practices, including

hashtags, fan pages, and online petitions. Scholars (Booth, 2017; Harrison & Michelson, 2016) found that fans' voices have the power to influence public opinion. For example, (Harrison & Michelson, 2016) indicated that sports fans were motivated to share their identities as a fan of a sports team when they learnt that other fans and players were advocates of marriage equality. Even though these studies demonstrate fans are no longer just passive consumers in the digital era but also influencers of opinion in the media landscape, sports fans are not studied fully, particularly from generational differences. The reality Prensky (2001) ignored also is that China's entry into the Internet and digital era was significantly later than 1980, which has made the adoption of digital fan practices delayed. Nonetheless, as this study shows, such practices are playing a significant part in NBA livestreaming fan practices.

2.3.4 Sports fanship and fandom

Fans are the most prevalent type of sports viewers (Jones, 2015). Fans arise from mass culture audiences in quest of increased meanings and pleasure, a major element of modernity. They consume mass culture, but in the process, they create social networks, identities, and cultural artifacts. They develop and consume fandoms, small worlds of consistent practice (Kelly, 2015). Both social identity (Tajfel, 1978) and self-categorisation (Turner et al., 1987) theories can be applied to fan cognition and behaviour. These two theories proposed that distinct mental and social behaviour were outcomes of being a member of a fan community (social identity) in comparison to when a fan considers him/herself as an individual (personal identity) (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010).

Some experts suggested that the term "sports fan" blurred two theoretically different concepts in the research: fanship and fandom. There is a difference between a fan's connection to a sports team and to other followers of a group. In the literature "Fanship" refers to the individual's sense of connection to a sports team, and "fandom" refers to the individual's connection to other fans of the team (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010). Furthermore, these scholars clarified that the idea of "fanship" is analogous to the concept of "team identification", defined as the degree that a fan feels psychologically connected to a team,

for example, "I am a fan of Houston Rockets" (Mahony & Madrigal, 1999; Wann, 1997) while the concept "fandom" is comparable to the term "social identity", defined as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1978), for instance, an individual's identity within a fan group differentiated from other fan groups.

In recent years, the topic of sports fans practising social identity, or subcultural identity, through a series of behaviours has been of interest to researchers, for example, attending games (Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2020), watching games through media (Merck et al., 2020; Ullah et al., 2021; Wann, 1993), purchasing merchandise (Sveinson et al., 2019), and so on.

Researchers (Fink et al., 2002) report that college sports fans with high team identification attended more home games, travelled more to watch away games, and were less price sensitive. A study (Wann et al., 2013) examines viewing time percentages for six different types of televised sporting events: events involving a favourite team, events involving a moderately supported team, events involving a favourite team's arrival, events involving neither a rival nor a preferred team, sports news shows, and sports documentaries. A major finding revealed team identification is a predictor of watching a favourite team's games. Some scholars (Lianopoulos et al., 2020) examined the role of perceived value as a moderator in the link between team identification and the propensity to purchase college team-licensed merchandise. The study showed that team identity alone did not influence purchase intentions; it is also crucial to consider the perceived value of team-licensed products.

Harasta (2021) outlines the evolution of sports fandom from the individual, self-identification phase to the mass audience, social experience, and finally to the "diehard fan" difference. This study emphasises that media convergence is essential to unifying sports fans in the current digital era. Sports fans begin as individuals who find emotional fulfilment in supporting a specific team or athlete because such teams or athletes give an essential psychological

component or addition to their lives. As fans' attachments to teams and sportspeople get stronger, they seek out additional people who share their sentiments and experiences, which helps to strengthen these ties. Sports become a social experience, and for the same reasons, the community of sports fan experience can pit groups against one another - the "us versus them" mindset. The proliferation of new social media platforms allows for even deeper and more rapid connection development and maintenance among sports fans, providing a "virtual" community experience. The ultimate goal of ardent sports fans is to become the most dedicated supporter - the "diehard fan."

Wann and Branscombe (1990) proposes that variations in team identification levels explain the phenomenon of committed and uncommitted supporters. Uncommitted fans only support the team when it is playing well, but committed fans support the team regardless of performance. Both argued that higher team identification resulted in greater basking-in-reflected-glory (BIRGing) tendencies and lower team identification to cutting-off-reflected-failure (CORFing) tendencies. BIRGing is the behaviour of attaching oneself with others' successes to enhance one's self confidence, whereas CORFing refers to distancing oneself from others' failures to protect one's self-esteem. Individuals with moderate or low identification were less likely to engage in BIRGing and more likely to be oriented to CORFing. To avoid affiliation with a losing team. Fans who are not fully committed to a team tend to reject team identification after poor performance. The authors contend that fair-weather supporters are to blame for attendance swings caused by winning or losing seasons.

In a related way, loyalty represents fan's attachment to a team or players, while the opposite concept is bandwagon behaviour. Boyle et al. (2019) indicate bandwagon behaviour means the phenomenon in which individuals start following a particular team or player mainly because they are successful or popular, rather than out of long-term loyalty or a deeper attachment.

Whether geographical location can predict sports fandom is another approach to exploring the identification gap of fans in different places. Guo (2021) surveys NBA local fans (American

fans who follow the local NBA team), non-local fans (American fans who like the non-local NBA team), and distant fans (Chinese NBA fans) in terms of their team identification, player identification, fanship, and fandom. The findings revealed that distant fans scored better on player identification, fandom, most motives, and fan behaviours, implying that, in general, distant fans (Chinese fans) have a stronger connection to the NBA than local and non-local fans (both are American fans). Jeremy Lin's performance in the NBA created a new word: Linsanity. This word refers to the enthusiasm and excitement felt in response to the sudden rise of Taiwanese player, Jeremy Lin, in the NBA's New York Knicks, which generated a basketball fandom in 2012. Following the self-categorisation theory (Turner & Reynolds, 1987), Chen and Phua (2016) study the "Linsanity" phenomenon in Taiwan and outline the social and psychological dynamics fans engaged in as part of the social phenomenon from a global perspective. The outcomes indicated that Taiwanese identity affected player identification positively, whereas player identification mediated the link between Taiwanese identification and team identification. As a result, team identity affected NBA participation favourably. Based on the "Linsanity" phenomenon, Pan and Zeng (2018) offer evidence that similarity identification indicated that media consumers were more apt to form emotional connections with media figures if they were similar to them on some level. These emotional connections would encourage sports fans to aspire to resemble athletes, prompt them to adopt athletes' viewpoints, and so on more closely in the context of online sports. These findings, therefore, raise the question for this study as to how fans gain or express identification in relation to Tencent livestreamed NBA content.

2.4 Transnational Subjectivity

Transnationalism and globalisation coexist. In the globalised world, transnational processes are based on and extend beyond one or more nation-states. In a narrow sense, transnational refers to persons who travel across the territories of one or more countries (Kearney, 1995). The flow of people, ideas and objects is also defined as transnational (Schiller & Fourn, 1999). The researchers are concerned with movements of people and ideas that transcend national borders because transnationalism is shaped by the flow of people and ideas in the global

context.

As the media carries cultural ideas to every corner of the world even if its users do not travel outside the country in which they live, it has also become a focus of studies on transnationalism. Sports fandom is facilitated by individuals who consistently consume a variety of sports media. When sports organisations increasingly produce events, a study (Gong, 2016) indicated that the cyberspace of transnational sports fandom also offers Chinese fans opportunities to form or become aware of transnational subjectivity .

Scholars have studied the issue of transnational subjectivity due to the movement of people or ideas, but there is not as much research on how Chinese fans who consume American sports and sports culture assume or reject a transnational stance or identity. Therefore, the existing findings provide an opportunity for this study to fill the gap: to examine whether or not NBA fans in China assume a transnational subjectivity through digital media consumption and fan practices or maintain a more nationalistic identity and stance especially when there is a diplomatic dispute between the two countries.

For example, scholars interested in the dynamic interplay between regional popular cultures and global equal-rights politics in the digital age have investigated how racism manifested itself in China's sports fandom in the aftermath of the global Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. The study (Peng et al., 2022) discovered that the often-negative assessments of the BLM movement posted on Hupu, the most popular Chinese-language sports fandom platform, were largely influenced by racism deeply embedded in traditional Chinese thinking, providing a foundation for Chinese sports fans to appropriate racial discourses to assess progressive equal-rights politics in Euro-American societies. The trajectory of such a discursive technique was dual, allowing these sports enthusiasts to legitimise their political ideas in both foreign and domestic settings.

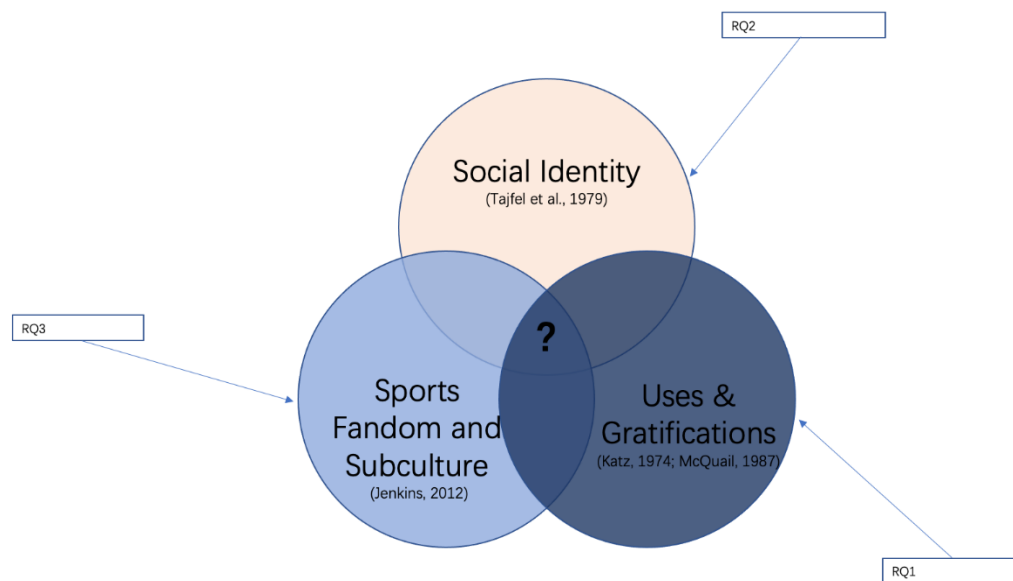
Since a few studies examined sports fans and nationalistic responses, it is necessary to explore further the influence of diplomat dispute on sports fans in China. When the current study

started in the second half year of 2019, the Morey incident happened in October of the same year. Houston Rockets General Manager Daryl Morey tweeted support for the Hong Kong protests and caused backlash from Chinese fans, authorities and sponsors. This diplomatic conflict between China and NBA is an example of how geopolitical conflicts impact fans' national identity.

2.5 Conceptual framework

Three key concepts have been reviewed: media consumption (uses and gratifications), social identity construction, and subcultures. As shown in the conceptual framework (Figure 2.1 below), former studies have unpacked the interaction between social identity and subcultures, as well as the intersection between subculture and media consumption. However, the convergence of three concepts – social identity, subculture and uses and gratifications- has been unexplored. Little is known about how digital media consumption practices shape both social identity and subculture in a virtual community, especially in the context of sports live streaming service.

Figure 2.1 illustrates the study' s conceptual framework.



This gap becomes important to understand fan community because it offers an opportunity where digital media enable sports fans to generate social identity when participate in subcultures and fulfill media-related demands. This gap also guides to emerge three research questions of the current study. This study attempts to answer (1) who are the users of Tencent NBA lives streaming service, (2) the social identity formation when the users consume Tencent NBA live streaming service, and (3) the construction of subculture in an online fan community. By addressing these questions, the current study plans to bridge the unexplored interplay of the three concepts.

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter explains the mixed-methods research design used in this study. The chapter is structured in two parts to describe the qualitative and quantitative components of the study. The chapter describes the research instruments and sampling parameters for both research approaches, as well as the data analysis process that was followed. It is necessary to note that the selection of survey participants and interviewees were conducted by convenience sampling because the process of data collection of both quantitative and qualitative section for this current study took place during COVID-19 pandemic. The chapter concludes by discussing the limitations of the study.

3.1 Mixed Method Design in Research about Sports Fans

This research attempts to examine social identity construction processes resulting from consuming sports products from the Chinese cultural context. A single method would be unable to meet the objective of studying the digital media users in China who generate virtual communities through their adoption, use, and consumption of NBA live streaming services. The current study considers the need to use a mixed methods research design combining a quantitative survey with a qualitative interview method.

Mixed method research design allows researchers to combine qualitative and quantitative approaches for data triangulation and/or corroboration (Johnson et al., 2007). Johnson et al. (2007) also suggest that triangulation is the major purpose of mixed research methods. Bryman (2006) indicates that mixed research design enhances the integrity of findings and combines the perspectives of researchers and participants through quantitative and qualitative research respectively.

A range of previous studies (Guest & Luijten, 2018; Santana & Téllez, 2023) applied mixed-method to examine a similar topic to the current research. Guest and Luijten (2018) combined survey and semi-structured interviews to examine fan culture and motivation in the context of a successful women's football professional team sports in Portland. Santana

and Téllez (2023) also conducted a survey and interview to explore sports fandom in a Mexican city where one city had two football teams.

This mixed research approach, in which data is collected in separate phases, allows subsequent qualitative research to extend the results of quantitative research. The mixed method design also allows researchers to validate the findings across different data sources, which enhances the reliability of the research.

The intention of using the online survey in the current research was to obtain descriptive baseline data regarding Chinese NBA fans behaviour intentions and media preferences in relation to using Tencent's NBA livestreaming service. The use of semi-structured interviews was intended to expand on the survey data and provide further insight into social identity formation and the emergence of different fan cultures and subcultures through NBA media consumption and livestream content engagement.

With the aim of achieving the research objective, this research received ethics approval before conducting data collection to ensure the protection of all participants in the research, to follow the ethical standards and contribute to the integrity and credibility of academic research. The application submitted to the ethics committee included details of the research methods, participant's recruitment process, participant's involvement and consent, potential risk and reduction plan, and the research data management plan.

The primary concern discussed in the ethics application was the potential risk to the participants, particularly the likelihood of psychological discomfort or social reputation damage. As the current research planned to discuss some contentious topics such as, sports diplomacy and nationalism, steps were taken to protect participants' anonymity and confidentiality. This included the de-identification of all personal data to minimize potential harm. The recruitment process involved online surveys and interviews with Chinese NBA fans using Tencent's live streaming service. Participants were clearly informed about the nature of the research, and explicit consent was obtained, with the information sheets and consent

forms provided in both English and Chinese to ensure understanding. The process was designed to be voluntary, and participants had the opportunity to withdraw at any time without penalty. To prevent potential distress, the research methodology included strategies such as providing participants with clear guidelines on what to expect during interviews and ensuring that they could refuse to answer any questions that caused discomfort. Participants were also made aware that they could discontinue their involvement in this current study at any time. The Ethics Committee approved the ethics application on 3rd November 2021

3.2 Quantitative Research Design

3.2.1 Quantitative Research Method: Survey Research

This study used a cross-sectional online quantitative survey that examined users' motivation for consuming Tencent's NBA live streaming services. The decision to use this method was informed by prior research that established surveys as effective tools for understanding media consumer behavior. Methodological insights were drawn from Wann et al. (2013), who utilized surveys with college students to identify the satisfactions of sports media consumption, and Li et al. (2019) who explored motivational differences and generational media consumption trends through survey methods. These studies demonstrated that surveys are suitable for capturing behavioral patterns, motivation, and preferences across diverse populations. In designing the survey, demographic variables (e.g., gender, age, city tier, education level, and income) and motivational constructs (e.g., convenience, enjoyment, viewing quality, social benefits, and viewing cost) were selected as independent variables. These were informed by previous studies on media consumption behaviors Li et al. (2019). Additionally, Hair et al. (2019) and Sujati and Akhyar (2020) emphasized the importance of constructs that could be validated through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA).

3.2.2 Research Sampling

Due to the travel ban in COVID-19 pandemic and the difficulty of recruiting a representative sample of participants, this study used the convenience sampling method in recruiting survey participants. The sampling criteria were as follows: participants 1) must be at least 18 years

old; 2) must have streamed no less than 10 whole NBA games, or 30 hours of NBA games, on Tencent over the last five years; and 3) must read posts about NBA on Weibo, WeChat, or another social media platform. The online survey was posted on a well-known survey website, Wenjuanxing (Survey Star, 问卷星), for two weeks from the 1st to the 14th of November in 2021. To prevent people from participating in the survey multiple times, Wenjuanxing showed the ID of the participants. The total number of respondents to the questionnaire was 306. All participants fit the inclusion criteria, and no respondents' data was excluded from the analysis.

3.2.3 Survey Research Instrument

The online survey questionnaire had six sections to understand who consumes Tencent NBA as a live streaming service in RQ1. The questionnaire is designed based on the previous study (Li, 2016). The first section outlined instructions for the survey participants. The second section asked questions about Tencent NBA viewing patterns and frequencies. In the third section, the focus then moved to scales for measuring users' intentions for streaming NBA on Tencent. The fourth section asked questions about NBA live-streamed content that users preferred. The fifth section asked about behaviour intentions when consuming the NBA live streaming service. The final section contained questions pertaining to demographic information.

The second section was organised carefully to avoid the influence of both response rates and errors. To examine user attitudes to live sports streaming services, five questions were asked about users' reasons for following sports organisations on Twitter and Weibo. Items were measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

The third section asked about NBA live streaming usage. To examine how often users access NBA live stream service in China, three questions raised in the questionnaire. These included, for instance, "How often do you livestream NBA on Tencent on an average day?" In order to compare responses with the qualitative study of users' social identity formation, one

more question was included in this part of the research it asked: “How long (in years) have you viewed NBA?”

The fourth section examined the NBA content accessed in China. The primary objective was to understand the kind of NBA content most popular with those using Tencent’ s NBA live streaming services. To achieve this, the questionnaire contained a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (least wanted) to 7 (most wanted) to measure fan preference for different kinds of content. The categories were match reporting, match schedules, team rankings, match highlight videos, player highlight videos, behind-the-scenes stories, documentary videos, user-generated content (UGC), fan communities, and others. All items were sourced from Tencent’ s Sports app. The second question measured the media platforms Chinese fans accessed NBA content. This multiple-choice question gave nine options: traditional media (TV, radio, newspaper), internet-based media (social media, short video apps, websites, sports apps), and finally, attending games and others.

The last section inquired into the behaviour intentions of Chinese users of the NBA live streaming service. The survey covered six factors: perceived convenience, perceived viewing quality, perceived enjoyment, social benefit, perceived viewing cost, and behavioural intention. For example, “I find it convenient to livestream NBA on Tencent anywhere, including indoors and outdoors.” The items in this section of the present study were examined on a seven-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). These six variables were selected based on the previous research about acceptance of live streaming service (Hino, 2015) and sports live streaming service (Whittle, 2018).

The last section inquired into the demographic information of participants, including users’ age, gender, residential city, income level and education background. The survey was designed to answer RQ1 which focused on the users’ behavioural intentions of accepting Tencent NBA live streaming service. The selection of demographic variables- gender, age,

city tier³, education level and income- was sourced from the potential impact on media consumption behaviours of these variables, as identified in former research (Li, 2016). The importance of these variable offered substantial insights into user segmentation.

Please refer to Appendix 1 for the sample survey questionnaire.

3.2.4 Survey Data Analysis

Once surveys were completed, SPSS 23 Windows was used to run a series of statistical tests to describe the users of Tencent NBA live streaming services in China, their media preferences and their behaviour intentions. Before conducting the analysis, the original data was cleaned to ensure accuracy. The descriptive statistics run by this current study provide an overview of the user base and how they consume NBA on Tencent.

An independent sample t-test was taken to examine the similarities and differences between respondents based on their demographic information regarding patterns of access to NBA live streaming services in China. This information included gender, age, city, income level, and educational background (Hypothesis in RQ1). The independent sample t-test allowed comparisons to be drawn between any two groups, and the ANOVA for comparisons between more than two groups.

Second, independent sample t-test and ANOVA were used to examine the similarities and differences between user attitudes towards livestreaming NBA in China based on a number of demographic information including gender, age, cities, incoming level and education background (Hypothesis₂ in RQ1). The independent sample t-test was used for comparisons

According to China Business News Weekly (第一财经周刊), "first-tier cities" refer to China's most developed and influential metropolitan areas, characterized by strong economic performance, high levels of internationalization, and advanced infrastructure. These typically include Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen. The concept of "new first-tier cities" was introduced to describe rapidly developing urban centers that, while not reaching the status of traditional first-tier cities, exhibit strong economic growth, urbanization, and attractiveness for talent and investment. Cities such as Chengdu, Hangzhou, Chongqing, and Wuhan are often categorized within this group based on factors such as business environment, infrastructure, cultural influence, and consumer market potential.³

between only two groups and ANOVA for comparisons between more than two groups.

Third, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA, MPlus Version 8.3) was conducted to measure the latent constructs of the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology Model scale. And then, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) test was conducted to determine similarities and differences in behaviour intention between users younger than 24 and others. In addition, univariate F test was introduced to determine differences and similarities between the below 24 and above 24 age groups examined in the study to test Hypothesis₃ in RQ1.

3.3 Qualitative Research Design

The qualitative interviews were intended to address RQ 2 and 3. Qualitative research refers to the study of the nature of phenomena, addressing their quality, various mechanisms, and the context where they emerge or the new knowledge from which they could be understood (Punch, 2013). RQ 2 and 3 aim to unpack the formation of the social identity of Chinese NBA fans and subcultures in the fan community, and the qualitative research method was identified as the most appropriate research methods to find these answers.

3.3.1 Semi-structured Interviews

This study used semi-structured interviews to understand the users' social identity construction in the process of adopting Tencent NBA live streaming service. Semi-structured interviews allow the researchers to be flexible in the finding or elaboration of information provided by the participants (Salmons, 2016). Previous studies (Lee et al., 2022; Seo & Jung, 2021) about the users of online video websites, for example YouTube, introduced the semi-structured interview as a reliable method for drawing out relevant responses to questions of social identity.

3.3.2 Convenience sampling

This study introduced convenience sampling approach to recruit the participants. In order to reach eligible interviewees, I used fan forum, such as Baidu Posting and Weibo, to publish

banners with participant recruiting requirements. These two channels were chosen, rather than WeChat, as platforms for recruiting interview participants in order to avoid situations in which the interviewees were previously known to the researcher, such as family or friends, and for ease of accessing participants at a time when other recruitment strategies were more difficult due to COVID-19.

In order to participate, potential participants had to meet the following criteria: 1) must be at least 18 years old; 2) must have streamed no less than 10 whole NBA games, or 30 hours of NBA games, on Tencent over the last five years; 3) must read posts about NBA on Weibo, WeChat, or another social media platform. The inclusion criteria ensured that all participants were adults who were capable of signing informed consent for participating in this current research. The minimum requirement to have consumed 10 or 30 hours of NBA games on Tencent in the last five years could ensure that interviewees presented an appropriate level of engagement with Tencent NBA live streaming service. Through this recruitment strategy, I was able to ensure that the participants in the study were not only were familiar with Tencent NBA live streaming service but also were able to provide a dynamic perspective on the research questions.

As soon as participants met the recruitment criteria and expressed their willingness to participate in the interview process, I sent the interviewees detailed instructions on how to participate, thereby identifying them as subjects for the qualitative phase of this study. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and associated travel restrictions, the researcher gave the participants clear instructions detailing how the interviews would be conducted remotely via web-based videoconferencing and explained that they would be recorded. All 16 interviews in this study took place over web-based videoconference software with the consent of the interviewees and were recorded in full. All interviews were conducted online following COVID-19 protocols observed in China during data collection.

16 interviewees participated in this study. The duration of the interviews ranged from 90 to 120 minutes. None of the interviewees was paid for their contribution.

I interviewed one participant at a time. Before the start of each interview, each interviewee signed the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form. All interviews were conducted via Tencent's conferencing software with video and audio recording capabilities. All interviews were conducted in Mandarin, as this was the first language of all interviewees.

All interviewees were asked not to provide information that would identify them during the interview. I also informed them that during the data analysis phase at the end of the interview, each interviewee would be assigned a code that could only be identified by me, and that pseudonyms would be applied to guarantee their anonymity when the research is published. At the same time, all interviewees were informed that if they felt pressured or uncomfortable, they could withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice.

3.3.3 Qualitative Research Instrument: Interview Guide

Based on a few existing research about sports fandom (Osborne & Coombs, 2013; Sveinson & Hoeber, 2016; Wann & Branscombe, 1990; Wann & James, 2019) and digital media usage (Bolin, 2016; Cunningham & Craig, 2019; Phua, 2010; Reid et al., 2004), the initial interview guide of this current study about users of Tencent NBA live streaming service was developed. Though the pilot test of the interview was not conducted due to the limited time frame of this current research, I adjusted the initial version of this interview guide after finishing the first two interviews to form the interview outline. The adjusted version of the interview guide added and detailed a few questions regarding perceptions about the transition between traditional broadcasting and live streaming service, Chinese sports fans' practices on digital platform and involvement of female commentators in Tencent programming. In addition, the first two interviews also offered an opportunity to test the duration of the interview.

Although I came up with the outline of the qualitative interviews based on the literature review, research questions and analysis of the quantitative study, the social identity

construction of Chinese NBA fans through digital media is a dynamic process. It was necessary to produce follow-up questions to obtain more data based on the information provided in each interview. After giving their basic information, the participants were asked questions divided into four sections. Initially, the participants were asked about their perceptions and behaviour intentions when consuming Tencent NBA live streaming service. This extends upon the survey questionnaire, gaining deeper insights into fan' s activities. Secondly, participants were asked about their participation in fan subcultures, to understand fandom in the fan community. The third part of the interviews asked about the perception of nationalism to explore whether Chinese NBA fans interact with NBA content using a national identity lens. The interviews ended with questions about sports diplomacy. The interview details were reflected in the outline (See Appendix). The interview outlines were created in English (for the purposes of being reviewed by the ethics committee) and subsequently translated into Chinese by the researcher. The Chinese translated version of the interview outline was cross-checked by a certified translator and then authorised for use.

Please refer to Appendix 3 for the template for the semi-structured interview guide used in this study.

3.3.4 Qualitative Data Analysis

This study used the Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) approach in data analysis. Developed in the 1960s initially, grounded theory is a qualitative research method with a systematic methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). It asserts that in a series of cumulative coding cycles, the researcher uses analytical skills to apply specific thematic codes to the material and eventually develop a theory from the coded data (Saldaña, 2021).

DeSantis and Ugarriza (2000) contend that a theme gives meaning and identity to recurring experiences and their variations. A theme, as such, encapsulates and unites the essence or foundation of an experience into a meaningful totality. In this study, the coding process was

divided into two cycles. This process involved thematizing all of the interview data, or in other words, categorizing a set of data under a single thesis that brings together a set of recurring ideas (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). The analysis of the data material consists of two stages: open coding and axial coding (Kaiser & Presmeg, 2019; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Williams & Moser, 2019).

Following the coding process introduced by Strauss and Corbin (1998), I reviewed interview transcripts to generate the initial list of concepts in the process of open coding. In the second and subsequent iterations, new concepts that were not covered in the initial list were added as new nodes to further refine the codebook. This process was repeated until the open coding process had been completed for all 16 interviews. This was a process whereby I coded and conceptualised the interview data verbatim, based on which the concepts were analysed, compared, and further categorised. In this process, I obtained a total of 47 valid concepts and 14 categories.

In the subsequent axial coding, I analysed the deep-rooted links between the 14 categories at the conceptual level based on their inter-relationships and logical order, and further generalised the correspondence between the four themes and the 14 sub-categories.

This qualitative study therefore followed a ground theory methodology – with all the themes emerging from the interview texts and given that the mind map began from a bottom-up organisation of the subthemes – and generated new theory from the materials.

The data from the semi-structured interviews in this research was coded using Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QDAS), namely NVIVO, to enhance the validity of the study, instead of the more traditional manual coding. QDAS adds rigor to the process, which other academics can observe through screenshots, coding structures, and matrix searches. The data can therefore be scoped, interpretations questioned, and saturation achieved (Siccama & Penna, 2008).

Table 3.1 below shows the codebook for the semi-structured interview analysis. It offers a systematic method for understanding the process by which themes emerge. Open coding identifies specific information or observations from the interview transcripts. There are 47 concepts, for example, "To learn basketball skills," "Basketball is the most accessible sport in China," and "Tencent delivered NBA live commentary is more entertaining. This step makes the data from the several interviews manageable and understandable. In the following step of Axial coding, a series of concepts are connected into 14 broader categories; for instance, the category "Relationship between live streaming NBA and fanship" covers three levels of fan identifications: Extreme Fan, Moderate fans, and Used to be extreme, but not now. 4 themes emerged from this coding process, and these helped me to understand the social identity formation of Chinese NBA fans when accessing Tencent NBA live streaming service and the subcultures in the fan community.

Table 3. 1 Coding book

THEMES	AXIAL CODING (categories)	OPEN CODING (concepts)
Digital demand	Reasons to utilise apps like Tencent to view NBA in China	To learn basketball skills
		Basketball is the most accessible sport in China
		Demands to interact with others
		Compared to other sports, NBA game is more attractive
		The NBA games on TV are friendly to viewers
		Various NBA-related content appeared on the media
	Reasons for viewer selection between CCTV 5 and Tencent	Tencent delivered NBA live commentary is more entertaining
		CCTV5 retains the soul of the NBA for fans born in the 1980s'
		Fans may alter selection of viewing platform to include participants without digital access
		Whatever the media choice, users prefer viewing NBA on a bigger screen
		Fans born in the 1990s prefer digital media but may retain use of

		non-digital platforms
	Digital media acceptance	Ease of use
		It is convenient to project NBA live images to digital TV
		Tencent built a one-stop fans ecosystem
		More information provided
		Sometimes, the content production of Tencent falls short of member expectations
		To watch CCTV5 and live stream Tencent at the same time
		Seniors have barriers to digital media use
	Relationship between live streaming NBA and fanship	Extreme Fan
		Moderate fans
		Used to be extreme, but not now
Economic investment	Cost of becoming a VIP live streaming service adopter	Membership fees and service changes impacted users' motivation
		Adoption of digital allows users to increase value of investment
	Adoption of digital encourage users to improve time management	Better time management to balance viewing more NBA games and daily life
		Different time consumption of NBA among different groups
	Critiques towards shortcomings of Tencent NBA live streaming service	Some Tencent NBA commentators were wasting users' time and patience
		Fans following particular team or player thought membership fee changes were not wise
Emotional engagement	To understand life deeper	Viewing more NBA is a way to understand life deeper
	Positive reactions to Tencent NBA live streaming is increasing engagement in the virtual community	Fans prefer commentary without political impacts
		Fans prefer Tencent commentary that keeps pace with the times
		Fans chose Tencent because the commentators understand contemporary audiences
	Negative reactions to content in Tencent NBA live streaming results	Retirement of favourite players makes fans less enthusiastic about

	decreased loyalty in the virtual community	NBA
		Some Tencent NBA commentary disappoints fans
		Users criticized Tencent commentators tendency to praise specific player
		Overwhelming 'barrage' is a public space for the "Anti-fans" and "Internet Troll"
		Female commentators develop profiles which sway opinion about team and player preference
		It is irrational to send virtual gifts to female anchors and purchase merchandise in live streaming service
	Unexpected fans responses to improved commentary	Fans switching to English commentary or no commentary version adds diversity
		The emergence of fans who discuss players' statistics only waters down engagement
		Unhappy fans may use social media to affect choice of commentator
Collective consciousness	Between individual fans and fan virtual community	Always be a member of the NBA Online Fan Club
		Discontinued fans
		Has never been a group member
	To mobilize fans in the Chinese NBA virtual community	Fans grow to generate content to expand the fan community
		Clever marketing may undermine confidence in platform and weaken group dynamic
	Respecting China' s stance	Positive initiatives Appearance of Chinese elements in NBA games made the Chinese understand tolerance
		Be Chinese people first, then basketball fans; resilience towards NBA' s presentation of western values

3.4 Criteria of Evaluation of Qualitative Research

This research cautiously and fully considered the issues of trustworthiness to ensure rigor without sacrificing the relevance of the qualitative study. There are various alternative models (Kirk et al., 1986; Williams & Morrow, 2009) appropriate to qualitative designs, but this study is based on Lincoln and Guba's model (1985) which is comparatively well developed conceptually and introduced to qualitative studies for a number of years. Lincoln and Guba's model (1985) is based on the conceptualize four trustworthiness components that are essential to qualitative studies: (a) truth value, (b) applicability, (c) consistency, and (d) neutrality.

This study followed the model (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) which defines the specific strategies of assessing the criteria in qualitative studies to increase the rigor of the qualitative design, including credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. To achieve credibility, the interview participants were selected from different gender, age, cities, education, and income characteristics to obtain different perceptions. Considerable efforts were made to decide the most appropriate meaning units, and the process of emerging themes and subthemes was documented. In addition, considerations were made to choose representative quotations from the transcript to support the themes and subthemes. Dependability was established by asking the same questions among all interviewees in the data collection process. During the analysis and interpretation process, I provided adequate contextual background about each theme and subtheme. To establish the transferability, I clearly described the context, participants and participants' recruitment, data collection and the process of analysis followed by the presentation of the findings together with appropriate quotations.

Furthermore, this study suggests how findings could be transferred to future research in the Discussion chapter. To construct confirmability, individual interview participants could read their respective interview transcripts and had an opportunity to confirm with the researcher. In addition, I conducted several reflective commentaries during the data analysis process to ensure that the researcher did not bias the analysis and results presentation process but was

entirely generated from the interviewer's experiences and perceptions.

3.5 Limitations of This Study

Firstly, this study explored Chinese fans who used live streaming services to access the NBA. However, viewers and fans of other international and local leagues should not be ignored, such as the five major European football leagues and the Chinese men's professional basketball league (CBA). These tournaments differ from the NBA in terms of game times. Therefore, there are differences in users' attitudes, usage patterns and behaviour intentions when adopting live streaming services.

Secondly, the online survey and interviews in the current study used convenience sampling, this was due to COVID-19 disruptions and social distancing which made other recruitment strategies difficult. As such, the data is not balanced in terms of gender and age. This caused the limitation that the survey is not representative but merely provides descriptive baseline data to compare to the qualitative interviews. The interviews provided the more substantial findings, but the sample was heavily skewed toward male users again, even though this represents the typical NBA fans. This research attempted to recruit as many female participants as possible, and the differences between their responses and the responses of male participants in the study provide some limited insights that are noted in the discussion.

CHAPTER 4 SURVEY RESULTS

This chapter presents the results from the survey analysis conducted for this study. The survey design addressed RQ1 to examine behaviour intentions of using Tencent NBA live streaming service according to variables of age and gender primarily. The chapter starts by providing an overview of the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Then it determines and compares the behaviour intentions of respondents across demographic information (gender, city, age, education, and income level).

4.1 Profile of Participants

306 NBA viewers in China participated in this survey. Among the respondents, 67.6% ($n=207$) were male and 26.8% ($n=82$) were female, and the remaining 5.6% of respondents ($n=17$) did not disclose their gender. All respondents were adults ranging from 18 to 70 years, but the sample skewed toward younger age demographics, with respondents having an average age of 22.11 ($SD=8.309$), apart from four participants who did not reveal their age. Young users (under 24 years old) accounted for 80.7% of the sample ($n=247$), while older users (over 24 years old) accounted for 18% ($n=55$). As presented in the limitations outlined in the research design chapter, convenience sampling was used in this survey and contributed to the uneven ratios of males to female and younger to older participants. In terms of the respondents' educational background, the majority had either a bachelor's degree or were studying for an undergraduate degree ($n=223$, 72.9%). More than half of all respondents ($n=163$, 53.3%) were living in what have been defined as First-tier cities (see Chapter 3). For income level, 61.1% of respondents had no income (Author's note: They are university students and need family support for living expenses). The percentage of respondents with annual incomes below (19.6%, $n=60$) and above (19.3%, $n=59$) ¥ 100,000 was roughly equivalent. (See Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Demographics of Tencent NBA Livestreaming Service Users ($n=306$)

Characteristics	Num	%
Gender		
Male	207	67.6

	Female	82	26.8
	Unknown	17	5.6
Age			
	Young People	247	80.7
	Others	55	18
	Unknown	4	1.3
Location			
	First-tier Cities	31	10.1
	New First-tier Cities	163	53.3
	Other	112	36.6
Education			
Level	Diploma and Secondary School	45	14.7
	Undergraduate	223	72.9
	Postgraduate and Higher	38	12.4
Income			
	None	187	61.1
	Less than ¥ 100,000	60	19.6
	More than ¥ 100,000	59	19.3

In response to questions such as how many years they have been watching the NBA games, or how many years they purchased Tencent NBA membership, a small number of participants did not provide valid data, and these were therefore not included in the average. The range of years spent viewing the NBA in China was from 1 to 35 and the average of years spent viewing NBA games for the respondents was 6.77 ($n=305$, $SD=7.033$). The participants spent an average of 1.45 hours daily ($n=305$, $SD=2.250$) viewing the NBA, with the maximum value being 12 hours. Regarding the duration of paid Tencent membership, the average was 1.41 years ($n=299$, $SD=5.881$), with the maximum value being 5 years.

For the users of the Tencent live streaming service, player highlights ($M=4.56$, $SD=2.144$), game highlights ($M=4.55$, $SD=2.056$), and team rankings ($M=4.13$, $SD=2.019$) scored the highest averages in response to questions regarding what they found most desirable on the service. User-generated content (UGC) ($M=3.09$, $SD=1.964$), fan communities ($M=3.08$, $SD=2.013$), and other kinds of content were recorded as the least desirable (see Table 4.2). This finding is quite different to the views that emerged in the interviews (discussed in chapter

5) and the contexts around watching livestreaming games versus engaging in virtual community will be unpacked further in chapters 5 and 6.

Table 4.2 Content Most Desired by Users of Tencent's NBA Livestreaming Services (n=306)

Categories	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Schedule	3.8	2.006
Ranking	4.13	2.019
Game Highlights	4.55	2.056
Player Highlights	4.56	2.144
Behind-the-Scenes Footage	3.78	2.019
Documentaries	3.77	2.063
UGC	3.09	1.964
Fan Communities	3.08	2.013
Other	2.83	1.992

The study also asked respondents to answer a multiple-choice question regarding which media platform that they most often engaged with NBA content on. It was evident that Internet-based media, including Tencent, dominated, with participants' main engagement being through social media (77.5%, n=237), websites (52%, n=159), sports apps (59.2%, n=181), and short video apps (69.3%, n=212). These were all chosen by more than half of the participants. Conversely, traditional media outlets were seldom accessed. Less than half of the respondents accessed NBA on TV (36.9%, n=113), radio (8.5%, n=26), and via newspapers (8.5%, n=26) (see Table 4.3). In addition, only 8.8% of respondents had ever attended an NBA game (n=27). Considering that 80.7% of the participants in the questionnaire of this study are young users, this result reflects the declining trend of traditional media use among the young group. This will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

Table 4.3 Channels for Accessing NBA in China (n=306)

Channels for accessing NBA contents	Num.	%
Social Media (Weibo, WeChat, Toutiao)	237	77.5
Websites	159	52
Sports Apps (Hupu etc.)	181	59.2
Short Video Apps (Douyin etc.)	212	69.3
Newspaper	26	8.5
TV Sports	113	36.9
Attending Games	27	8.8
Radio	26	8.5

Other	10	3.3
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4.2 Results of RQ1

RQ₁ includes three hypotheses, the outcomes of which will be presented in this section.

4.2.1 Results of Hypothesis₁

The quantitative findings of this study accept Hypothesis 1: There are differences in the use patterns of Tencent' s NBA live streaming service in terms of demographic information (gender, age, and city), although I acknowledge that the unevenness of the sample in terms of age and gender limits findings in relation to these variables.

For male and female users, the independent t-test results indicated that there were significant differences in the number of years they had been viewing NBA $t(264) = 10.584, p < 0.001$, the time per day accessing information about NBA on media $t(279) = 5.428, p < 0.001$, and the number of years they had been paying members of Tencent' s NBA live streaming service $t(266) = 4.835, p < 0.001$. In the above three aspects, male users' means were higher than the females. This finding indicates that male users were more active and long-term users of the service.

Regarding the time spent per day accessing NBA-related information through media, the statistical results indicate that there is no significant difference between users aged 24 and younger and those older than 24. This suggests that although older users may have greater financial independence, which allows them to afford more premium NBA content, they do not necessarily spend significantly more time watching NBA content overall. On the other hand, younger users, despite having lower financial independence and limited disposable income, still engage with NBA content through free or lower-cost channels such as social media and short video platforms. Thus, the findings suggest that interest in NBA games remains similar across age groups, and while the method of content consumption may differ, the total time spent engaging with NBA content does not show significant variation.

For users across different cities, a one-way ANOVA test indicated that there was a significant difference between users in Tier 1 cities and New Tier 1 cities in terms of the years viewing NBA, $p < 0.05$, and the mean of the group of users in Tier 1 cities was higher than that of users in New Tier 1 cities. This output indicates that the NBA viewing, and market expansion were more established in Tier 1 rather than New Tier 1 cities.

4.2.2 Results of Hypothesis₂

The quantitative findings of this study suggested that there are differences in attitudes towards Tencent NBA live streaming service based on three categories demographic information: gender, city, and education level.

In terms of different genders' attitudes towards Tencent NBA Live Streaming Service, female users ($M=3.0707$, $SD=1.49712$) showed lower dependence on Tencent NBA live streaming service than male users ($M=3.77$, $SD=1.803$), $t(287) = 3.112$, $p < 0.05$ (see Table 4.4). This finding was the same as the differences between genders in hypothesis₁, and this was one more example to explain that males dominated consumption of NBA games.

Table 4.4 The similarities and differences between male and female users in terms of attitudes to streaming NBA live on Tencent

Statement	Male Users		Female Users	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Streaming NBA is one of the most important things I do each day.	4.17	1.922	3.35	1.59
If no NBA streaming service, I would really miss it.	4.38	2.051	3.43	1.707
Streaming NBA is very important in my life.	4	2.005	3.15	1.634
I could easily do without NBA streaming service for several days.	3.33	2.007	2.82	1.744
I would feel lost without NBA streaming service.	2.97	2.076	2.61	1.734
Total	3.77	1.803	3.0707	1.497

Note: $p < 0.05$

For the users in different cities, a one-way ANOVA test suggested a significant difference

between the users living in New Tier 1 cities as opposed to the other cities, $p < 0.05$. Users from the category of Others showed higher dependence on Tencent NBA live streaming service than the New Tier 1 Cities (see Table 4.5). Unlike the output about cities in Hypotheses1, the difference in attitudes towards adopting Tencent NBA live streaming service occurred between New Tier 1 cities and Others. This indicated that entertainment options were fewer in Others than in New Tier cities. There are more entertainment activities in New Tier cities than in Others, which could reduce the dependence on a specific entertainment choice, such as Tencent NBA live streaming service in New Tier 1 cities.

Table 4.5 The similarities and differences among the users in different cities regarding attitudes to streaming NBA live on Tencent

(I) Location	(J) Location	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.
Tier 1 Cities	New Tier 1 Cities	0.558	0.256
	Others	-0.146	0.916
New Tier 1 Cities	Tier 1 Cities	-0.558	0.256
	Others	-0.705*	0.004
Others	Tier 1 Cities	0.146	0.916
	New Tier 1 Cities	0.705*	0.004

Note: * The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

For the users with different educational backgrounds, a one-way ANOVA test suggested that there was a significant difference between the users with a Diploma degree and a bachelor' s degree, $p < 0.05$. In addition, users with a Diploma degree showed higher dependence on Tencent NBA live streaming service than those with a bachelor' s degree (see Table 4.6). This finding suggested that users with higher education could have more diverse options in entertainment consumption, such as reading, traveling, etc., and are not limited to a single

choice (NBA games only). In addition, economic conditions are the reasons why people with higher education have more entertainment consumption, because they may invest more money in more expensive entertainment activities.

Table 4.6 The similarities and differences among the users in different cities regarding attitudes to streaming NBA live on Tencent

(I) Education	(J) Education	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.
Diploma	Undergraduate	0.811*	0.017
	Postgraduate and higher	0.770	0.132
Undergraduate	Diploma	-0.811*	0.017
	Postgraduate and higher	-0.041	0.991
Postgraduate and higher	Diploma	-0.770	0.132
	Undergraduate	0.041	0.991

Note: * The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Regarding the different age groups attitudes toward streaming NBA live in China, an independent t-test indicated that there were no significant differences between differently aged users in terms of attitudes toward streaming NBA live in China, $t(300) = -0.214$, $p > 0.05$.

For the users belonging to different income levels, a one-way ANOVA test showed there are no significant differences among users with different incomes (None, less than ¥1 million per year, and more than ¥1 million per year) in terms of attitudes to stream NBA in China, $p > 0.05$.

The outputs of the attitudes towards adopting the NBA live streaming service in terms of age and income revealed wide popularity across all age groups and income levels. In the following subsection, the findings representing the different behaviour intentions of consuming NBA live streaming service between the age groups is presented.

4.2.3 Results of Hypothesis₃

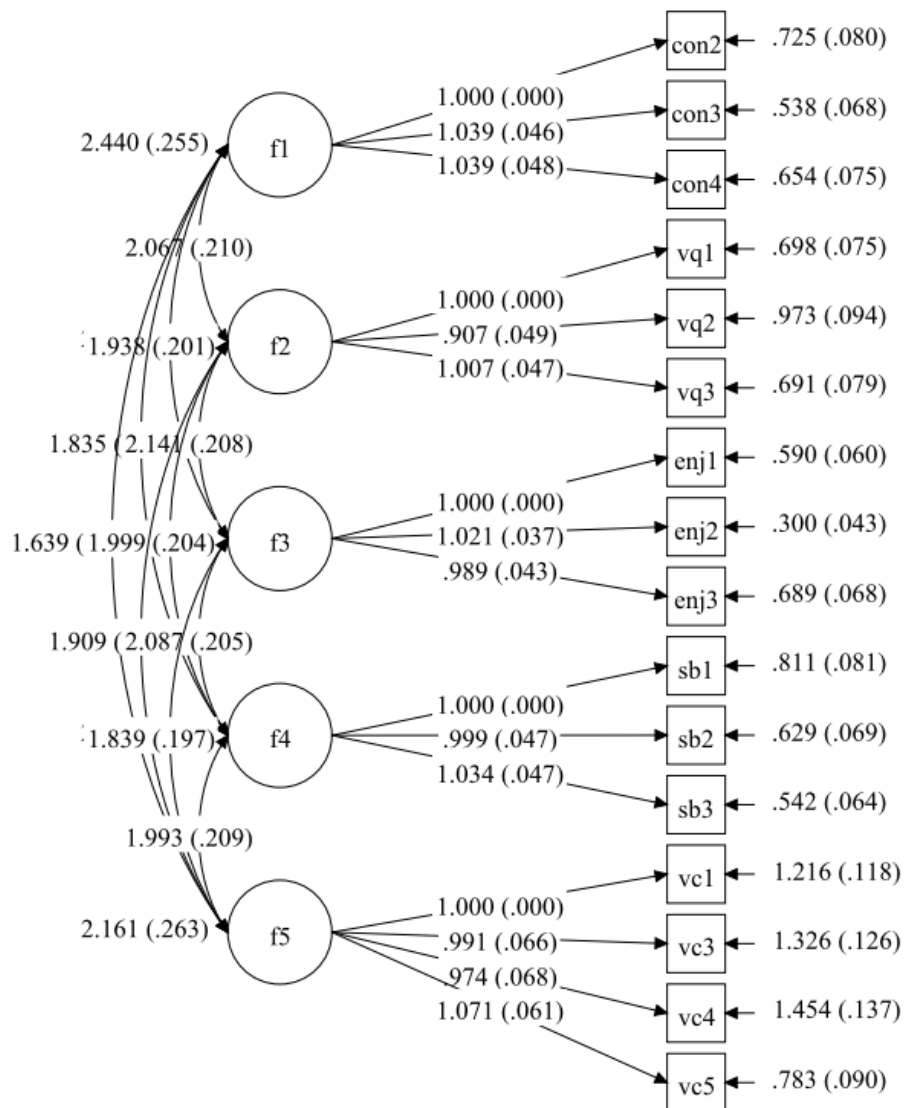
Hypothesis₃ concerns similarities and differences in the behavioural intentions of two age groups (under and over 24 years old) regarding the consumption of Tencent NBA live streaming service. Before testing Hypothesis 3, the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was utilised to examine the model fit with MPlus Version 8.3, including reliability and validity.

4.2.3.1 Results of CFA

This research executed a test of the appropriateness of the measurements introduced with five latent constructs (perceived of convenience, viewing quality, enjoyment, social benefits and viewing cost, see Figure 4.1).

The model reached an acceptable level of S-B χ^2/df ratio (i.e. $286.991/94=3.053$). Additional fit indices indicated the model attained satisfactory fit for the data: $\chi^2(94) = 4990.216$, $p < 0.001$, CFI=0.960, RMSEA=0.082, SRMR=0.033.

Figure 4.1 Proposed research model with standardized path loading



Note: f1= convenience, f2= viewing quality, f3= enjoyment, f4= social benefits, f5= viewing cost.

Table 4.7 shows the model' s factor loading, reliability and convergent validity. Factor loadings can be considered as indicators of validity for the 16 items. All items had substantial (higher than 0.821) loadings on their corresponding factors, demonstrating strong construct validity. This analysis reports two kinds of reliability: item reliability and composite reliability. On the one hand, values of R-square ranged from 0.674 to 0.91, suggesting that all items are

reliable. Secondly, a composite reliability coefficient greater than 0.70 is considered reliable (Sujati & Akhyar, 2020; Viladrich et al., 2017). On the other hand, while the values of five latent variables in this study were larger than 0.917, the scale is reliable. In addition, the results showed the AVE values of five constructs are: 0.866, 0.826, 0.821, 0.857 and 0.735. Based on the suggestion that if AVE is more than 0.5, it is acceptable (Hair et al., 2019), this scale met the criterion for convergent validity.

Table 4.7 Constructs of the Model' s Factor Loading, Reliability and Convergent Validity

CONSTRUCTS	Item	Parameters of Significance				Item Reliability	Composite Reliability	Convergent Validity
		Estimate	S.E.	Est./S.E.	P-Value	R-square	CR	AVE
F1	CON2	0.916	0.016	53.616	***	0.839	0.951	0.866
	CON3	0.942	0.013	68.629	***	0.887		
	CON4	0.934	0.015	61.432	***	0.872		
F2	VQ1	0.896	0.016	55.270	***	0.803	0.934	0.826
	VQ2	0.896	0.022	37.521	***	0.803		
	VQ3	0.934	0.016	53.699	***	0.872		
F3	ENJ1	0.935	0.013	67.573	***	0.874	0.932	0.821
	ENJ2	0.954	0.009	103.328	***	0.910		
	ENJ3	0.824	0.015	58.655	***	0.679		
F4	SB1	0.920	0.017	50.327	***	0.846	0.948	0.857
	SB2	0.931	0.015	59.447	***	0.867		
	SB3	0.927	0.013	68.706	***	0.859		
F5	VC1	0.897	0.024	33.430	***	0.805	0.917	0.735
	VC3	0.863	0.025	31.110	***	0.745		
	VC4	0.847	0.027	28.264	***	0.717		
	VC5	0.821	0.018	48.942	***	0.674		

Note: ***<0.001

F1= convenience, F2= viewing quality, F3= enjoyment, F4= social benefits, F5= viewing cost.

As the Table 4.8 reveals, the correlation between the latent variables was below .85. Therefore, discriminant validity was also acceptable based on the recommendation (Hair et al., 2019; Kline, 2016). Moreover, Discriminant validity arises when the latent variable exhibits higher variations on related indicator variables than other constructs in the same model (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The results presented in Table 4.8 inform that the five latent constructs had the following square roots of AVE: 0.931, 0.909, 0.906, 0.926, and 0.857. The five latent constructs' square roots of AVE were bigger than the inter-construct correlation. Therefore,

the five latent constructs also met the requirements for discriminant validity.

Table 4.8 Model' s Reliability and Convergent Validity Discriminate Validity

	Composite Reliability	Convergent Validity	Discriminant Validity				
	CR	AVE	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
F1	0.951	0.866	0.931				
F2	0.934	0.826	0.781	0.909			
F3	0.932	0.821	0.755	0.824	0.906		
F4	0.948	0.857	0.707	0.767	0.811	0.926	
F5	0.917	0.735	0.655	0.756	0.751	0.798	0.857

Note:

The diagonal bold is the AVE square root value;

The lower triangle is the Pearson correlation coefficient of the constructs.

F1= convenience, F2= viewing quality, F3= enjoyment, F4= social benefits, F5= viewing cost.

4.2.3.2 Results of Hypothesis₃

After testing the model fit, this research tested Hypothesis₃. The quantitative findings of this study accept Hypothesis₃: there are differences in behaviour intentions to live stream NBA on Tencent between users aged under and over 24 in China.

The results reported that the users under 24 years old were primarily impacted by convenience (M=4.51, SD=1.61), followed by enjoyment (M=4.44, SD=1.59) and viewing quality (M=4.43, SD=1.58). However, these users are less impacted by viewing cost (M=4.06, SD=1.55) and social benefits (M=4.29, SD=1.59) (see Table 4.7).

In terms of users older than 24, their primary intention for live streaming NBA on Tencent is convenience (M=4.96, SD=1.56), social benefits (M=4.46, SD=1.62), enjoyment (M=4.55, SD=1.50) and viewing quality (M=4.41, SD=1.48). However, the older users were more driven by viewing cost than their younger counterparts (M=4.15, SD=1.54) (see Table 4.7).

These results suggested that older users and young users alike appreciated the convenience of Tencent' s programming. Both also found enjoyment and viewing quality motivations for

accessing the service. A key difference was that older users also cared about social benefits, which meant that the NBA live streaming service provides a platform to enhance their social connections or that users in this age group had formed a community with the same interests. In contrast, younger users didn't appear to use the service for social connection.

Furthermore, the MANOVA was conducted, and the results indicated there were significant differences in live streaming NBA between the users under 24 and others, Wilks' Lambda=0.910, $F=2.873$, $p<0.05$, $\eta^2=0.046$.

The univariate F tests presented there was significant difference between the users under 24 years old and others, $F=6.212$, $p<0.001$, $\eta^2=0.039$. The young users demonstrated a significantly higher intention in viewing quality of live stream NBA on Tencent.

The F test results also showed that there were significant differences in behaviour intentions in convenience, enjoyment, social benefits, and view cost. The users older than 24 had a significantly higher intention of convenience than those under 24, $F=9.805$, $p<0.001$, $\eta^2=0.061$. In addition, the young people showed a lower level of intention in viewing cost ($p<0.05$), enjoyment ($p<0.05$) and social benefits ($p<0.05$) (see Table 4.8)

Table 4.8 *MANOVA Results for Intentions between Different Age Users*

Dependent Variables	F	η^2	Young People		Others	
			M	SD	M	SD
Convenience	9.805**	0.061	4.51	1.61	4.96	1.56
Viewing Quality	6.212*	0.039	4.43	1.58	4.41	1.48
Enjoyment	7.911**	0.050	4.44	1.59	4.55	1.50
Social Benefits	7.234*	0.046	4.29	1.59	4.46	1.62
Viewing Cost	5.773*	0.037	4.06	1.55	4.15	1.54

Note: * $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.001$

The differences indicated the younger generations growing up with digital technology expected higher quality media service. Conversely, the older generation appeared to prioritize the convenience and social benefits.

4.3 Summary of This Chapter

Based on the statistical testing, in terms of RQ1, the research finds that in terms of use patterns of Tencent NBA live streaming service, male users had more years viewing the NBA, longer time every single day accessing the NBA and more years paying for the NBA live streaming service than females. Older users (over 24 years old) spent more years viewing the NBA and paying for the NBA live streaming service than younger users (under 24 years old). The results of this study recorded a declining trend in the use of traditional media among young people. The results of quantitative survey also provided an overview of the users of Tencent NBA live streaming service which will be discussed further in terms of gender and generation difference in the qualitative interview.

Regarding attitudes towards adopting Tencent NBA live streaming service, male users were more dependent than female users, users from the Others category showed higher dependence than the New Tier 1 Cities, and users with a Diploma degree showed higher dependence than those with a bachelor's degree. However, there was no significant difference between the two age groups in terms of attitudes toward accepting Tencent NBA live streaming service.

In terms of the differences in behaviour intentions between the two age groups, the young users demonstrated a significantly higher intention in viewing quality of live stream NBA on Tencent while the older users had a significantly higher intention of social benefits than those under 24.

The quantitative questionnaire results offer a descriptive understanding of the users of Tencent NBA live streaming service from the perspective of consumers' behavioural intentions. The qualitative interview findings will provide nuanced insights into the users' social identity construction based on generational differences, which was only partially reflected in the quantitative survey results.

CHAPTER 5 INTERVIEW FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of the semi-structured interviews conducted for this study, which aimed to explore how Chinese fans construct their social identities through the consumption of Tencent NBA live streaming service. A total of 16 interviews were conducted. The location of the participants varied, and included Beijing, Shanghai, Chengdu, Changsha, Wuhan, Harbin, Chenzhou, Suizhou and Dongying. All respondents were older than 18 years old, and hailed from different educational backgrounds, gender, age ranges and income levels. Table 5.1 below summarises the interview respondents' demographic information. As age is a particularly relevant variable to the analysis, I have grouped younger participants (Under 24 years old) and older participants (Over 24 years old) together in the table below for clarity:

Table 5.1. Profile of participants

Code	Location	Gender	Age	Education	Income Monthly	Year commenced viewing NBA
	Over 24 years old					
T1	Wuhan	Male	34	Masters	¥8,000	2002
T2	Beijing	Male	42	Masters	¥40,000	1995
T3	Chenzhou	Male	39	Senior School	¥10,000	1995
T4	Chengdu	Male	31	Masters	¥30,000	2007
T10	Harbin	Male	32	Bachelors	¥10,000	2000
T12	Changsha	Male	33	Bachelors	¥4,000	2009
T13	Beijing	Male	32	PhD	¥10,000	1996
T5	Shanghai	Male	27	Bachelors	¥25,000	2006
T9	Changsha	Male	27	Masters	¥7,000	2009
T11	Beijing	Female	38	Bachelors	¥10,000	1999
	Under 24 years old					
T7	Changsha	Male	21	Bachelors	¥0	2014
T8	Changsha	Male	19	Bachelors	¥0	2019
T6	Changsha	Male	21	Bachelors	¥0	2011
T14	Changsha	Male	24	Bachelors	¥10,000	2006
T15	Suizhou	Male	20	Bachelors	¥0	2014
T16	Dongying	Female	20	Bachelors	¥0	2014

Through open and axial coding, four main themes and 14 sub-themes emerged in the study. The chapter emphasizes how consumers of NBA games constructed their identities as sports fans and participated in a virtual community through their digital practices.

The first theme that emerged from the interviews, which sheds light on the different reasons why participants followed and became fans of the NBA, related to age and generational differences. The main finding emerging from the qualitative interviews is that an online sports fans community in China is fragmented based on age and income levels of the users. To make sense of these differences I have employed the concepts of digital immigrants and digital natives, as outlined in the literature review (Prensky, 2005). Whereas the original use of these terms referred to Millennials or Gen Y (who would now be aged 27-42) as *digital natives*, and older generations (Gen X and baby boomers, or users aged 42+) as *digital immigrants*, in this thesis I use these concepts differently to refer to those who began consuming NBA in China through traditional broadcast medium, and those whose consumption of NBA has mainly been through Tencent live streaming service. I define these different cohorts in the following sections of this chapter. The second theme that emerged from the interviews was the way NBA fandom provided users with a sense of belonging to a social group, helping to construct a social identity. Finally, the third theme shows the interconnections among Tencent NBA live streaming service users, who produce collective emotions through participation even though they belong to a fragmented community. For displaying the findings of semi-structured interviews, the code book (presented in Chapter 3, Table 3.1) is displayed here:

Table 3. 1Coding book

THEMES	AXIAL CODING	OPEN CODING
Digital demand	Reasons to utilise apps like Tencent to view NBA in China	To learn basketball skills
		Basketball is the most accessible sport in China
		Demands to interact with others
		Compared to other sports, NBA game is more attractive
		The NBA games on TV are friendly to viewers

	Reasons for viewer selection between CCTV 5 and Tencent	Various NBA-related content appeared on the media
		Tencent delivered NBA live commentary is more entertaining
		CCTV5 retains the soul of the NBA for fans born in the 1980s'
		Fans may alter selection of viewing platform to include participants without digital access
		Whatever the media choice, users prefer viewing NBA on a bigger screen
		Fans born in the 1990s prefer digital media but may retain use of non-digital platforms
	Digital media acceptance	Ease of use
		It is convenient to project NBA live images to digital TV
		Tencent built a one-stop fans ecosystem
		More information provided
		Sometimes, the content production of Tencent falls short of member expectations
		To watch CCTV5 and live stream Tencent at the same time
		Seniors have barriers to digital media use
	Relationship between live streaming NBA and fanship	Extreme Fan
		Moderate fans
		Used to be extreme, but not now
Economic investment	Cost of becoming a VIP live streaming service adopter	Membership fees and service changes impacted users' motivation
		Adoption of digital allows users to increase value of

		investment
	Adoption of digital encourage users to improve time management	Better time management to balance viewing more NBA games and daily life
		Different time consumption of NBA among different groups
	Critiques towards shortcomings of Tencent NBA live streaming service	Some Tencent NBA commentators were wasting users' time and patience
		Fans following particular team or player thought membership fee changes were not wise
Emotional engagement	To understand life deeper	Viewing more NBA is a way to understand life deeper
	Positive reactions to Tencent NBA live streaming is increasing engagement in the virtual community	Fans prefer commentary without political impacts
		Fans prefer Tencent commentary that keeps pace with the times
		Fans chose Tencent because the commentators understand contemporary audiences
	Negative reactions to content in Tencent NBA live streaming results decreased loyalty in the virtual community	Retirement of favourite players makes fans less enthusiastic about NBA
		Some Tencent NBA commentary disappoints fans
		Users criticized Tencent commentators' tendency to praise specific player
		Overwhelming 'barrage' is a public space for the "Anti-fans" and "Internet Troll"
		Female commentators develop profiles which sway opinion about team and player preference
		It is irrational to send virtual gifts to female anchors and

		purchase merchandise in live streaming service
	Unexpected fans responses to improved commentary	Fans switching to English commentary, or no commentary version adds diversity
		The emergence of fans who discuss players' statistics only waters down engagement
		Unhappy fans may use social media to affect choice of commentator
Collective consciousness	Between individual fans and fan virtual community	Always be a member of the NBA Online Fan Club
		Discontinued fans
		Has never been a group member
	To mobilize fans in the Chinese NBA virtual community	Fans grow to generate content to expand the fan community
		Clever marketing may undermine confidence in platform and weaken group dynamic
	Respecting China' s stance	Positive initiatives Appearance of Chinese elements in NBA games made the Chinese understand tolerance
		Be Chinese people first, then basketball fans; resilience towards NBA' s presentation of western values

The chapter discusses the different reasons why two generations of users I interviewed in this study were consuming the NBA in China, and how they consumed it. This includes fans born in the 1980s and early 1990s, who originally watched NBA games on traditional live broadcasting and are now transitioning to digital media. I refer to them as the "digital immigrant generation". It also includes fans born after the "first year" of the Internet in China,

namely the year 1997 (Ya et al., 2008), who are known as "digital natives". I acknowledge that there is some blurring and overlap of generational categories rather than the year of birth always being a clear marker. For clarity, in this thesis, I define users aged 29 and below as digital natives, and users 30+ as digital immigrants. During the years of transition from traditional to digital media, the NBA has continued to expand into the Chinese market, and China has become the NBA's largest market outside of the United States.

The quantitative findings of this study (Chapter 4) revealed differences in the acceptance and adoption of digital and live streaming services between these two generations: users under 24 were primarily impacted by convenience. In contrast, older users were more impacted by social benefits than their younger counterparts, which shows some correspondence with the survey findings. To explore this difference in more depth, the qualitative analysis aimed to determine the reasons why fans of these two generations consume the NBA. The diverse reasons why fans in both generations consume the NBA cover the influence of China's macro policies in different periods such as the changing media landscape, the NBA's strategy, and the different social and emotional factors that drive different generations of fans in China. In the process of consuming Tencent NBA live streaming service, fans of two generations constructed social identity in different ways. The distinctions between the two generations, including media preference, fan practice and sense of belonging, led to the fragmentation of the fan community online. However, the reunification occurs due to collective emotions, namely, the strong national sentiments of Chinese NBA fans. This is noted in the thesis primarily in fan reactions to the Daryl Morey incident, which interview participants in this study responded to.

5.1 Tribal identity of digital immigrants

5.1.1 China's investment in Basketball at a national level

The Chinese government has, since the 1980s, been dedicated to developing the sports industry and sports participation in basketball in China. Back to that time, China's large-scale construction of basketball courts throughout the country inspired greater participation

and interest among people of all ages who subsequently became basketball fans. To put this in a historical perspective, from the 1950s to the 1980s, basketball teams were established in factories, workshops, and villages throughout China. In 1952, Mao Zedong initiated a call to "develop sports and enhance the physical fitness of the people" (Sun, 2012). Various documents promoting sports development were subsequently issued to develop mass sports participation in China. The "Preparatory Labor and Patriotic Sports System" policy was implemented in 1958⁴. According to this policy, sports were divided into three levels based on physical fitness and skills: preparatory, first, and second. The preparatory level required schools, factories, mines, government agencies, and the military to develop sports training methods tailored to local conditions (Yun, 2023). This planted the seed for the sport's popularity and wide youth participation in basketball.

Interviewees T3 and T10 (both digital immigrants), who were born in the early 1980s, remembered that during the childhood stage of their growth, basketball in China was a sport that was easy to access. State-owned enterprises and government agencies built local basketball courts, providing a basis for the NBA to enter Chinese people's lives. T3 is from the southern part of China while T10 is from the northeast:

I think it's probably because we had fewer sports facilities in those days, and basketball was probably the easiest sport to try. (T3)

For example, in Harbin, the sports facilities were limited at that time, but the schools had basketball courts, so it was easy to access and play. (T10)

Encouraged by the policy, sports activities swept across the country, from government agencies to the general public, from industrial and mining enterprises to schools at all levels. In this wave, basketball became the most widely played sport. Schools, government agencies,

⁴ The Preparatory Labor and Patriotic Sports System was introduced from the former Soviet Union in the early days of the People's Republic of China's founding to encourage people to actively participate in physical exercise. It later evolved into the current "National Physical Exercise Standards."

and factories had basketball teams and held several friendly matches and tournaments. For example, some of the most famous local basketball teams in Wuhan, the capital city of Hubei province, were from Wuhan Iron and Steel Company, Wuhan Boiler Factory, Wuhan Heavy Machine Tool Plant, and Wuchang Shipbuilding Plant (Yun, 2023).

Since the 1980s, the NBA has appeared in CCTV programs, and the live broadcasting of the Final commenced in the mid of the 1990s (Huang, 2013). Consequently, the NBA was a regular content in China' s state-run TV media. Having learned basketball skills by watching live broadcasts, NBA fans in China needed an occasion to showcase their learning, and participants (T3) also mentioned that in China, the basketball court was a place where fans could combine watching the game as a fan (of local competition) and competing for the game as a player.

The skills of NBA players inspired me to practice on the court, and I attended local basketball competitions between junior schools. I wanted to win the games. There were many players in the junior schools who had good basketball performances.
(T3)

Based on China' s investment in basketball at a national level, Chinese people had the desire to practice basketball skills. In addition, the NBA games on TV screens educated an increasing number of fans in China. Inspired by the NBA players, Chinese people participated local basketball competitions.

5.1.2 Interests in the skills connected to fan identity

Following the construction of a large number of basketball courts in China, and the establishment of local competitions, people enjoyed basketball and their enthusiasm grew across the country, basketball became more a lifestyle rather than only a state promoted game in the early 1980s. The team winning the labours' basketball games in the city level were given the opportunity to participate in provincial level games. Practicing basketball

became a part of life after hours for workers in state-owned enterprises in the 1980s. While the local basketball competitions provided a platform to play and enjoy basketball, the broadcasting of NBA games from the United States on CCTV offered Chinese people the opportunity to access elite basketball players, such as Earvin "Magic" Johnson Jr., "Flying" Michael Jordan etc. As outlined in the Introduction, this was the beginning of Chinese NBA fandom and was accompanied by a strong drive to understand and learn elite basketball skills (Huang, 2013). As T3 mentioned, he watched the NBA of the Michael Jordan era when he was growing up to learn the skills displayed by these players.

When I was young, I liked basketball, liked to play basketball, and then, learn the skills of those basketball superstars, which was the year from the Jordan on the court. (T3)

To learn elite basketball skills is the reason why digital immigrants interviewed in this project watched NBA live broadcasting for a long time. T1, T2 and T3, born in the 1980s, and T4 born in the early of 1990s, stated that they loved playing basketball and found their favourite players in NBA games to follow and learned their basketball skills. This study discovered that respondents were aware of the impact of the NBA and American basketball skills when they grew up and that the impressive performance of NBA players had appealed to Chinese audiences since the league's introduction in China.

Because I like to play basketball, people who started to learn certainly picked up some moves from their favorite players. (T1)

NBA is a window to let me know how basketball is. When I played basketball, I was educated by the NBA players. It lets me know that basketball can be played like NBA. (T4)

I always played basketball after class everyday with my friends. Although we cannot play NBA-like skills, we all tried to improve our skills and improved a little

bit every day, and we played better and better. (T2)

These Chinese fans who developed an interest in the NBA watched games and learned basketball skills through televised broadcasts. Watching NBA games live on air provided the most direct access to basketball skills. The NBA live broadcasts stimulated the interest of a large number of Chinese fans (Huang, 2013), and this interest served as the initial foundation for the creation of a fan culture.

5.1.3 NBA is preferred to China's local leagues

NBA has a unique story in China. For Chinese fans born in the 1980s, professional leagues were a concept imported from overseas. In those days, either Chinese teams participated in international or Asian competitions in the form of national teams, such as the Olympic Games, World Championships, Asian Games, etc., or teams were formed in China based on the administrative divisions of provinces to participate in national competitions, such as the National Games in China. A professional sports league is a form of sports competition different from the one managed by administrative power in China. Therefore, there was a gap in their understanding of professional leagues. NBA and other sports leagues entered the Chinese market in the 1980s such as the Italian football league (Serie A). These games offered Chinese fans their first lesson in professional sports (Guang, 1995; Huang, 2013; Sun, 2008). In the mid-1990s, China began to undergo the professionalisation reform of sport and the concept of sports clubs and leagues was introduced into the Chinese sport system. Starting in 1994, the Chinese Football National League was changed to a club system with a home-and-away games format. Football games were the pioneer of the reform of sports industry in China. It was later upgraded to the China Super Football League (Huang & Wang, 2002). With the introduction of the football professionalisation reform, Chinese basketball soon followed and also entered the club phase. In 1995, the Chinese Basketball Association (CBA) was established, followed by the introduction of volleyball, table tennis and badminton professional leagues in China (Sun, 2008). As mentioned in the Chapter One, there are three stages of sports broadcasting in China while competitions for the copyrights for local and

international sports games emerged and demands of audiences increased. However, according to those interviewed in this study, broadcast quality of local games did not match the superior broadcast quality and media coverage of NBA games, for example, T2, said:

The NBA has a higher level of broadcasting quality and a higher level of players' performance. (T2)

This was also reiterated by T4 who had a theory that the NBA has been creating a special marketing strategy in China to appeal to Chinese fans through superior broadcast quality and emphasising the skill and quality of players, which meant that appreciation of local competition was limited.:

In terms of images on the TV, there is no doubt that the NBA is the best sports game in the world, including football, rugby and so on. Whether it is the quality of the broadcast graphics, the skills of the players, or even the marketing process of the NBA, it is a specific model for sports events globally. Indeed, we cannot rule out the fact that NBA may have a unique strategy for the Chinese market, but it allows us to compare the differences and come up with a feeling that the NBA is the best. (T4)

Sports broadcasting quality is a concept of the overall standard or calibre of the production and presentation of sports content on media, encompassing production quality, commentary quality, content diversity, accessibility and distribution, engagement and interactivity, and so on (Owens, 2021; Schultz & Arke, 2015; Turner, 2016).

5.1.4 It is convenient to project NBA live images to digital TV

This study discovered that the participants interviewed tended to balance their former habits developed by watching NBA live on traditional TV broadcast with current live streaming practices, such as screen casting. This is an advanced technology through wireless protocol

to screencast from a small screen to a large screen. It solved the problem that the TV, tablet and projector have different types of links (Kumar & Alex, 2017) .

Chinese people, born in the 1980s and early 1990s, experienced these device upgrades that have taken place in the living room, for instance, smart television is gradually replacing analog signal televisions. And, as the NBA transitioned from traditional TV broadcasting to live streaming service in the early 2010s (Zhou et al., 2017), the generation of digital immigrants often failed to change their habits of watching games in their living rooms.

The participants in this study who were born in the 1980s agreed that the larger the TV sets in the living rooms, the better the experience. For example, T10, born in the early 1980s and from a city in the north-east of China, emphasised this as a key reason for the acceptance of watching NBA live broadcasts on digital devices. Much of the enjoyment and experience of NBA fans who belong to the digital immigrant generation in China initially rested on their reception of live games on TV. Even though they can watch conveniently in a mobile environment, they will no longer watch on the move because of the demand for viewing quality and will cast the screen to a larger TV in the living room.

Now the necessity of the TV in the living room may be slowly decreasing, and for me, the TV set is used for casting the screen of a mobile phone. (T10)

I often use the cast from my mobile phone to the digital TV in the living room. This is easy to use and makes the image quality good. This satisfies both things: Tencent NBA live streaming service and a bigger screen (than mobile phone). (T4)

This study found that participants had a need to project images of live streaming services from their mobile phones onto their digital TVs for viewing quality, rather than enjoying the convenience of watching on a smaller screen, even though they can view games at anytime and anywhere. The manufacture of TV sets in China have undergone a significant increase in the past four decades, and the quality of TV sets has improved. This was accompanied by a

change in image quality from black and white to colour, while the resolution also upgraded from standard definition to high definition (He, 2018). In addition, the size of the television set in living rooms has been growing larger, and the Chinese user experience of watching TV has been improving over the last four decades (Lu, 2018). T3 stated this change in the interview:

I remember that when I first watched NBA games on a small (TV) screen in 1995, it was not a digital one, now I have forgotten the name of the brand. My family bought a bigger one in about 2000. Several years of after graduation from university, I had a digital TV in my living room. I have to admit that the picture quality of today' s TVs is far better than that of the 1980s. (T11)

T11, currently a news editor of a media organization in Beijing, further indicated the bigger screen could present better audience experience with the visual narratives, such as the players' emotions:

If I need better viewing quality, it is better to have a large screen than a small digital phone. I can see the images because they are high definition, and every micro-expression or the emotions on the face of players after scoring can be seen very clearly. (T11)

As T10 and T11 suggest, casting from mobile phones to digital TVs can effectively enhance the user experience, particularly in terms of picture quality.

5.1.5 Benefits of social connection

As the survey findings showed, the social benefits of engaging with NBA is a primary motivation for digital immigrants in the study, and the qualitative results provide a rich picture of the social aspects of being an NBA fan. For example, T4 pointed out that while interacting with his classmates in junior and senior schools, many of them talked about NBA, so he would

access NBA games live to find common topics with his classmates,

I started watching the NBA in my junior school ... The NBA was a trendy topic among the students around us, so we wanted to learn about it through various media ... most of it was through CCTV5, and then we had some discussion about the NBA and basketball with our classmates. (T4)

T9 reported using the NBA live streaming service to interact with his family. As T9 mentioned, the Houston Rockets, which connected him with his father, are significant because the Chinese player Yao Ming was once a member of the team. Yao Ming's influences impacted a range of fan practices in China:

My dad and I often discussed NBA games, and he is also a fan of the NBA. The Houston Rockets used to be a common topic of ours, because of Yao Ming in that team. (T9)

The respondents stated that watching NBA games and playing basketball were important aspects of their social lives. For example, NBA games and player performances were often used as conversation starters between fans, family, and friends. These common topics facilitated deeper connections between them, and discussing the NBA became a catalyst for friends and family to bond and strengthen their relationships.

T10 recalled his experience of becoming famous on social media in China. Because he likes the NBA and Kobe Bryant, he began to buy some of Kobe Bryant's game uniforms and sneakers after he had income. After learning that a Kobe Bryant jersey he purchased had been stolen from Kobe's senior school, he returned the jersey to Kobe's school for free. Subsequently, many news media reported the story and made him known to more people on social media.

This is an unforgettable experience. Because of this, I am known to many people.

Even if I go to the stadium to play, many people would say that I am the fan who returned Kobe's jersey. More importantly, I felt that Kobe was so far away that I had no chance to get close in the past. After Kobe also knew the news, I had the opportunity to have a one-on-one meeting with him in China, which Kobe specially arranged. (T10)

5.1.6. Convenient time for professionals and employed fans

In this study, respondents expressed a desire to watch more live NBA games on Tencent's live streaming service. They also expressed a wish to improve their time management skills to fully enjoy the benefits of paying for membership. As T11 (a female digital immigrant) and T9 (a male digital immigrant) mentioned, this is an element of life skills practice for NBA fans. For these fans, subscribing to Tencent's NBA streaming service was a way to demonstrate their identification with the NBA and their commitment to their favourite teams and players. The NBA has cultivated the practice of watching games in the morning, which requires digital immigrants to plan their daily routines, studies, and work around the NBA games. Chinese fans' ability to view NBA games in the morning, Beijing time, is a significant advantage for the league, especially since other major leagues, including European and local Chinese ones, hold their games in the evening or late at night. The advantage of game time has been instrumental in cementing Chinese fans' engagement with the NBA live streaming service. As long as they can consistently watch and consume NBA games in the early hours of the day, few other leagues can match the appeal of live NBA streaming during this time.

After being attracted by NBA games, Chinese fans and spectators have consciously arranged their work and lives to allocate sufficient time to consume the NBA live streaming service. T11, a female fan, pointed out that the live broadcast of NBA games is better than other competitive leagues, such as the Champions League. The five major European football leagues are not conducive to Chinese audiences in terms of time difference because the games are often played during the small hours of the morning. NBA games, however, play in the morning, Beijing time, so there is no need to stay up late to watch the live events.

... I also watch football, but in terms of the time of the games, for the NBA, there are more games in the morning, and for football, it's probably in the evening or at midnight, so I probably watch fewer other sports than the NBA. (T11)

T9, working in the education sector in China, believes that Tencent's NBA audiences do not need to watch the game at an inconvenient time for professionals, compared to the Chinese fans of the European Football League who have to stay up late to watch the game:

... the difference between watching the NBA and European football is that European football games are played late at night, Beijing Time. I think watching football late at night is a matter of lifestyle habits ... For watching basketball, the NBA is, after all, watched in the morning without jet lag⁵, which is good for health. (T9)

5.1.7 Yao Ming is an image of China in the NBA

Up to now, six mainland Chinese players have played for NBA teams. In the order of their debut in the NBA, they are Wang Zhizhi, Mengke Bateer, Yao Ming, Sun Yue, Yi Jianlian and Zhou Qi. Although Mengke Bateer and Sun Yue have won NBA championship rings with their teams, Yao Ming is undoubtedly the most globally recognised representative of the Chinese NBA player on the world stage. In 2001, China's Olympic bid for the 2008 Summer Games was successful. This was also the year that China joined the World Trade Organisation (WTO). At that time, China, which had undergone 20 years of reform and opening policy, needed the appearance of a Chinese role model that was both liked by the Chinese and accepted by the world, and Yao Ming became this figure. The process of reform and opening up provided the material foundation for the emergence of self-confidence of the Chinese people, which not only enhanced China's economic strength and international status but also strengthened the self-confidence of the Chinese people, i.e., enhanced the national identity of the Chinese

⁵ If the game is played in the morning in China, Chinese audiences do not have to stay up late to watch the game, thereby avoiding the impact of jet lag on fans.

(Kong, 2008).

Yao Ming joined the NBA in 2002 (Passa, 2011), becoming a player with the Houston Rockets, which undoubtedly increased the national self-confidence of the Chinese people. This is reflected in the responses of interview participants for whom Yao Ming became a symbol of national identity and pride. In this way, sports fandom became entwined with projections of idealised national identity, which appealed to fans for whom basketball fandom, through Yao Ming and success at the Olympic Games, became closely tied with national identity. T4, a 31-year-old participant, said:

Because there was Yao Ming, the Chinese media promoted NBA games, and at the time we had a sense of national pride when viewing live broadcasting the NBA games. (T4)

Participants in this study agreed that the appearance of Yao Ming in the NBA was an image of Chinese people on the international stage, which gave the Chinese audiences national confidence, T2, a digital immigrant, said:

When it comes to the most influential Chinese element in the NBA, there is no doubt that it is Yao Ming. During Yao Ming's time with the Rockets, the team's jersey even featured the Chinese characters for 'Rockets' in place of the English word. (T2)

The media has the power to influence how individuals and groups identify themselves through the use of ritualistic and dramatic means (Sola-Morales, 2016). Media tell stories with visual symbols and uses rhetoric to construct the media rituals so that visual elements with national images are transmitted and remembered (Wang & Tong, 2022). The packaging of Yao Ming as the face of Chinese national identity and pride, but also as the face of the Houston Rockets, undoubtedly drove many Chinese fans to become fans and to purchase NBA merchandise and products. They attached their national identity to this sporting lifestyle

and fan practices and even formed deep emotional bonds with players and their stories.

5.1.8 I understand life deeper through the NBA

When fans belonging to the digital immigrant generation paid for the digital livestreaming service and became members, this study discovered that they invested themselves not only financially but emotionally, moving from surface level basketball viewing to deep fan identification. Chinese NBA fans of this generation have created a personal connection with NBA players to the extent that they look to the player' s personal stories to navigate challenges and gain a deeper understanding of their own life.

T1, watched NBA games for 20 years. He pointed out that in the difficult moments and stages of his life, he gained mental strength from the experience of watching the game and learning from players.

I learned the power of perseverance, how to keep doing something for a relatively long period without any distractions, and I learned the true value of life from Nowitzki's experience ... result of bringing reflections on the NBA games to the real life of fans... from being selected in the draft in 1998 to retiring from the league in 2019, Nowitzki has only played for one team in the NBA from beginning to end, the Dallas Mavericks. This is an expression of loyalty, regardless of the team or himself. When having bottlenecks or troughs, he was always dedicated to the team and not be tempted by other temptations. This is commendable. There are also twists and turns in the lives of ordinary people... For example, there will be low points in my company... Under the influence of Nowitzki, I will find and solve problems within myself instead of thinking about other things, Nowitzki taught me loyalty and consistency. (T1)

T10, watched NBA games since 2000, and was encouraged by Kobe Bryant' s story to pursue dreams:

Kobe has faced many difficulties, many hard times in his life, and he recovered little by little and bounced back from his career lows to usher in an acceleration ... After Kobe died in a sudden plane crash (author's correction: a helicopter crash), I aspired to keep his shadow alive in the world and to be the one to carry it on myself, I insisted on losing weight, from 110 kilograms to 80. (T10)

This feeling of NBA fandom being a part of users' emotional lives and life strategies is an important aspect to this thesis, where I highlight those parts of NBA consumption and fandom that indicated that, for NBA fans in China, it is much "more than a game". This is also reflected in the responses of digital immigrants, for example, T5 and T10, who grew up consuming NBA on the internet and later through Tencent's livestreaming service. As a digital immigrant who had a dream of becoming a NBA commentator, T5, working and living in Shanghai, indicated:

As a young generation of NBA commentator, it is a long road for me to get here, however, I never give up my initial dream ... I don't care about the time of the game; 5 am is ok for me, I need the real game to practice (my commentary). At present, I finally have the opportunity to deliver commentary of the regular season to the audiences. (T5)

T10, who will have a child soon, pointed out that the NBA's most significant wealth and life inspiration to fans should be to show the spiritual understanding of accessing games in their own lives and to inspire the next generation.

I wanted to be an ESPN reporter, and I thought that would be great, even if I had to be a ball boy. If I have a child in the future, I will tell him never to give up, tell him "If you want to do it, go for it" ... (T10)

However, the digital immigrants in the study were inspired by Tencent live streaming content

in other ways also. For some, the aspiration to become commentators was also a motivational factor in their consumption of the NBA, indicating it was more than a game. The quotes of T10 and T5 indicated that all the additional features associated with digital fan identity (i.e. preference of commentators, access to data, more replay footage) were also important in helping them to achieve their professional goals and dreams.

After accessing the NBA live streaming service regularly, the digital immigrants in this study showed a "sense of combination", synthesising their lifestyle and aspirations with the NBA game. The purpose of these NBA fans in China is to absorb confidence from the NBA games and players. They agree that the NBA is an essential element in fans' lives, which encourages them to pursue better lives. As a result, fans can find inspiration in the player's stories and success, which provides energy in life from their fan experience. Through creative digital practices, they merged their own identities, social learning, and social aspirations with the personal stories of NBA players, seeking to gain mental strength and life strategies from players' performances and stories. Emotional takeaways from consuming the NBA live streaming service are considered the nutrition and power in users' lives.

5.2 Digital identity of digital natives

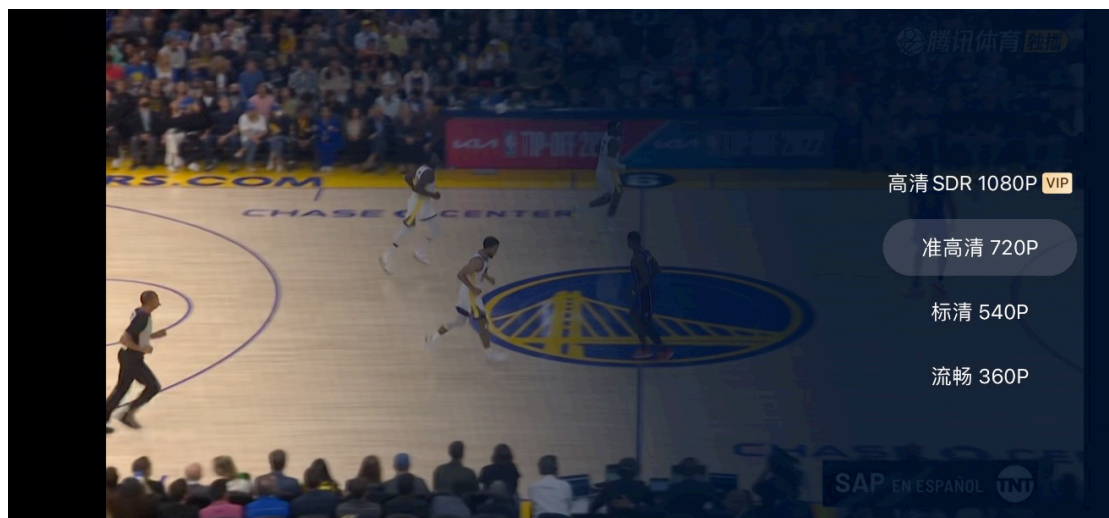
5.2.1 More viewing options

Based on the rapid development of internet technology, Tencent has produced a wider range of service content for its users compared to traditional TV broadcasters, such as options for video quality and various commentary styles (Wang, 2014). These options generate more fun for Chinese NBA fans, who can participate in the content of Tencent in a range of ways. This has shaped many of the fan practices of China's digital natives who have responded to the shift from the broadcast era to the era of live streaming with an appreciation of much more than player skills, social benefits and adoration of role models.

On Tencent's interface, users can choose live streaming services with different resolutions. There are two considerations for this: first, some users who rely on mobile data to access

Tencent NBA live streaming service may choose lower resolution video quality to save their limited data allowance. This is because higher resolutions consume more data, as T7 mentioned in the interview. Second, higher-resolution video often requires users to purchase a membership, providing an alternative for users who prefer not to pay for the subscription. T7, studying at a university currently, purchased a one-year Super VIP membership of Tencent NBA live streaming service, which required using mobile data. This led them to consider change mobile data plan to continue to afford the service:

Many times, I can't access free WIFI, so I needed to use my mobile data to watch NBA games on Tencent. Purchasing mobile data is very expensive. However, if using my Super VIP subscription to watch NBA games, the video quality is much better, and different views are available, including ...1080p. So, I need to think twice about my mobile data plan. (T7)



Picture 5.1 A screenshot of Tencent Sport interface: Different resolution options for the users on Tencent NBA live streaming service (Accessing 1080P required VIP subscription)

Users and fans need to pay to watch NBA game on Tencent, therefore, they prefer more close matches rather than those with a significant gap between two teams. For example, if the score difference becomes too large right from the start, it may cause fans to lose patience and interest in continuing to consume the games. T14 and T6 are male digital natives, and T15 is

a female digital native. As they suggested:

... the appeal of a game depends on how closely played on court. If a significant point gap emerges from the first quarter, you might lose interest and stop watching by the third quarter. (T14)

I have the desire to pay for the subscription, to enjoy the exciting games; for me, exciting games mean the battle between teams is competitive. When I watch this kind of game (competitive), I always feel it is valuable to pay for. (T6)

A very strong team and another that might be at the bottom of the league, but in this game, if these two teams play extremely tense, I think this is also a very exciting game, and I am willing to pay to watch it. (T14)

I paid for the membership to watch games with my favourite play. Once I saw good performance on court, I felt comfortable for a whole day. (T15)

Tencent provides live streaming service of games authorized by NBA in a season, and this has changed the traditional programming schedule of NBA games on CCTV. CCTV selected games to be broadcast, which resulted in a limited number of games being shown. Consequently, for viewers, there was not much difference in the broadcasting schedule of regular-season games and finals during a long season. However, Tencent offers live streaming services for all teams and all games, resulting in a significantly larger number of games available compared to CCTV. As a result, Tencent users can now more clearly perceive the difference of what must be viewed between regular-season games and finals when choosing which games to watch.

T14 pointed out that because the NBA season has a long-time span, and the long regular season is not very exciting, it is a cost-effective option to consumers to purchase a super membership to watch NBA live broadcasts after entering the relatively intense playoffs.

The All-Star Game is generally more entertaining than regular season games ... while playoff and Finals games are definitely more exciting. So, I usually watch fewer regular season games each year and only start following more closely during the playoffs, roughly from the Western Conference semi-finals onward, until the Finals. (T14)

As excitement drives the experience of fans, Tencent is interested in increasing the entertainment value of NBA games through a range of innovations not available on traditional TV broadcasting. This is all designed to make the experience of fans “stickier” (Li et al., 2021; Szabo, 2017), namely, the ability that a media retain its users over time. However, for some fans, more immersive content and staying engaged for longer has led them to impose time management and restrictions on their viewing, as the next section explains.

5.2.2 More than a Game: more content, more interactivity

As mentioned in chapter one, Tencent NBA live streaming service builds a content ecosystem with diversity for its individual subscribers, for example, CHBL, CJBL, and CUBA are the China High School Basketball League, China Junior College Basketball League, and China University Basketball Association, respectively. All these Chinese student basketball leagues are presented on Tencent. T14, a digital native, suggests:

I found that, at present, the Tencent Sports app does not just have NBA and CBA events only, it even provides the live streaming service of the National High School Basketball League, I saw my senior school play a match against a school from the city of Shenzhen earlier before. (T14)

The Tencent Sports app provides NBA live streaming service and related content to its users. It also offers live streaming services of several local basketball leagues in China. Users consume live streaming services of various basketball games, for example, China's university

and high school leagues could bring users closer to the schools they are attending or attended, especially when these users are graduates of the participating schools. To a certain extent, users show the feeling of stickiness towards Tencent through accessing basketball games. The participants born in the digital native era demand a more complete content ecosystem around basketball content. T6, a digital native, suggests the ecosystem in Tencent NBA live streaming service provides this:

The live images of games can reach a high-definition level, including some of Tencent's merchandised products, interactive design of interface, and users generated content, so on; from these aspects, Tencent built an entire ecosystem for Chinese NBA fans. (T6)

As T14 and T6, both digital natives, mentioned in the interview, the diversity of the content ecosystem on Tencent NBA live streaming service was unavailable in traditional TV broadcasting. This advantage of digital media may interest the digital natives to consume more basketball online.

5.2.3 Whatever the media choice, users prefer viewing the NBA on a bigger screen

For the generation of Chinese fans who are digital natives, basketball viewing habits developed in an era where digital TV was already the dominant medium. Unlike digital immigrants, who experienced a clear distinction between mobile phones and traditional living room televisions, digital natives perceive these devices as more interchangeable for media consumption. For digital natives, the difference is whether it can be used on the move. Furthermore, for the generation of digital natives, fans who are already used to mobile internet, the need to watch TV in the living room is met by the demands to watch the game with family and friends. Therefore, it brings more social benefits to watch it on a bigger screen, a point of similarity with digital immigrants.

T6 and T7 also pointed out that the differences between watching the game through digital

devices, such as mobile phones and tablet computers, and watching the game through the TV in the living room at home would affect the choice of media selection.

Firstly, they believed that watching the game in the living room with family members on a large TV screen would have a more emotional atmosphere and resonate emotionally with other people because the TV screen in the living room can be seen more clearly than the screen of a digital device.

... the TV compared to the mobile phone; I think the TV screen is huge ... it is a little better than the mobile phone. (T7)

Secondly, unlike American fans who can attend games and immerse themselves in the atmosphere with tens of thousands of other fans, the study revealed that Chinese fans typically watch games from the comfort of their living rooms. However, since the living room is a communal space for the entire family, a larger TV screen is preferred over a mobile device, enabling multiple individuals to watch the game interactively.

... more fun to have more people together. Basketball is a team sport ... you cannot celebrate alone. So, CCTV this kind of inside the living room ... watching live can meet your needs of this kind. (T6)

This indicates that digital natives also like to watch NBA games with their families on TV to enjoy a multi-generational social experience, although the benefits of watching NBA live-streamed on multiple devices provide the added benefit of more interactive content that appealed to them as individual consumers of Tencent's content ecosystem.

5.2.4 Tencent NBA Fans' digital practices and preferences

Having acquired the exclusive digital rights of the NBA in China in 2015 (Xiangfeng, 2019), Tencent has provided NBA fans in China with a service different from traditional live

broadcasting. Digital technology supports more interactive features in live streaming services. Relying on this unique advantage of digital media, Tencent has built an ecosystem that serves audiences and fans. This study uncovers the preference of NBA fans, mainly digital natives, for a comprehensive, one-stop content access system. In contrast to traditional media, which typically relies on a single channel for information dissemination resulting making the content the same for all viewers, digital media amalgamates texts, images, videos, audio, statistics, fan-generated content, fan communities, e-commerce, and other features within a single service, thereby establishing an all-encompassing ecosystem for fans and allowing individual subscribers to pursue a diverse range of content and experiences catering to their own individual tastes and interests as fans. As fans grow accustomed to the cohesive ecosystem offered by digital media, their loyalty and engagement with the service intensifies. Based on Tencent's digital services, fans have engaged in a series of practices that have empowered fans, establishing closer connections between fans, commentary, and content. Rather than being passive consumers, these end users of digital media have critically engaged with their digital identities through active digital practices and have developed a sense of belonging due to these digital practices. They have also developed a critical attitude toward service aspects that threaten their enjoyment or sense of identification and belonging. This result is reflected in critical attitudes toward commentators, as reflected in the following sections. As the commentators generated a large number of responses from digital immigrants as well as digital natives, in the following sections I have blended and compared the responses of both generations to reflect on where views agree and depart from one another.

5.2.5 Fan preferences in commentary differ and they are more critical

It is important to recognize that, since users pay for Tencent's livestreaming service, the participants in this study are more aware of what they do and dislike and act more as consumers in some ways, as they actively seek out the service's unique features that differentiate it from CCTV5's traditional broadcasting.

Digital technology provides more support and possibilities for the presentation of digital media, moving beyond the single presentation style of traditional television. As a result, digital media users have more proactive demands and choices. They seek a higher level of user experience and will constantly engage in "trial and error" to find the most suitable service content based on their situation and viewing scenario. However, the prerequisite for this is that Tencent can offer a broader range of options, such as various live commentary choices.

T14, a digital native living in the middle part of China, highlighted how the option to have audio commentary in English, with Chinese commentators or without commentary, allowed fans to experience a range of viewing experiences, even having the opportunity to remove commentary if it is undesirable:

Tencent offers an English original audio channel in addition to the channel with Chinese commentators and anchors. There is also a separate live version without commentary... the original English version, and there's also a version without commentary. I think the atmosphere in both is great. I do not need to tolerate the Chinese commentary in low quality. (T14)

Digital media services alter experiences of social identity so that fans in China can mix and match atmospheres and experiences through their choice of live commentary.

5.2.6 Less censorship, more fun

Digital natives also reveal a preference for less censored content. Tencent users appreciate the freedom of the commentators on Tencent and do not need to consume formal and political content on CCTV anymore. T7, studying at a university, indicated this difference:

Many of current Tencent's commentators are former CCTV5 commentators, their performances in Tencent seem more relaxed, because they don't have to worry as much about what they can and can't say any more, they can get around the

sensitive topics in the commentary. (T7)

T14, a digital native user, suggests that the commentary of Tencent NBA live streaming service is more entertaining.

The commentators on Tencent always talk more straightforwardly. Unlike the traditional style of commentators in CCTV, Tencent's commentators try to talk about what they want to talk about in the NBA live streaming service. I believe audiences interested in politics will not come to Tencent NBA live streaming service to look for content. Therefore, Tencent's commentators do not need to discuss political issues in the commentary. They go directly to the topic of basketball, which is closer to Tencent's audience. Tencent's audience is mainly for entertainment purposes. (T14)

Regarding the political content in the commentary, for example Daryl Morey incident caused a diplomatic conflict between China and the US, the digital immigrants compare the impacts of political turbulence on traditional broadcasting and live streaming services. Political issues, for example, the conflicts between the US and China, have impacted NBA broadcasting in China. NBA games was suspended in 1999 when NATO bombed the Chinese embassy in Yugoslavia. This issue caused public protests and a temporary suspension of NBA content by CCTV. Another suspension took place in 2001 after a U.S. reconnaissance plane collided with a Chinese fighter jet. These contexts promoted the political awareness among fans who desired to watch NBA games without interruptions by politics conflicts (Huang, 2013). T1, a digital immigrant, pointed out that when doing a commentator job in China, the commentator's narration of the game or the player should attempt to find the middle ground and not be too biased or out of step with public attitudes.

Not all of the public can accept the current commentary ... and the key thing is that Chinese commentators have the idea that while their work does not need to be perfect ... they choose the most conservative way to commentate. (T1)

T10, a digital immigrant, agreed that Tencent has fewer restrictions on live commentary than CCTV5. The commentators are free enough to talk and have free space to say what the fans think and become the "spokesperson" of the fans. Fans, in turn, participate and interact with and constantly challenge commentators' words. This responsiveness is a way to make the users feel included in the whole experience of Tencent's NBA live streaming service, but even so, T10 preferred the US commentators because they have even more freedom. Tencent provides the English commentary version for its VIP users and there are alternative options for accessing the English commentary version without copyrights.

... there are many ways to access the game, you can watch it on the copycat, the source is from the US, and the good commentators from the US are the ones who can express their own opinions. (T10)

Performance of the commentators has the power to inspire fans' emotions. As the consumers, fans feel that Tencent should hear their voices. Different from CCTV5's commentator team, which rarely changed over the years, Tencent constantly reshuffled its commentary team according to users' habits and preferences, such as employing young generation of commentators. T5 pointed out that the CCTV5 commentary was outdated and would not be accepted by digital native audiences. But rather than calling for more freedom to express political views, he proposed that the commentators should engage with the NBA fans more than just reading the play as though it was the news. It was noted that a humorous, entertaining tone was preferred by the digital natives:

Basketball commentary should be funny and humorous ... you may listen to the broadcast style of Song Shixiong and Sun Zhengping whose style is very formal like a newsreader, that era is over now ... They need to concentrate on listening to what is the fans talking about. (T5)

T4, a digital immigrant, also expressed a preference for Tencent's commentators, owing to

their tendency to use humor. For example, Tencent commentators were celebrated for using sexual innuendo to describe play on court, as a tie in with commercial sponsor, Jissbon, a condom manufacturer, supports:

I think professional, both sides are certainly professional, CCTV and Tencent's commentators have a certain knowledge base, but for the audience, although they are professional things, but how to make the audience to accept is a problem ... for example, Tencent commentators connect the quality of Jissbon, a sponsor of Tencent NBA live streaming service, with the players' performance on courts. This style is so funny. (T4)



Picture 5.2 A screenshot: the commentator of Tencent NBA live streaming service. The banner in commentator hand is a commercial advertisement of Jissbon

The formal style of CCTV's commentary means that the audiences feel it is in the style of hard news. The participant above reflects on the way that Tencent commentators promote commercial product placement (i.e. of Jissbon condoms) and humorous critique of the player performances is entertaining and adds interest to the game for fans. This kind of commentary indicates the shift from conventional narratives of basketball games to a commercialised presentation. Zheng et al. (2017) suggest that absorbing sponsors to produce content serves

as an approach to transform from a "commodity of the symbol" to a "commodity of the audience" in TV sports, especially in online media. As T6, a digital native, indicated that he can understand the combination of basketball games commentary and commercial products in an entertaining method.

I can understand Tencent' s design. One is to make the commentary more interesting, and the other is to obtain economic benefits. In particular, it links the protective function of condoms with the best defense in basketball games. This is a very unique design in itself, and basketball fans can understand the secret at a glance. (T6)

However, not all participants liked Tencent' s entertaining commentary. Many digital immigrants in the study felt that Tencent commentators should be more professional and focus on basketball. They think Tencent's approach is sensational. For example, T2 expected that the members of the Tencent NBA commentator team, regardless of their previous background, should strive to become professional media people, especially sports media people whose primary characteristic was understanding basketball and serving the audience.

Tencent NBA commentators should play the role of professional media people. (T2)

T2 also pointed out the criteria for professional NBA commentators, they should help fans and audiences to understand basketball and the NBA game more accurately. The commentary and engagement with users and fans must be rational. Whether a former basketball reporter or a professional basketball player, they need to understand their current role in the live streaming service, especially the relationship with users and fans.

The typical scenario is when a controversy is on court, when a player fails to do a skill well on court, commentators should use their professional knowledge to make the matter clear ... The commentator needs to clarify the situation, whether the situation on the court is related to James or not, they should remember they are

not fans of James. (T2)

Respondents also criticized instances where the commentators presented themselves to be fans of a specific player in the commentary. Because they paid to watch the game on Tencent, users were more critical of the commentator's performance and wanted it to be impartial. Digital technology provides the opportunity for the user to criticize the content. T3 pointed out that the most unacceptable commentary for users was that commentators praised a specific player too much, which fans of other teams and players might find off-putting. While some fans reflected that this kind of emotion was brought into the commentary to please the fans of a particular star, it was rarely taken well by opposing fans. In this case, fans criticized the commentators as biased and claimed it compromised the integrity of the commentary work.

I don't care about these things, I've heard of some that are particularly favour towards some players, like James and Harden, and it feels like extreme, it's extreme words. (T3)

The comparison between CCTV and Tencent indicates the evolution of expectations about sports commentary in digital time. It outlines the balance between entertainment and professionalism for fans to consume basketball in live streaming services.

5.2.7 Fan-driven commentary and contentious practices

Tencent's commentators extend the interaction among fans beyond the game to the virtual community in ways that have caused tension among fans. T8 believed that whether the content was created by Tencent commentators or fans on social media, the examples mentioned have personal characteristics rather than professional styles. The commentators can express the attitudes that are restricted in Tencent live streaming service, and the content produced by fans is even more varied. Unfortunately, due to a lack of control, commentator preference can be used deliberately to affect fan's understanding of events. As it is such a

large community, the scale and consequence of the effects are huge:

... but there are also differences because UGC⁶ bloggers are more free and more personal ... As UGC bloggers, they have a personal preference, for example, if you like a player, you could post that's number one in the NBA, you can say that player is invincible, but as a professional commentator, that's definitely not, they can lead the public discussion in a way ... The contents produced by users flow among fans. (T8)

T7 pointed out that the accounts of UGC about the NBA on social media were generally named after a player or team name to interest specific fans of the player or team. The aggregation of fans through content production feedback Tencent NBA live streaming service.

... a lot of accounts on Douyin (author's note: an equivalent version of TikTok in China), like James' House, Harden's House ... and James Chinese Website, Harden Chinese Website, Durant Chinese Website, bloggers may post some short videos ... I would like to go through this kind of production of these contents of them, and then view some games. (T7)

T7 also pointed out that fans were using Tencent to enjoy discussions about players' historical status and who should be MVP. Furthermore, some users may guide fans' attitudes, for example, by sparking an online battle of words in the comment section, which in turn may be pushed back to the interaction session or barrage in Tencent NBA live streaming service.

The question of who the scoring is the most and MVP of this season has been discussed a lot on social media; everyone has different ideas. Tencent's live commentary may also discuss whether it is Embiid or Jokic, and they may also refer to some opinions from social media ... the fans trigger the discussion, once the

⁶ UGC: User-generated content refers to media created or produced by the general public rather than by paid professionals and primarily distributed on the Internet.

fans start to discuss this thing ... the commentators will discuss it in the live streaming service ... (T7)

T5 pointed out that NBA commentator of Tencent should not directly quote from what fans posted on social media but go through the critical points from fans' ideas before the start of a game, such as fans' attitudes toward a specific team. In this way, commentators incorporate fan commentary in their own calling of games.

As a commentator, I'm only going to refer to UGC ... A straightforward source of information is that, as I said, an elementary example is that the Lakers have played particularly poorly this season ... The other side is that many fans will summarise some data, and they summarize very well, this is to help me to understand the game ... (T5)

For the data compiled and spread by fans, T2 believed that although the data itself was not vital, it was the most direct method of understanding the performance of the players and teams. In addition, organized data allowed fans to reach a consensus on the performance of the players, and data flows in the virtual community can also be used by fans who make articles to trigger a battle of words online.

A trendy piece of local Chinese fans is some data summarized by fans, you will talk about the data of the players, discussing the performance data of the players ... The players may represent success but don't represent them as a person. Yes, it's all about the numbers, I want to prove that this guy is a special superstar ... (T2)

5.2.8 Female commentators

The internet is a much more open space than traditional media environments. The participants agreed that online media adopted specific strategies to attract users; otherwise, they may lose viewership amid the vast amount of online content. Online media may create

targeted strategies to capture users' attention, particularly visual presentation. For example, in this study, participants felt that one innovation introduced by Tencent to hook the mostly male viewers of the service was the introduction of female commentators. Male Participants in the study responded to female commentators with a mixture of desire and also a sexist view that they had less knowledge than male commentators. T14 reflected this biased view:

... most basketball viewers are male, and men tend to be attracted to beauty. This could be one of the strategies Tencent employs ... the professional knowledge of female commentators in basketball might not be very high. (T14)

T15, a female digital native, agreed with that female commentators in Tencent NBA live streaming service provided a point of difference from that of male counterpart.

... unlike male commentators always analyse basketball skills, females tend to deliver the information about back scene stories, which makes the commentary more relaxed and colourful... (T15)

T14 and T15, both digital natives, agree that female commentators in Tencent NBA live streaming service create the opportunity for users to invest more money when they consume NBA games. As these two participants responded, the common strategy of female commentators is to build a public image where they are a deep fan of a certain player or team in NBA.

I notice that the female commentators are showing that they are a fan of specific team, and the users are very clear of which team of player that the female commentators are supporting. (T15)

They create a public image where they are a fan of a player or team, and they can build a close relationship with other fans of users who are following the same players or team. In this way, it increases the opportunity to spend money in this

digital service when female commentators announce specific products. (T14)

As previously mentioned, the introduction of female commentators is understood by the digital immigrants in this study to be a commercially motivated strategy to attract male audiences. As T2 and T4 confirm, the female commentators selected are often attractive and so there is a view that this is by design, to keep fans engaged with the content and create high page views and high user traffic because.

I would definitely accept a female anchor. First of all, Tencent selects people from various factors, they have good communication skills, good appearance, and good clothing. For those who watch the games in our fast-paced life, the female commentators with good looking can make the games less boring ... (T4)

They are good looking ... even though the female commentators may probably add a public image of their own, they may demonstrate a team preference, or a tendency to support a star. (T2)

Female commentators present a more entertaining image in Tencent NBA live streaming service. This entertaining image, in turn, is used to connect with the fan community. Tencent uses young female commentators to hold the attention of viewers, particularly male viewers, when there is little action happening in the game. T2 and T4 pointed out that Tencent's female commentators had an efficient way to engage users by building a public profile as a superfan, that is, setting themselves as fans of a specific team or star. T2 also regarded this as a second level of identification and participation for NBA fans on Tencent, who followed their favorite players but also had their viewing experience enhanced by having an "attractive companion" to cheer on their favourite player or team with them.

It's just that the identification and love that the average sports fan or fan has for the player doesn't come from a second person, like Meina, not with the help of Meina ... The presence of an attractive companion with whom to watch makes the

viewing experience more enjoyable. (T2)

... it's okay in terms of understanding basketball ... If the anchor-woman is willing to take the time to understand the game ... when she prepared, passionate and has the skills to talk about the game... But if there is a woman like that, I believe that no matter what her appearance is ... she will attract people. It would appeal to everyone. (T5)

Some participants, however, felt that the female commentators did not hold the audience's attention and were not knowledgeable enough about the game. T7, studying at a university, said although there was space for female commentators in the NBA live streaming service, their appearances on the screen reduced audiences' interest.

Although there is a certain reason for their appearance (female commentators), the majority of them do not understand basketball and the NBA well, in my mind, Meina could be the best one among them... This can be seen from their commentary. They may make many weird comments that are not related to basketball, which would inevitably lead to reduced interest in the Tencent NBA live streaming service among those who are really love basketball and NBA. (T7)

There are also some differences suggested between digital native and digital immigrant generations, in terms of preference of the female commentators in the digital media, which is related to the age of participants. T3, a digital immigrant, pointed out that the attractiveness of female anchors did not matter as much to older male users and fans.

... During timeouts, halftime, when the anchor-women come out as soon as they do, I'll leave the screen or turn it off for a while and watch it when the game comes back ... I'm not interested in what they say ...Because I'm probably a simpler basketball fan, I watch the game just for the basketball itself. (T3)

Criticisms directed at female commentators were often about the commercialization of the commentary, which is used as a resource to sell merchandise to the users, rather than providing expert commentary. T2 pointed out that the NBA female commentators promoted by Tencent were chosen to generate economic outcomes. For example, in the live streaming service, users are able to flood digital gifts for the female commentators on the screen (seen in figure 5.3).



Picture 5.3 A screen shot: A female commentator of Tencent NBA live streaming service is working in the studio and receiving “virtual gifts” sent by fans.

This screenshot (Picture 5.3) displays a scene where a user floods virtual gifts for a female commentator. The female commentator was interacting with the fans, and a fan named "Brother Darui (Darui Ge, 大睿哥)" sent her nine heart-shaped diamonds in a row. Some male interview participants also viewed the practice of flooding female commentators with digital gifts as a practice that should be reciprocated, reflecting conservative, gendered attitudes. This study found that fans of Tencent's NBA live broadcast overall had a conservative and negative attitude toward the inclusion of female commentators. When it comes to flooding gifts for female commentators, all respondents believed that the commentators should reciprocate and thank them for their gift:

This is really not cost-effective ... they will not even give you feedback, it is not like Douyu or Hu Ya (the social live-streaming service) where you send virtual gifts to the commentators you support, and the anchor may say "thank you" ... (T5)

Females make up over 36% of the job market in China, but they are often discriminated against in recruitment due to a few reasons (Cooke & Zhao, 2021). Impacted by the traditional belief, Chinese society considers women's primary duty as family-oriented other than career-oriented. This value causes gender discrimination in the job market in which employers prefer hiring men and assume that women's commitments to marriage and family may affect their jobs. In addition, while the economic reform in China led to privatisation and increased market competition, women were marginalized in the workplace. The increasing number of high-paying positions favour men because of the sexist and incorrect assumption that women are less capable physically and intellectually (Stockman, 1994). However, young Chinese women are challenging gender inequality in the workplace (Bulger, 2000). The role of female commentators in Tencent NBA live streaming service is an example to show that gender (in)equality in Chinese workplace is being challenged with the entrepreneurial qualities of the female commentators who, like their male counterparts, are fans of the NBA and want to monetise their fandom through opportunities provided by Tencent.

I have a female colleague, although she did not enter the anchor industry, she has some fans in China, such as female Kobe fans, she is a Kobe fan ... and basically, she embarked on this career path completely because of Kobe, even changing jobs several times in order to get closer and closer to Kobe, and then finally achieved this life goal... (T2)

Aligning with this trajectory where female fans have moved from fans to professional commentators, some other male participants spoke of how some female commentators were coming to be viewed as superfans, who have transformed their digital skills and fandom into a professional career path. T14 pointed out that Tencent's female commentators were also

adept at expanding their influence beyond the game to the after-game content on social media. The female commentators use their platform on Tencent NBA live broadcasts to become influencers on their social media accounts, seeking financial benefits beyond the income earned from Tencent.

These female commentators should know that men dominate the fan base, and men are often attracted to, or even fascinated by, good-looking women, and then pay for this. Therefore, I found that some Tencent female commentators may manage their own image and influence in Tencent NBA live streaming services and extend this influence on their own social media accounts. Once they are getting popular, for example, as the number of followers on their account reaches a certain number, they can receive more commercial promotions and achieve profitability. However, the starting point of all this is to attract the target group in Tencent NBA live streaming services, such as the male fans I mentioned. (T14)

T15, a female user and digital native, is currently studying a broadcasting and art course in university. This course trains the presenting skills for broadcasting media. In interviews, T15 stated that she hoped to become a female commentator in the future. Like the male users in the interview, she also pointed out that the current female commentators lacked basketball knowledge, but she highlighted the attractiveness and business acumen of these female commentators.

I am studying bachelor' s degree in broadcasting and media arts at university, which is a course to train the skills of a news presenter and reporter. Meanwhile, I am practicing basketball skills and participating in basketball games to understand the essence of this sort of sport. I believe that female commentator can deliver better performance as male did in the industry.

Female users usually don' t have the urge to spend money on female commentators. This impulse mostly comes from male fans. These female

commentators from Tencent are indeed beautiful and will attract me to take a look. However, this does not prevent me from wanting to become one of Tencent' s female commentators in the future. I don' t care whether I earn men' s or women' s money. (T15)

Female commentator is not a component of CCTV NBA broadcasting but is essential part in Tencent NBA live streaming service. As the interviewees of this current research responded, female commentators appeared in Tencent NBA live streaming service and appealed to an increasing number of fans and users. This is a positive perspective of the role of female commentators in fighting gender equality in the society. The gender topic in Tencent live streaming service will be discussed further by the participants later in this chapter.

5.2.9 "Extreme content" : adult erotica product advertising

To add to this focus on Tencent' s coverage becoming about more than the game, with the addition of more entertaining, 'sexier' and younger coverage to engage viewers, users of Tencent NBA Live are also gradually accepting that advertisements for commercial products appear both in clear and invisible ways in the Tencent livestreamed coverage, and sponsors are more aligned with this youthful, playful focus. T6 noted that they were initially uncomfortable to see Jissbon, a condom brand, appear in NBA games, but Jissbon used interesting ideas in conjunction with the basketball game. Adult products were redefined as a sports protection brand in the NBA live streaming service. If audiences are exposed to it long enough, they will accept it in the end. Since Jissbon became a partner of Tencent NBA live streaming services in 2016, its appearance on the main vision in the studio has been a hot topic among fans. Regarding the issue of Jissbon, the generational conflict emerged in the interviews:

At first, I felt very inappropriate, that is, I felt very strange to have this kind of thing appearing in a live basketball game ... as a part of our Chinese NBA culture. (T6, a digital native)

The sexual health product ads are rarely seen in the mass media (e.g., television). This is not only because media regulations but also public opinions pressures. Such advertisements have been promoted mainly in stores or small-scale exhibitions rather than mainstream media (Xu et al., 2023). T2 pointed out that the combination of Tencent NBA live streaming service and Jissbon was an irony, the essence of which was an internet subculture.

I think it's funny that they do condom ads, but of course the point of this is that it's a kind of irony. (T2, a digital immigrant)

Although the societal attitudes become more open and the market for sexual health products is expanding, the legal regulations on advertising these products are getting stricter. Sexual health products need to explore alternative approaches to increase their exposure in the media. T1 cited the way Jissbon was required to disguise their message in the live streaming context, by combining the concept of sexuality with the basketball game. This expands the scale of acceptance of fans and viewers during the service, and softly implanting it into the live streaming service to make it easy for the audience to accept. One-way Jissbon has done this is by associating the best defensive play of each game with the protective power of Jissbon, and the lasting power of Jissbon will be emphasized in additional games, etc.

Sports protection brand. It was Wang Meng and Ke Fan who did an ad, Wang Meng said he couldn't hold on to it for 10 minutes overtime to do this ad ... but the digital media may be a little bit warmer tolerance on this ad. (T1, a digital immigrant)

T2 was surprised by Jissbon's appearance in Tencent NBA live streaming service and recalled that in the early years of CCTV NBA advertisements and newspaper and magazine media, CCTV' s sponsors were either national telecommunications industry leaders, products, and brands extremely relevant to the sport or brands with a good reputation among their audience. T2 stated that media exposure may reflect a healthy corporate culture of Tencent,

and sports games should positively impact sports fans. T2 pointed out that Tencent' s choice of Jissbon as a sponsor does not respect the viewing habits of older viewers.

When we started doing NBA a few years ago ... I saw ads that were not of this type of feature. When we were in the Sports Weekly, the ads were China Mobile, China Telecom, Mengniu, Yili, Nike, Adidas and so on, all at least in the domestic very famous brands. I think Jissbon appears in this scene is not inconsistent, we could say that Yili, China Telecom and so on, represents the NBA at that time ... (T2, a digital immigrant)

The use of humor is a key factor in the success of sexual health products in the Chinese market. Not only Jissbon but also its main competitor, Durex, employs similar humor on Chinese social media. This communication and marketing style is highly "localized" for the Chinese users, differing from the brands' marketing strategies in the US. This marketing strategy reflects an approach of humor that resonates more closely with Chinese culture and user expectations (Doland, 2015). From fans' perspective, T4 believed that combining Jissbon and NBA in the live streaming service was exciting and can generate topics that disseminated in cyberspace.

The brand must have some connection with the content of the media. It considers Tencent's users, many of whom are young people who are watching the NBA. (T4, a digital immigrant)

Regarding the ads for sexual health product in Tencent NBA live streaming service, a female participant responded that these ads are different from traditional values although she can understand the appearance of them in this digital service.

The ads for sex health products are not common in Chinese public media including sports broadcasting. Chinese and Eastern traditional cultures are conservative; we don' t directly discuss topics related to sex in public settings. (T11, a female digital immigrant)

However, T10 believed that this kind of combination was a conceptual shift, and this sub-culture's appearance may lower the quality of the NBA live streaming service.

Jissbon, which at first, I thought was quite a bit of bullshit, is slowly coming around.

It's on the screen every day and I'm getting used to it. (T10, a digital native)

Jissbon is an example of Tencent creating content, which could be a hot topic in the fan community regardless of the positive or negative feedback from the fans. It cannot be denied that discussing these hot topics in the fan community is an identity practice by fans.

Through a focus on digital practices, the previous sections explored how fans interacted with Tencent's livestreaming service, including interactions with commentators. Based on digital technology, Chinese NBA fans have developed a digital user identity within the content ecosystem created by Tencent NBA live streaming service. Tencent is continuing to expand the users of NBA streaming service (D. Guo, 2021), and the interconnection of the internet provides the technology to support the formation of a virtual community. However, this 'imagined community' is fragmented for various reasons, with fault lines emerging between digital natives and digital immigrants, who do not have demands to buy into digital fan practices such as barrage, and do not spend money on flooding gifts to female cheerleaders. In some cases, these generational tensions allowed users to assign fans into categories of "real fans" and "fake fans" with these identifications causing conflict and hostility in online environments and leading to a fragmentation of the virtual community of NBA fans. Further types of fans are also defined in this section and related to a broader typology of fan behaviours and practices.

5.2.10 Real-time, Live data

One aspect of Tencent's service that has prompted new fan practices and identities is the production of real-time statistics, which fosters a unique user experience for fans, such as

those who may not be able to watch live video (depending on their package) but can still access up-to-date game statistics, player scores, and other basketball skill-related data. Tencent NBA live streaming service is better than CCTV5 in the presentation of real-time statistical data. Real-time statistics are a window for fans to understand players' performance, and the current mobile phone viewing scene makes it less common for fans to watch the whole game. T4 expressed that the player data could be displayed during the live digital broadcast, resulting in more user-friendly and acceptable experience for fans.

Tencent Sports can see the data, because sometimes, for example, when you see the game, you may seem to understand the star, how today's play, you can go through Tencent ... (T4)

In terms of the quality of the presentation of real-time statistics, Tencent NBA did significantly better than CCTV5. This is because real-time statistics are a window for fans to understand players' performance. T5 said that Tencent's presentation of real-time statistics was more conducive to a better user experience, meaning fans show greater acceptance.

Now Tencent Sports does the statistics of the stars, team data, viewers can have a real-time comparison, understanding the data of players is a growth for fans from a junior fan to intermediate or more in-depth fans ... (T5)

T8, made a similar observation:

In television, you cannot check that data in time; for me, real-time data checking is an important condition to pick up digital media' s live streaming service ... but on TV, I wait for a commentator to read the numbers. (T8)

The interviews conducted in this study found that generational differences had emerged, with digital immigrants showing nostalgia for traditional television broadcasting while digital natives embrace and consume the services provided by digital media. Such generational differences affect the social identity construction of the two generations of fans in the digital

age, leading to generational conflicts and sometimes even hostility. However, Tencent NBA live streaming service has gathered a large number of Chinese NBA fans, who have formed a virtual community. The identity practices of fans in this virtual community lead to the fragmentation of the community, and this result will be presented in the following section.

5.3 The Fragmented Virtual Fan Community

5.3.1 The Virtual Community

While interactions with commentators and live data have already been discussed, another fan subcultural practice enabled by Tencent's content ecosystem is the practice of sharing game content on social media, building a virtual fan community. While in chapter four, the survey responses by younger users indicated that this was of low importance to them, in the interviews social media engagement was much more integral to the digital native fan identity.

While consuming Tencent's NBA live streaming service, users and fans often screen recordings or take screenshots and post them on their social media accounts. Traditional TV fails to provide the possibilities of recording and taking screenshots. The recording and screenshot functions of digital media help fans to achieve the goal of sharing the images on the social media to their own networks, thus engaging with fan communities outside of the parameters of the game itself, T6, a digital native reported:

Recently, I have been recording some highlights to post to the WeChat groups I've created. For example, that Durant's dunk, this could make my friends know I am a Durant's fan ... I would not post videos of players I don't like ... even if it's cool. (T6)

The value of sharing screen recordings and screenshots for fans is not only for storing these images in Tencent's mobile's library for their own viewing, but they also share this content to express their identity to the virtual fan community. When posting the recordings and screenshots to social media, such as WeChat, fans also post texts they write, which can be as

long or as short as they like. There is no specific number of comments required from their friends, but they simply try to increase the exposure of videos on their own social media that they think are worth sharing, such as game highlights. T6 also reported:

There is an example in my WeChat, the moment that the Warriors won the championship this year, this guy immediately posted a picture of Curry holding up the trophy of the Final to tell his friends ... (T6)

In some cases, NBA fans chat in online forums for social reasons, rather than appreciation of the game. Some fans form fan groups on WeChat, which can be made up of either their existing friends or new friends they have met through consuming Tencent NBA live streaming service. T6 noted that the WeChat group was usually in a casual style, but when there was a hot topic about NBA, the WeChat group would have more interactions and discussions. When there are no basketball or NBA-related topics, WeChat group members will also discuss other topics. Discussions in the WeChat group is not intended for serious debate but is an online space for group members to keep on interacting after watching the game, with the aim of freedom and entertainment for the WeChat group member. Basketball and the NBA are just part of the life of fans. As T6 shared:

In the WeChat group I created, members always talk about NBA and other things in our spare time ... We catchup with friends based on NBA, with discussing NBA topics and our favourite players and teams in the group, we also talk about our lives ... (T6)

The decision about whether to join the NBA online fan forum while live streaming NBA games depends on social circumstances. WeChat groups are a way for fans to establish virtual social connections (Zhang et al., 2017). Generally, users who join these types of virtual communities can be divided into three categories: consistently join an NBA online fan organization, once joined in the past but quit now, and never joined.

T2, a digital immigrant, felt that the purpose of joining NBA online fan groups, such as WeChat groups, was to get the trending topics of fans' discussions and understand what fans are talking about. This has created whole communities who follow a person's writing and views on NBA, rather than being fan groups of a particular player.

I was added to a fan WeChat group, and the fans' online interaction [is to] find out what the fans want and what they are discussing ... people who are good at writing articles about NBA-related content will organize some WeChat groups of people who follow them and talk about the player after they have more followers on social media ... (T2)

T6 and T7, on the other hand, joined the WeChat group of fans of a particular star in order to actively participate and be a part of the community in discussions within the group. They think this kind of WeChat group for NBA fans is loosely organized, but members in the group will feel intimacy during the chat process. Ultimately, it seems that most people who join this WeChat group share a common interest.

I have joined groups with Warriors fans ... there's a wide range of topics ... the group is very general and not too connected. We just feel that we have a common topic in the group: the Warriors. (T6)

I have joined a few Harden fan groups before. We all discuss the game together in the group ... WeChat group is a gathering point for fans. What impressed me was that for some of the key games in the playoffs, the group would organize offline game watching ... Then the leader would negotiate the venue and so on. (T7)

This section has described the different topics and the level of organization of virtual fan communities, with some having a founder or admin who fans follow because they write about the NBA well or are knowledgeable. Other communities are more loosely organized and

leaderless, with topics emerging more or less organically and also being interwoven with social, non-NBA related topics. In the next section we explore the reasons why fans might not engage with the virtual community of fans.

5.3.2 “Coupling” and the spread of fanfiction among Chinese NBA fans

“Coupling” is a type of fandom that initially emerged in Japan (Mao, 2020). In the Japanese animation fan culture, fans create couples without being influenced by commercial factors, and fans are free to create couples, if they desire that two characters should be a pair. Thus, “Coupling” is offering fans the freedom to create in such a way that it may differ from the couples designed by the scriptwriter of the original version. This practice of fan identity is highlighted by the creation of specific combinations and nicknames for these pairs of players, blending elements from their native US context with interpretations of local Chinese fans.

T6 cited the names of player combinations that often appeared in Tencent's NBA live streaming service. Despite though the all-male NBA environment, the practice of coupling breaks gender boundaries, with fans engaging in the creation of pairings that they follow based on such associations as teamwork, on-court chemistry, or shared attributes.

Chinese fans prefer to Coupling ... Especially after 2014 or 2015, NBA player couples are becoming more and more common. (T6)

In the context of the NBA, where all players are male, it becomes inevitable to couple male players. However, fans still practice the coupling activity, regardless of gender. Couples can be understood as brothers in this context. For example, the *Splash Brothers* (水花兄弟, *shuihua xiongdi*), a Chinese fan group of players, refers to, three players who shoot three points very accurately, and their three-point shots are very smooth when they go to the basket, like a stone into the water without waves.

The Splash Brothers - Curry, Thomson, the OK duo - O'Neal and Kobe. I've read

an analysis that says that players' nicknames now are not as good as they used to be because of the media ... but now the fans create the Chinese nicknames. (T6)

West and Zimmerman (1987) suggested that people tend to be consistent with social expectations of gendered behaviour in their “performance” of gender. When Chinese fans pair NBA players, they are imagining a relationship that transcends traditional gender roles. As participants responded, this relationship is fictional, but it reflects fans' idealized vision of the players' relationship. This practice displays the fans' active role in interpreting sports narratives. It demonstrates the diverse and inclusive nature of fan identity within the global NBA fan community in the online environment.

5.3.3 Barrage, "Anti-fans" and "Internet Trolls"

Despite the previous sections showing that the virtual community extends beyond the boundaries of Tencent' s NBA service, Tencent live stream service also provides fans with tools to interact with the game and other viewers in real time.

The barrage is a technology for users and fans to advocate for a player and oppose or troll other players. Some fans demonstrate their high level of support for a player by flooding the screen with supportive messages. T4 pointed out that the emergence of the barrage had improved the public space for users and fans to express their emotions in real time during an NBA game. However, "Anti-fans" and "internet trolls" have also emerged.



Picture 5.4 A moment of Tencent NBA live streaming service that shows the barrage on the screen.

Everyone has their right to post comments on the barrage, because digital media technology has offered this function ... for example, a Clippers fan, but today is the Lakers game, Clippers fans post it, many of them are anti-fans ... they are Internet trolls. (T4)

In summary, while barrage can involve flooding comments on top of the game in support of a player, it can also be used to share harsh words and criticism. Some digital immigrants regarded the barrage as a distraction that younger users participated in to feel a sense of shared identity and emotion with other fans, which was less appealing for older users who just wanted to watch the game. Some participants in the interviews argued that there existed two types of negative barrage.

Firstly, T2 pointed out that naysayers tend to argue for the sake of arguing.

I would turn off the barrage. I think the barrage interfere with me watching the

game ... This is probably with the age issue, maybe there are younger people who like it ... I understand that ... they can get a sense of identity and feel like a lot of people are in the same team. The people who post on barrage are predominantly male, and I personally feel that their wording is very masculine. (T2)

Secondly, T3 pointed out that some users upvote for one player and downvote for another on the barrage. For example, when a match between Lakers and Warriors, the fans who oppose James LeBron would use a word of shit to describe the leading star in Lakers.

... They're spreading some very childish comments in the barrage. One kind of text abuse, for example, extreme praise for the player they support and extreme abuse for the player they don't like. (T3)

T11 pointed out that there were two groups of users of Tencent's NBA live streaming, one of them may highly praise their favorite players regardless of their performance; the other group may be rational according to the performance of their favorite teams and players. T11 believed there was a chain of contempt between the two groups: the latter consider themselves more professional than the former.

A lot of fans only like one player, they don't like other players ... they support the player unconditionally, I think for me that's a pseudo-fan. Moreover, they like to troll and slander other players' fans ... I look down on them. (T11)

T6 also pointed out that users could post this kind of barrage anonymously:

I don't usually turn on the barrage ... because I feel like a lot of AI (Artificial intelligence) are posting them ... I'm sure some of the contents on barrage are organized, some of the content isn't genuine, it's organized, and I don't find it interesting ... (T6)

T7 agrees with T6, and believes that bots maybe in utilization for the post text on the barrage:

I think there must be a lot of AI (artificial intelligence), that post the texts that seems like bulletin on the screen ... when the anchor-woman sells merchandises ... the barrage is flooding. (T7)

Some fans use more exaggerated words to catch the attention of commentators and other fans to validate their existence in the virtual community.

They need the female commentators to read what they've posted, and they get a sense of accomplishment. (T4)

T5 pointed out that to improve the users' experience of Tencent NBA live streaming service, the contents on the barrage should be filtered. This is because abusive comments often enter a person' s view and provide unwanted distraction.

Tencent needs a person to filter the post on the barrage ... the content is boring and detracts from the viewing. (T5)

This is reflective of some of the differences between digital fan subcultural practices in the virtual community, and the emergence of tensions between digital natives and digital immigrants specifically. For digital natives, fandom is about more than the game, with an array of ways of engaging with NBA content being enjoyed by the Tencent generation and criticized by digital immigrants. These ways of being a fan alter the more or less unified fan identity of the TV watching generation, or digital immigrants.

5.3.4 Types of identity in the Chinese NBA fan community

The study displayed that live streaming services were perceived by participants as having a greater ability to attract new subscribers, from content creation to interface design. However,

individuals loyal to traditional television broadcasting (digital immigrants) exhibited hesitation in joining fan groups established by digital native fans on digital media platforms. This is due to the fact that digital media offers a much broader range of information compared to traditional television media, as content on traditional television is broadcast linearly and is presented through the selection of the broadcast platform. This carries with it the media's content production requirements and values which fans believe to be the essence of live NBA broadcasts that have developed over the years. However, this is not emphasized as much in the content of live streaming services, which is much more based on a tiered subscription model that separates the type of content communities can access according to their willingness to pay, creating identities based on individual consumption rather than the social identities promoted through the CCTV broadcast.

The debate between 'true fans' and 'fake fans' is an important topic in the NBA virtual community in China which speaks to tensions not only between digital immigrants and digital natives, but also between different fan subcultures, and which are accompanied by claims that some fans aren't authentic. For example, T7 pointed out that there was a common sense among "true fans" that fans could not be "true fans" without viewing and reflecting on the NBA games they watch with other fans.

Some friends around me, claim to be true fans, but they haven't watched many games in a season. They only care about statistical data and use it for discussion.

I think these are fake fans, and I look down on this type of fan. (T7)

The psychological interactions between an individual fan and a sport or team is driven by complexity and the strength of sport-related mental connections, and there are four steps for fans to create the links with sports teams, they are, awareness, attraction, attachment and allegiance (Funk & James, 2001). The participants of this study suggested that the identity of a "true fan" was a process of an individual's growth. Due to the increased consumption of content about basketball and the NBA, the fans' understandings of the NBA expand. When fans considered themselves to be "true fans", they tended to see those who understood the

NBA less deeply than they did as "fake fans". This created a divide between the "true fans" and "fake fans". In addition, the "real fans" tended to use this status to feel a sense of superiority over so-called "fake fans". At the same time, fans often attempted to be "real fans" because of the satisfaction and sense of superiority and confidence they felt inside, and it was this that led them to consume more NBA content. This can lead to conflict or even refusing to participate in the virtual community.

T2, born in the 80s, pointed out that the live broadcasting of CCTV5 had the style of a national TV station. For fans who have been watching NBA for several years, CCTV5 may be attractive. When they switch to Tencent Sports, they would feel that the soul of watching NBA live broadcasting is lost because the digital live streaming service is a commercial service. Tencent may try to attract new fans who are not necessarily fans because of the game itself but owing to consumer practices "outside" the game. For T2, the presentation of Tencent NBA live streaming service was more appealing to new fans and particularly to younger fans, who T2 felt follow because it is "trendy" to do so.

The biggest difference is probably because the two platforms face different users, resulting in a different level of youthfulness. Tencent live streaming service will target more young users; it will try to add elements outside the game that can attract a younger audience to come in ... Tencent is to shape a young, trendy atmosphere strongly, and that CCTV or that traditional TV station is different ... (T2)

Moreover, Chinese NBA fans face several challenges as they grow older. With the pressure of work, family, and other responsibilities, they find it difficult to maintain their enthusiasm for the NBA as they did during their student years. As they age, respondents reported a decrease in their willingness to accept new trends, which may hinder their adoption of live streaming services and prevent them from joining virtual fan communities created by digital media platforms.

T2 also explained the growth of their classmates and friends of the same age. As a result, this

group of fans who grew up with CCTV5 NBA live broadcasting will not choose Tencent to watch the game in the current Tencent NBA period.

... my classmates in junior or senior school, a situation arises ... they are far more dissatisfied with the current NBA than I am ... the Tencent NBA live streaming when he has some not quite adapt, said this get fancy, what is not quite understandable. They will say ... the so-called soul of the NBA is gone. (T2)

The description of “soul” that T2 articulated is one that separates “real fans” as those digital immigrants who fell in love with the game during an era where its presentation was more to do with a broadcast that delivered the game, and no frills on top. This led fans to follow and appreciate the skills of elite players. T2 is critical of the commercial drivers of Tencent to attract new users and fans with features that have little to do with the game. In the next section, it will suggest a typology of fan practices as defined by digital immigrants and digital natives, which highlights the generational tendencies in the fan community.

5.3.4.1 Data fans

According to digital immigrant participants in the study, an increasing number of Tencent NBA live streaming service users tend not to understand basketball and NBA but only pay attention to the surface of the game, for example, talking about the players' statistics. In their mind, an excellent NBA game is only covered by a series of numbers. However, it is not just digital immigrants who separate out “real” and “fake” fans, with some digital natives also investing in this discourse. T3, a digital native, referred to some of these “fake” fans as data fans (as described in section 1.2). T3 elaborated this as a “superficial” fan practice only concerned with the data themselves rather than the game and players.

Now there's a kind of data fan. They don't know anything about basketball ... they just think the NBA is a fashionable representation. So, what they like is probably just some stats, very superficial. (T3)

T5, a digital native, also added that the emergence and practice of "data fans" were related to how Tencent provided players' data during the games. Some commentators also rely too much on real-time statistical data, resulting in fans consuming the game's surface other than exploring the depth of the competition. In this sense the datafication of the game is felt to be killing off real fandom.

Ideally, the stats only assist you in filling in the commentary of the game ... Including the stats are also a tool and a means to assist you in understanding the player, not particularly It's not an over-understanding that if you read a bunch of data ... (T5)

In the minds of so-called "real fans" of both generations, engaging in verbal battles is also regarded as an irrational form of "fake-fan" behaviour. The "real fans" tend to despise the online verbal battles engaged in by the "fakes fans" for this reason. T7 pointed out that the online verbal battle was mainly based on fans comparing the statistics of players or teams, and T6 further pointed out that the statistics of players were one-sided and the real-time statistics could only show a moment in time, thus it was little sense to use them to cause verbal battle and, apart from entertaining yourself, verbal wars were a waste of time and boring.

They are the kind of fans I despise, the kind of fans, even though I tell them to pay more attention to the players ... rather than a bunch of numbers, they just focus on a few technical statistics. (T7)

Sports is a dynamic process and "true fans", like T7, believed that they should feel and enjoy the changes on the court, rather than just using technical statistics to get a general idea of how a player or team is performing. "True fans" believe that technical statistics are a type of fan practice that lacks emotion. For example, in years to come, true fans may find it boring to recall a classic game they have seen if they just mention a bunch of technical statistics.

In fact, I don't think stats illustrate every player's capability, ... Shouldn't it be about recalling what happened on court in a classic game, or even the dressing room story. (T6)

5.3.4.2 Anti-fans

Many of the interview responses divided fans out into “real fans” who became emotionally involved in the game and developed knowledge of the game, and “fake fans” as those who centred their fandom around “add-on” content from Tencent, such as live data—a response that in some cases was framed by generational conflict, and in others, was framed by different understandings of ideal fans, anti-fan is a fandom phenomenon distinct from the traditional fans practices, and which is negative in orientation. Anti-fans are called “Hei fen (黑粉)” because the character of “Hei (黑)” refers to smear somebody in Chinese. In recent years, entertainment talent shows have nurtured an increasing number of anti-fans in China (Chen, 2022; Kou, 2021). The basic behaviour of anti-fans is to smear certain contestants attending talent shows, or sporting games. In relation to talent shows, anti-fans often deliberately smear a particular contestant or even makeup stories to discredit other idols. The conflict between fans created by anti-fans is enhanced by features of Tencent's live stream, such as the barrage, and fans will escalate the online verbal battles to defend their favourite contestants. This behaviour would to some extent increase exposure and popularity for their favourite idol. The phenomenon of anti-fans has also spread to the NBA community in China. For example, fans of different players in the same position on the court often smear against each other. In addition, fans of players involved in the MVP competition also smear each other. T7 described this practice:

Every player has his fans and there will be anti-fans. When some anti-fans post something towards my favourite player and team on the barrage, I would like to strike back at them and try to defend the image of my favourite player and team. (T7)

T16, a digital native, has encountered anti-fans, especially in barrages. Fans of other players often use texts to deliberately insult the players T16 followed:

At this time, I will also respond on the barrage. I cannot let the players I follow be deliberately insulted. I know that this will often trigger verbal conflicts among fans, and such a response will make me feel more present among the fans. (T16)

These fans' practices in the community caused by verbal conflicts, further leads to the fragmentation of the community.

5.3.4.3 Extreme Fans

While anti-fans were criticized by so-called "real fans" of both generations: digital immigrants and digital natives, the category of "extreme fans" only emerged among digital natives. T7 considered themselves to be extreme fans. The reason is that they maintained their enthusiasm for the NBA and cheered for a specific player or team from the beginning to the end. They also spent a great deal of time and money supporting the players and team and felt lost when they missed any game of the players and teams they follow. For extreme fans, the driving force behind their strong willingness to pay is the desire not to miss any games featuring the players and teams they identify with. They possess an intense eagerness to learn as much as possible about the teams and players they support through this service, which in turn solidifies their psychological connection with teams and players during the consumption of the service.

My criterion for an extreme fan is, first of all, to know all the players in the NBA ... in my sophomore year, I viewed all the Rockets' games in an entire season, including when I was in class, and sometimes I even watched them with my teacher, who is also a Rockets fan. (T7)

T9 also considered him an extreme fan and give a particular experience in the Covid-19 pandemic to support his opinion:

Because of the impact of the Covid-19, there were no NBA games to watch. I found it quite difficult to adapt. When the NBA resumed, I was so happy that I didn't care about anything, even though I was busy on my thesis ... (T9)

One digital immigrant, T10 also felt that he used to be an extreme fan, as he was compelled to and watch all the games of the player he supports. However, once changes happened to the team and players, such as his favorite player retiring, his enthusiasm for streaming the game live drastically reduced. Although T10 still purchased the Super Membership, whose benefits allowed him to access all the games of a season, whether to view or not, or pick up which games to view became more random for him. Interestingly, he reflected on how this made him feel like his youth was “lost” , and becoming a more moderate fan led him to feel like he was joining the other digital immigrants.

For me, it used to be extreme, and after Kobe retired, it was getting moderate ... I still purchase a super membership of Tencent Sports every year, but the games I selected to view are more random. (T10)

The category of extreme fan emerges from Tencent' s price structure, an issue that has caused tension between fans and members of Tencent, with the adjustment of membership fees being challenged by some users. Membership fee changes were not friendly to the fans following a team or player only. Users are eager to show their support for their favorite teams and players, so they are willing to purchase team-specific membership services, even if it means sacrificing the freedom to choose which games to watch. Therefore, Tencent's updated payment method, which allows users to select any teams to watch during the month, adds an unnecessary burden to fans. As a result, fans' identification remains with their favorite team, rather than the NBA as a whole. T7 pointed out that the current pricing structure was a defect of Tencent's live broadcast of NBA.

I prefer the former pricing strategy a normal Tencent Sport member can access all matched of a team rather than current one that eight tickets per month to view games. (T7)

T11 agreed with T7 and went further to suggest that current pricing of Tencent NBA live streaming service wasted his time:

The current pricing strategy is stupid, If I am a normal Tencent Sport member, I need to spend a few times in planning which eight games to stream in each month. That is a waste. (T11)

The super members of the two payment methods before and after can watch all the NBA live broadcasts. For users, the corresponding user rights and interests have not changed, but because of the price increase, users cannot accept it, and they will look for other alternatives to watch.

For ordinary members of the two pricing, because the corresponding rights are greatly different, different users have different psychological expectations. The early method of buying a team package is suitable for users who deeply support a certain player or team, and there is not much choice in the number of games to watch. Users can watch all the games of a certain team, and flexibly select the number of games to watch the live broadcast according to the overall schedule of the month.

T9 pointed out that between ordinary VIP members and super VIP members, super members will be selected, because compared with the two, if user buys a super member for one year, it is not too expensive to pay more than ordinary members, and user does not need to spend it on calculating which games to watch.

I always by the super VIP member, because the price is not too much more

expensive than normal VIP member, so I can afford it. (T9)

The change of membership fees is a method to test fans' identification level, dividing fans out into extreme fan, moderate fan, and those whose participation is more sporadic, not because of their desire to watch games, but because of the desire to watch the games of the teams or players that they support.

5.3.5 Quitting or refusing to join the virtual community

T1 and T10 said that they once joined an NBA-related WeChat group because of interest in a player but later quit for reasons to do with time management. For example, they developed a view that group chats were a waste of time, and that participation in them decreased with age and maturity. The latter view appears to be shaped by their social position as digital immigrants, which allows them to distance themselves from the more "irrational" fan practices of digital natives:

I have joined WeChat groups, but after I followed them once or twice, I found them all irrational and without any point of depth, which I found to be a waste of time. (T1)

I used to have a Kobe fan WeChat group, but now I don't participate. I think being older as well, I just don't have that same enthusiasm that I had back then. (T10)

T3 and T9 pointed out that they never joined NBA-related WeChat groups because of time limitations, a sense that the chatter was meaningless and their preference for offline discussion. These preferences were claimed by T3 to be associated with age and generational differences with him feeling less "carefree" to engage in meaningless fan talk as younger users, while T9, though a digital native, also found that work commitments meant that he had less time to engage in these time-consuming aspects of fandom, even though he would like to.

... it's quite meaningful to discuss with friends around you. What is there to discuss with some people you don't know. I think ... it is possible to have a discussion on the surface. I try to go online and find some like-minded friends on a large scale, like QQ friends, but it's hard to talk to them ... At our age, nearly 40, we have so many things to worry about in our lives, and we have to spend time doing them ... (T3)

I'm on a tight schedule at work and don't have time to follow the group chat, so I never joined ... but rather I'd like to find someone who is like-minded with me. (T9)

While some participants did participate in the virtual community, they also acknowledged that the hostility of some fan communities was a turn off. Fans of different players and teams tend to battle verbally on the internet to defend their favourite teams and players. T14, a digital native, pointed out that the current online environment in China had been made worse by the verbal battle between NBA fans, and that some of the verbal battles were of extremely poor quality. These battles caused conflicts which could have a negative impact on the fan's identification. In extreme cases, some fans have said they have dropped their identification with players and teams to avoid digital hostility. T14 described these tensions:

... internet environment in China is quite bad now. For example, I've been a fan of Kobe and James since the very beginning of my interest in the NBA. In various online forums, Kobe and James fans are often in a hostile state, the verbal battles often happen between each other. (T14)

Some specific tensions emerged in relation to previously discussed fan practices, which the digital immigrant generation felt was destroying the soul of the game and the true fan identity. This will be discussed next.

5.4 Be Chinese People First, then Basketball Fans

NBA sets a window for Chinese fans to connect with the world. In recent years, more Chinese elements have appeared in various forms in the NBA games (Xu, 2022) for example, an NBA game adopted the atmosphere of festival for Chinese new year with Chinese music and dance. Despite this blending of American and Chinese culture in the NBA, however, cultures and national interests inevitably clash. Chinese fans have gradually grown more aware and tolerant of cultural difference by consuming an imported cultural product. Shortly after the start of this study, however, the Morey incident occurred. For many of the study's participants, this incident did not heavily impact their participation as fans of the NBA, and they felt this crisis could be resolved diplomatically, so they continued live streaming NBA games. However, interestingly, the patriotism of some Chinese fans and their love of the game allowed for a unification of fans who previously felt divided according to generational difference and differences in styles of fandom. The Morey incident instead stirred nationalistic sentiments of fans meaning that they often lost the attributes of a fan for a specific player or team, and instead came together as one, becoming patriotic Chinese NBA fans calling for respect for cultural and political difference, and condemning the NBA for its criticism of China's foreign policy, for example, in Hong Kong.

The current study revealed that NBA offered an opportunity to reflect on and consolidate national identity despite following different sport teams and despite the generational fragmentation previously described. T4 and T9, both digital immigrants, pointed out that NBA should have a sense of balance when it spreads across countries and cultural boundaries to China, and stressed that respect for China and Chinese fans was crucial, especially in light of the controversy sparked by the Daryl Morey incident:

At first place, it can't insult China, because everyone still has this patriotic sentiment, and then, whether it can have a positive energy expression, including its management from the team ... because Yao Ming also retired ... Chinese fans are difficult to accept and identify, we are Chinese. (T4)

...I was furious to the point... If it was another team, one that didn't know China, and he said that, I might think you're an American, we're different, you don't know China ... but to say something like that as the Rockets' GM hurts us Chinese fans who have loved the Rockets for over ten years. (T9)

T15 offered a perspective of female digital natives to understand the positions of Chinese NBA fans about national identity.

I feel that no matter how much I love the NBA or how much I love the players, we cannot harm our nation. As fans, they must first and foremost respect my country; I believe this is above all else. If they hurt my country or our nation, I will no longer support them. This is about valuing our nation, and it is important. Especially now, if they do anything to harm our nation, we may no longer be able to watch NBA games. From a fan's perspective, we hope they understand that, at certain times, we will be very united in resisting some of their actions. (T15)

Due to China's state-supported sports, success of Chinese athletes in international competitions promoted national pride and collective identity. However, the commercial sport under global impacts, for example, NBA, created complexity to how fans perceived national identity. In addition, a few Chinese athletes' stories, such as Li Na and Gu Ailing (Eileen Gu) blended Chinese identity and western commercial impact to evolve the Chinese people's understanding national identity. The participants took a perspective of transnational identities to reflect the fan identity of Chinese NBA fans. T1, born in 1980s, pointed out that through the cross-border communication of sports tournaments, each party involved should seek common ground while reserving comment on political differences, and sport is a bridge to close the gap between different cultures and political backgrounds.

Sports have no borders, but sportsmen have national awareness. Some athletes make statements about politics and religion, which I would ignore, but information flows, especially on the internet, and these borders break down and I inevitably

hear these expressions. (T1)

T2, working in Beijing, believed that contemporary Chinese fans had experienced the changes of the times. Compared with fans in the 1980s, they have shown openness and tolerance in recent years. They no longer need to use sports performance to validate their existence. Therefore, it is an excellent time to return sports to the competition itself in China.

There must be no possibility for American basketball, the NBA, to bridge the differences between the two countries. First, basketball can't reach the same height as table tennis. Basketball in China is not the national ball ... Moreover, I don't think the sport needs to go on this mission anymore ... Let's return the purest form of competition to the sport. (T2)

T10, a self-employed participant, believed that sporting events did not need to be elevated to the level of politics but rather had the potential to reach a broader audience in the international community.

I don't think NBA should put on a lot of things unrelated, we all say sports without borders, for the NBA, we are entertaining the game, not consuming the political struggle from other countries ... in fact, watching basketball is just a kind of entertainment activities for us. (T10)

T8 pointed out that contemporary Chinese fans had more access to high-level overseas sports events than ever before, and they were correspondingly more cultured and able to understand the differentiated aspirations of those sports leagues from overseas and were therefore able to remain relatively rational when consuming imported sports events, T8, a digital native who are studying in a university said:

For me, the NBA is a business, and players and teams have their own business interests, this I can totally understand, but I don't support them to gain attention

to earning business by hurting another country ... but if you like Chinese fans, we welcome it. But please remember, we are Chinese fans. (T8)

Chinese NBA fans experience national identity through their engagement with NBA games. Participants in this study expressed expectations that their sense of national identity would be reflected within the intersection of Chinese cultural values and Western commercial influences. Their understanding of national pride on the global stage is not static but continues to evolve. A crucial factor in shaping these sentiments is the broader geopolitical context, particularly the diplomatic tensions between China and the United States. These tensions are heightened when the NBA becomes entangled in China's foreign policy and domestic affairs, as seen in the Daryl Morey incident. Morey's tweet in support of the Hong Kong protests in 2019 triggered widespread backlash among Chinese fans, leading to a surge of nationalist sentiment. The controversy was perceived as an instance of foreign interference in China's sovereignty and reinforced a collective sense of unity among previously fragmented NBA fan communities. This event catalysed a moment of national solidarity. It demonstrated how political disputes can activate and strengthen national identity within the context of sports fandom.

5.5 Summary of This Chapter

The findings of semi-structured interviews unpacked the social identity formation through digital practices for both digital immigrants and digital natives. It highlighted how these two generations built social identity by accessing Tencent NBA live streaming service. The current study examined digital natives, who were born in the time of rapid development of technology and the globalised impacts, to engage with the digital platform for sports products. It caused the formation of a dynamic community online. Digital immigrants displayed nostalgia for traditional sports viewership and tribal identification of the games. However, digital natives highlighted an active consumer identification when they accessed Tencent NBA live streaming service.

Driven by different media consumption preferences, fan practices and perceptions of fan identity, fragmentation of the virtual community emerged along the generational gap. The fragmentation led to conflicts in the subcultures in the fan community, for example, the battle between “true fans” versus “fake fans” depends on the levels of fan engagement.

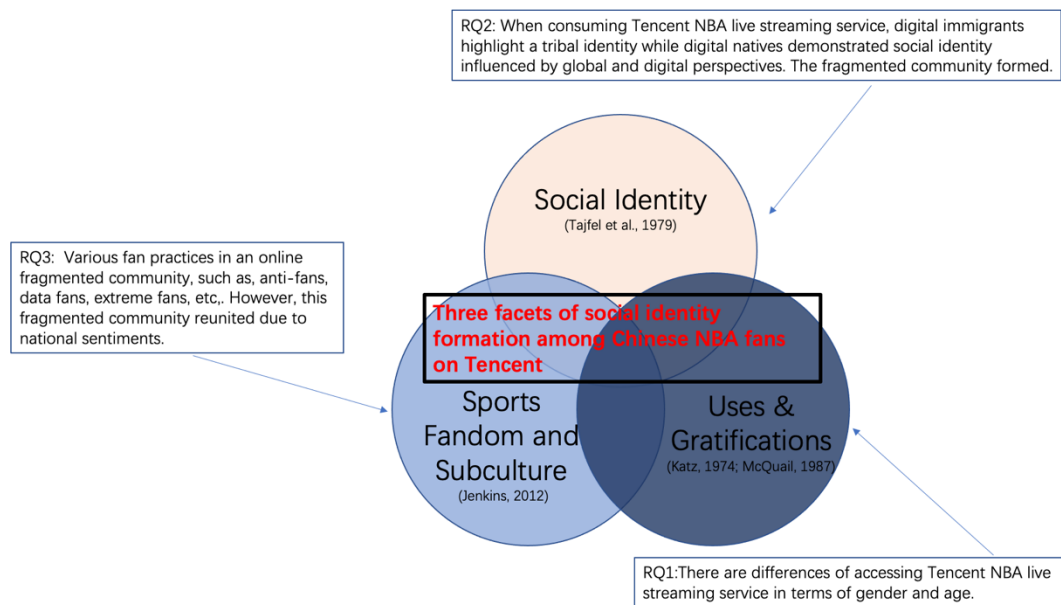
Although there were differences and conflicts, a reunified power emerged based on national identity, for instance, political tensions between China and the US. As conveyed in the incident of Daryl Morey’ s post on Twitter, caused national sentiments to realign some of the Chinese NBA fans. This study demonstrated sports fandom can make up the digital divide and generational gaps to unite fans in advocating their national identity. The digital era had diverse fan experiences and identities, but the national sentiments could be effective emotional connectors.

CHAPTER 6 DISCUSSION

This study unpacks Chinese NBA fan' s behaviour intentions when streaming basketball on the Tencent NBA live streaming service, and how fan identity is socially constructed by i) online viewing formats, ii) engagement with digital practices specific to Tencent' s live streaming platform, iii) fragmentation in the virtual community and iv) reunification of the fan community through renewal of nationalistic feelings. The discussion centers on generational differences between early adopters of Tencent' s digital service (digital natives) and those who grew up consuming NBA on traditional TV broadcasting (digital immigrants). The study also analyses differences in consumer practices, social identity construction and fandom according to gender.

The conceptual framework used in the study introduces three theories, which are integrated to address the study's aims. These were the Uses and Gratifications theory (U&G), the Social Identity theory (SIT), and existing studies of subcultural practices in the Chinese Tencent NBA fan community. The evolved framework (See Figure 6.1, below) offers detailed and empirical insights of how theoretical concepts manifested in a real-world fan practice of Tencent NBA live streaming service.

Figure 6.1 An evolved conceptual framework of this current study



The discussion chapter focuses on the differences that emerged between digital immigrants and digital natives, given that generational differences were a major finding that emerged across the quantitative and qualitative analysis. Based on U&G and SIT, the chapter examines participants' use of this service and how different uses and practices depend on age differences. Based on existing studies on subcultures, the chapter also discusses how the online community became fragmented owing to conflict emerging between the generations of fans, and between different fan practices and subcultures, with considerations of gender also becoming salient in these conflicts. Finally, the discussion displays why a fragmented community becomes reunited through US-China diplomatic rifts that reinforced a sense of national identity vis a vis foreign interference from another nation state (the US and NBA as its proxy), with this them/us relation having greater significance than those in the fan community.

6.1 Consuming Sport

The first aim of the current study is to address the users' behaviour intentions to adopt Tencent's live streaming service in order to access NBA games in China.

This study found that the most desirable content on Tencent NBA live streaming service is game information, such as game highlights and team rankings, rather than user-generated content with social functions. Social media has become a preferred platform for accessing NBA-related content, surpassing traditional media in popularity for this type of content consumption. This finding is consistent with the existing studies (Li et al., 2019), which suggests that users select media based on psychological needs such as information acquisition, entertainment, and social needs. As (Zhao, 2017) noted, the content diversification of live streaming services in China allows digital media to capture a substantial market segment and shift users from traditional media, this is because media consumers are seeking content that satisfies their specific demands based on the interactivity of digital media. For example, Tencent's NBA live streaming service has exclusive digital rights in China and provides live images of all games and related information, with social functions a secondary option, notwithstanding some differences across generations. In the comparison of social media and traditional media, the dominance of digital media reflects the high demand for interactivity among Chinese fans in the digital age, particularly digital natives, and they are increasingly involved in the content production process. The diversity of content provided by digital media enables users to choose content based on their personal needs instead of passively accepting content as in the traditional media era. This study expands the understanding of media consumption tendencies from the perspective of psychological and social needs to content preference.

The findings of this current study indicated that male users are more likely to depend on Tencent NBA live streaming service in terms of duration of use. This result is supported by a previous study (Negroponte, 2000) that the internet and digital media have broken down spatial boundaries. The Internet allows people to have the same access to consume specific media content. However, even though users can access the same digital media content on Tencent, the users from Tier 1 cities (see the three categories of cities in China in Chapter One) spent more money purchasing this service, indicating that differences in income level also influenced user behaviours. This outcome is not reflected in the previous study (Clavio, 2008; Li et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2022; Wann et al., 2013). Hence, this current study extends the

understanding of Chinese digital media users, particularly regarding differences in willingness to pay for sports live streaming services.

This study found that among the five constructs of behaviour intentions that impact the adoption of Tencent NBA live streaming, convenience has the highest impact on both generations of NBA fans in China, while viewing cost has the lowest. Comparing the two generations of fans, younger users' responses to these variables are generally lower than those of older users (except viewing quality). This result partly agrees with a study by (Hino, 2015) in which age does influence how social norms and convenience affect users' intentions, but it does not significantly alter the impact of perceived enjoyment on their intentions. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, the NBA has been expanding its market in China over the last four decades. During this period, the Internet and mobile technology developed rapidly, and media consumption patterns have changed significantly; for example, the channels for users to obtain content have become more diversified and convenient, with users from low- and high-income categories having differing options to use the service. Sports live streaming, like Tencent, provides fans with a flexible and multi-service user experience.

Although viewing quality in the research model had no significant impact on accepting Tencent NBA live streaming service, the interview findings offered further interpretation. This could be because the users have alternatives to solve the viewing quality issue. Most of the Tencent NBA live streaming service users accessed the game on their mobile phones. The reality is that the mobile phone screen is much smaller than the TV screen in the living room, hence, users can understand that the viewing quality of the cell phone screen is flawed and could be influenced by certain factors such as unstable mobile Internet access during their commute. In the qualitative interview section of this study, interviewees (T10 and T4) reported that if they needed a larger screen to view NBA games live, they had an alternative: to connect their mobile phone to a digital TV in the living room. The problem of viewing quality could be solved. This finding indicated that fan preferences for viewing the game in higher definition led some fans to use screen casting technologies so they could watch in their living rooms and with family members and friends.

In terms of social benefits, the survey found that older users scored higher than the younger. This outcome agrees with the existing study about sports fans (Wann & James, 2019) in which emotions emerged in viewing sports games and older audiences usually have a long time of watching sports on TV and relating to a team or player. According to Prensky (2005), older users always consider online activities as an extension of social interaction in real life. This finding is supported by the interview of this current study. The older users (T4) grew up with the NBA on the TV screen and in everyday life at schools, where it connected them socially with family and friends. In contrast, the younger users (T14 and T7) are more individualistic media consumers and see sport less as a social connector.

In the following subsection, how generational differences shaped social identity will be further discussed.

6.2 Social Identity Formation of Two Generations of Chinese NBA Fans

The second aim of this study is to explore the social identity formation of Chinese NBA fans when they are consuming the Tencent NBA live streaming service. In the context of sports fandom, social identity formation refers to how fans identify with members of a group and feel a sense of belonging due to membership. In this current study, two age groups of fans displayed different social identities related to the team and players they followed and supported, namely, traditionally tribal identity and fluid identity based on digital practices. The generational-based difference in social identity and, to a lesser extent, conflicts between different subcultures of fans across generations caused the fragmentation of the online fan community. In addition, another significant finding of the project was the influence of national identity on the reunification of Chinese NBA fans in the Tencent NBA live streaming service.

Regarding generational identity, it is worth pointing out that the media landscape has transitioned over the last four decades, shifting from traditional broadcasting to live streaming services (Hutchins et al., 2019). Digital media has many features that are not offered by

traditional media. For example, Tencent NBA live streaming service has built a content eco-system around NBA and basketball for fans of different ages, including the professional content produced by Tencent and fan-generated content. Table 6.1 compares the social identities of two age groups, digital immigrants and digital natives, in the consumption of the Tencent NBA live streaming service. The former group prefers tradition and constructs their social identity through a conventional lens. However, digital natives easily adopt digital and internet-based media, and their social identity is built as active and individualistic consumers.

Table 6.1 Comparison of social identity between digital immigrants and digital natives in the consumption of Tencent NBA live streaming service

Generation	Key Differences	National Identity
Digital Immigrants	Engagement is shaped by traditional, often non-digital formats (e.g., CCTV); Nostalgia for these formats	Shared aspects demonstrating social identity from a traditional perspective
Digital Natives	Engagement is shaped by digital formats and the internet; Comfortable with digital communication and media	Shared aspects demonstrating social identity influenced by global and digital perspectives, including participation in fan subcultural practices.

Table 6.1 indicates that the social identity formation of Chinese NBA fans accessing live streaming service can be divided into three facets: media consumption (influencing traditional and subcultural identities), team identification, and the display of national identity. All three facets responded to the changing media environment because the media's evolution has produced audiences' fragmentation and created emerging social identities online. However, national identity remains a salient concept for Chinese NBA fans, but it is being displayed through methods different in the time dominated by traditional media.

In brief, social identity formation in a sports live streaming service is not merely about consuming basketball games but involving the fan identity practices and display on digital media from different generations. As the title of this present study shows, fandom of NBA on

Tencent livestreaming is about more than basketball. This is a significant finding and a major contribution of the study that has consequences for how the NBA is marketed to fans in China. This subsection will be divided into four parts to discuss the social identity construction of Chinese NBA fans on the Tencent live streaming service.

Before discussion, it is necessary to recap the two generations that emerged in the interview findings. In line with the concept of digital immigrants and digital natives (Prensky, 2005), two-generational divisions emerged based on the technology landscape that existed during fans' formative years. This results in a significant difference in the interaction between media and technology. The interviews with fans of both generations indicated that digital immigrants' media engagement is mainly shaped by traditional, non-digital formats, such as broadcast television (e.g., CCTV), radio, and print media. Their users' experiences with media are characterised by more passive consumption, even in the shift to livestreaming where they have more options with which to consume basketball but attach meanings of "real" and "fake" to fans based on practices that they grew up with watching NBA on CCTV, including what they perceive as more knowledgeable and serious commentary, and fan practices that are also more serious and less focused on digital and interactive forms of engagement. This perception is influenced by the nature of the limited and controlled media digital immigrants consumed growing up.

The interview also highlighted that digital natives were more at ease with digital communication, social media, and a wide range of online and data-driven content. Their engagement with media is more interactive, immersive in its reach. This has significantly impacted how digital natives form social identity from a more global and digital perspective. Digital natives tend to interpret a more inclusive perception of national identity, namely, more about shared values and cultural exchanges beyond national borders other than geographical boundaries. As a result, this generation's social identity is more fluid and dynamic. It reflects the diverse and globalised world digital natives live in.

6.2.1 Generational differences in social identity formation through media consumption

The first facet of social identity formation is shaped by the different media consumption of the two generations. Although both generations use Tencent to access NBA games, this current study indicates that they have different viewing behaviours and user experiences. For instance, the digital immigrant generation viewed NBA games on CCTV live broadcasting growing up, which impacted their traditional viewing behaviours and perceptions of the NBA. Digital natives are more accustomed to accessing the NBA on digital media platforms like Tencent. This caused further differences in consumption patterns of NBA games and social interaction methods. The results are consistent with previous studies (Chen, 2020; Croes & Bartels, 2021; Liu & Kozinets, 2022) in which age is a major factor in social identity construction. Furthermore, the interviews in this current study provide evidence for understanding social identity differences from a generational difference perspective and how consuming NBA on different media formats shapes the social identity of fans.

The current research highlights digital immigrants, born during the dominance of CCTV live broadcasting, display a higher demand for traditional features. In other words, they have nostalgia for traditional broadcasting formats (i.e. serious commentary, commentators being experts in the game, the spectacle being centred on the game and fandom centring on teams and team rivalry or tribalism). T2 explains that the reason is that the generation of digital immigrants is not familiar with interactive features and the culture of digital sports consumption. This output is supported by the existing study (Bolin, 2016), which argued that nostalgia was related to early media memories associated with major events such as Children's radio and TV programs. This current study extends the memory of the sports games that digital immigrants watched when they were children. They pointed out that people still remember the classic NBA games that were broadcast on television many years ago. As Bolin (2016) suggested, this is because of not only a reliance on media technology but also a nostalgia for the past media use experience in the new media environment.

In the interviews conducted for this current study, digital immigrants suggest that they seem not interested in fully using digital affordances, when to them, they simply want to watch

basketball rather than interact with digital practices and fandom. This reflects a departure from Prensky's original concepts about digital natives and immigrants (2001) and indicates that the generational gap is about more than just the ability to use digital technology but about an essential position towards the participatory culture digital media enhanced. This is a point of difference with digital immigrants who regarded certain digital practices as immature and not 'real fans' should act. For example, T3 considered digital practices such as barrage texting as childish because it was not used to comment on the performance of players or teams but is mostly verbal abuse. In T3's view, this kind of connection with team or player is not solid, especially when the players and teams they like lost the game. This results add a new element to the previous studies about sport fans (Funk & James, 2001) in which once an individual built an attachment to a team or player and take this attachment in their social identity, they can be describe as real sport fans, otherwise, sports spectators. T1 provided an example of a long-time loyalty to a specific player he followed who just played only one team in NBA in 12 years. T10 offered another example of relate the player he has supported for nearly 2 decades and the player's story inspired him to not give up when meeting some challenges in life. This evidence supports the concepts of real fans in digital immigrants' minds.

Different from digital immigrants' nostalgia for traditional broadcasting, digital natives were influenced more by specific digital practices and enhanced interactive features than the game itself only. Digital natives highlight a diversity of use patterns when consuming Tencent NBA live streaming service, for example, enjoying entertaining values of digital formats, preference for enhanced features, favouring humorous commentary styles without politics and engaging with barrage and other digital practices. T8 indicated that Tencent live streaming service allows fans and users to access and compare data on players in real-time. As Steiner and Xu (2020) mentioned, emerging media technologies, such as streaming video, are becoming more interactive and smarter. T14 also stated that the presentation of female commentators and commentators who used humour to call the game was also a preference. Some digital natives followed commentators and flooded virtual gifts to female commentators during half-time breaks. T6 and T7 argued that some digital natives were antagonistic and used the digital

practice of 'barrage' to criticise opposition fans and players. These difference between two generations agrees with former studies (Real & Kunz, 2020) argued that new technology has offered individual users more agency in creating their unique viewing experience based on preferences and feel like they are part of the sports events. Participation in the digital practice shaped the social identity of the users, in particular, the digital natives in this current study.

This current study also found a difference in emotional investment in the NBA between digital immigrants and digital natives. Many digital immigrants had low access to leisure activities when they were teenagers (in the 1980s), and basketball was one of the sports that they could consume. Digital immigrants established an emotional relationship with basketball and NBA in a simpler way than that of digital natives. T3 and T10 (digital immigrants) indicated that there were many basketball courts and easy to access when in the 1980s and the reason for consuming NBA games was to learn basketball skills. However, digital natives grew up in an era with relatively dynamic entertainment and leisure activities, and the media environment was also more interactive. They established emotional connections with basketball and the NBA. In addition to learning basketball skills, more subjective emotions can be expressed. Interactive functions such as barrages and virtual gifting provided by live streaming services enrich the space for digital natives to establish and express their emotions. T16 (digital native) suggested that there were extreme emotions displayed on the barrage, and T5 considered sending virtual gifts to the female commentators as an irrational activity. These results are supported by (Wang et al., 2019; Xu et al., 2022) who argued that the higher the user's emotions, the higher the possibility of participating in sending virtual gifts and posting texts on barrage, because this is a demand for emotional expression. It is clear that two generations of fans have different emotional expressions in digital media which shape social identity of digital immigrants and digital natives respectively.

In the context of Chinese society, the generational difference reflected the social identity formation impacted by the evolution of the economic and cultural environment. Participants in the interview (T3 and T10, both digital immigrants) reported that in the early days of live broadcasting on CCTV, China was in a relatively closed social environment than now. All

information about the NBA games is from CCTV' s commentators, so the information transmission between the media and the audience was dominated one way. Additionally, in that era, the content accessible to the Chinese through the media was limited. When the NBA games suddenly entered millions of Chinese households via CCTV, it formed the first generation of Chinese fans by displaying the players' extraordinary skills. As one digital immigrant participant remarked the reason, they loved the NBA back then was: "I didn't know basketball could be played like that. (T1, a digital immigrant)" However, with the enhancement of the internet, contemporary Chinese internet users can access various sports events and diverse media content. The NBA game is just one of them. China's social and cultural landscapes have changed significantly over the last four decades (Kong, 2008). This process inevitably generated impacts on various sectors in China, and sports industry and sports consumption were no exception. For example, commercialization and professionalization of sports games, expansion of sports consumption and diversification and influences on grassroots sports and physical education. The changes in society and culture also influence the emergence of generational differences.

This current study found that the consumption of commentary in Tencent NBA live streaming service also differentiated across the two generations. Digital natives no longer rely on the media to cultivate their engagement with the NBA but can critically seek out content they enjoy online. For instance, a participant (T7, a digital native) mentioned that his understanding of basketball surpasses some of the commentators on Tencent. In addition, the information about NBA games that users of the Tencent live streaming service can access might be similar to that of the commentators. Everyone can equally obtain information from players and their social media. This change leads to a two-way transmission of information about NBA games. However, digital immigrants retain an attachment to traditional media and the era they originated from. For example, they (T2 and T3, both digital immigrants) often compare traditional television commentary with live streaming services and prefer the narratives of games in the former. This result agreed with VanSlyke (2003) who argued that digital natives, unfamiliar with one-way communication, perceived themselves differently than digital immigrants who had navigated both communication forms. Furthermore, Hou et al. (2019)

indicated that females in the media content and interactivity played significant roles in appealing to live streaming users. The perceptions of female commentators in Tencent NBA live streaming service will be further discussed later in this chapter.

In short, based on accessing NBA games on a digital media platform, this study outlined that digital immigrants developed a nostalgia for traditional media in terms of media content while digital native built their social identity as active digital media consumers in Tencent NBA live streaming service.

6.2.2 Team identification differences between two generations

In line with the differences in perception of themselves between nostalgic ideas of 'real' fan identity held by digital immigrants, which harkens back to a pre-digital era, and the reworking of these ideas by digital natives as they become consumers who engage in all that the digital service offers 'beyond' the game, the second facet of social identity formation is how fans shape their identification with an NBA team or player online. This is especially interesting given that they are distant fans consuming a sport game from overseas. What also needs to be addressed in the current study is whether, the manner of team or player identification has evolved over last 40 years. In other words, whether the generational differences are also reflected in the issue of identifying with teams and players. In addition, these practices may possible intensify team and player identification, such as, data fans and anti-fans, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

The result of the current study suggests that two generations of Chinese NBA fans establish their identification with NBA teams and players in different ways. For instance, among the interviewees participating (T2 and T3, digital immigrants) in this study, the fans from the digital immigrant generation mentioned that factors leading them to start following the NBA games were Michael Jordan or the Chicago Bulls. The reason is that Chicago Bulls and Michael Jordan were undoubtedly the most successful teams and players in the 1990s. Fans were drawn to the success of the Bulls and Jordan and gathered to form fan groups in China. While the Bulls

and Jordan continued to achieve success, these fans felt a sense of self-esteem superior to fans of other teams and further solidified their social identification as fans in this group. Before Tencent NBA live streaming service, the social identity of the digital immigrant generation of Chinese NBA fans was shaped by the programming of CCTV. Since CCTV frequently broadcasted Bulls' games, fans could easily have their tribal identification shaped by the success of the Bulls. Similarly, T10 (a digital immigrant) suggested in the current study that this formation mechanism can be explained the tribal identification of the Lakers and Kobe, which were successful in the era following the Bull's success.

In the current study, the social identity of those born in the digital era displayed a consumer-orientated identity in relation to payment behaviour and platform affordance. These commercial elements in Tencent NBA live streaming service not only supported the consumption patterns of digital natives but also shaped a transformative process in social identity formation- a shift from pure emotive bonds to affiliations with team and player combined together with commercial interests. Due to the interactivity of digital technology, the services provided by Tencent include multiple user engagement settings. Tencent NBA live streaming service also allows its users to access all games of NBA. To access these features, users or fans may pay for them in accessing live images of the games. The social identity of the digital native generation of fans is shaped by a series of digital practices, for example, flooding barrage (T6 and T7, both are digital natives). The user pays identity differs from the digital immigrant generation of fans shaped by traditional television, gathering only around a single team or player.

Barrage is an example of the presentation of social identity of digital natives in digital media. T6 and T7 suggested the sense of belonging emerged when they posted supporting comments on the barrage. The fans establish the social identification with the NBA teams and players in relation to this digital practice, offering a new understanding of the concept of basking in reflected glory (BIRGing) and cut off reflected failure (COFRing) (Campbell et al., 2004; Wann & Branscombe, 1990) through displaying team identification on the digital media (Tsigilis et al., 2022). Wann and Branscombe (1990) indicated that BIRGING reflects fans'

demand to increase attachment to successful teams or players. An existing study (Wang et al., 2020) has illustrated that perceived belonging and perceived identity are the drives for digital media users to post texts on the barrage. In the context of sports fans, the current study also shows barrage represents a battlefield for younger fans, namely, the fans of the digital native generation engage in barrage to defend their identification with a team or player (T6 and T7, both are digital natives). As a result, online verbal battles among fans of different teams and players arises on the barrage while the resilience of fans' collective emotions are presented on the screen and spread to the fan group. In the current study, most digital immigrants, or those from an older generation, resist this form of identity expression through barrages and even find the content of these comments to be unintelligent or nonsensical (T3, a digital immigrant). This further proves the difference in thinking between digital immigrants and digital natives in terms of team identification.

In the digitalization era, mechanisms working for social identity formation diverge significantly from those in traditional media. Digital media affords individuals enhanced autonomy and interactivity. Features of digital media amplify fan interactivity and immersion, such as live streaming services and real-time commenting (like barrages). Thereby, it intensifies fan identification.

6.2.3 National elements in the fans' social identity formation between two generation

After discussing how fans gather around teams or players, this section unpacks the third facet of social identity formation: national elements' role in this process. As mentioned in the literature review chapter, extensive studies (Billig, 1995; Reicher & Hopkins, 2000; Smith, 1991; Tajfel et al., 1979b) conceptualized national identity within the social identity formation process. Subsequently, scholars explored the interaction of national identity and social identity construction from the perspectives of globalization (Castells, 2004; Held & McGrew, 2007) and the power of technology which has expanded opportunities to consume and participate in sports fandoms from around the world, increasing processes of transnational identity formation (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Postill, 2014; Rainie & Wellman, 2012). This

current study provides an understanding of the interaction between national identity and social identity in the context of different generations of NBA sports fans in China.

The findings of this current project indicated differences in the national elements of social identity construction between the fans classified as digital immigrants and those classified as digital natives. During the years of NBA's entry into the Chinese market The digital immigrant fans experienced strong feelings of national pride and identity in relation to Chinese heroes who played in the NBA team competition, for instance as Yao Ming. T4 (a digital immigrant) reported that figures such as Yao represent the personal success and soft power of his country, China. They also suggested that these Chinese players were the collective symbols of national pride in the global context during sporting events where they played for China, such as the Olympic Games. This finding agrees with the concept that sports events foster nationalism in contexts of globalization (Jozsa, 2009; Zajda & Vissing, 2023). Jozsa (2009) suggests that Yao Ming has played a pioneering role in spreading China to the world since the early 2000s. The outcome of this current study agrees with an explanation by Xu (2009) in which Yao's esteemed NBA performance not only amplified the sport's televised reach across China but also elevated expectations for China's performance in the 2008 Olympic Games. This caused the fans of digital immigrants to attach their social identity to the representation of China as embodied by Yao in the NBA. The finding in this study also supports previous research about Chinese NBA fans (Li et al., 2019) in which the cultural emphasis on collective achievements might magnify the impact of a singular sports figure like Yao Ming in China.

However, the current study found that the generation of digital natives has tended to exhibit antagonistic, troll-like identities instead of feelings of unity and pride or other associated emotions. This emotion is due to digital media platforms and the specific determinants of digital platforms that loosen identity from a national sporting culture and ties it with consumer driven practices (Kuang, 2019; L. Li, 2019). Data fans and anti-fans are emerging identity labels that depict how individuals interact and express their identity in the digital era. For instance, T7 and T6 (both are digital natives) suggest that "data fans" are making decisions driven by

data. At the same time, T7 (a digital native) also mentions that "anti-fans" hold negative views towards certain personalities or entities, whether data fans or anti-fans and the existence of such phenomena needs the support of digital media and technology (Stein et al., 2014). This current study aligns with previous research suggesting that digital media has transformed fans from passive viewers to active users (Hutchins & Rowe, 2012; Jenkins, 2006; Marwick & Boyd, 2011; Sunstein, 2017). The identity of an active consumer deepens fans' engagement (Jenkins, 2006) and may lead to extreme emotions in fans (Sunstein, 2017), but it also may loosen ties of identity from more traditional social identities as fans become reoriented toward individualised and subcultural (to be discussed next) fan practices and identifications. In the era of traditional television broadcasting, such manifestations would have been impossible.

In summary, based on media consumption, team identification, and the display of national sentiments, this study reveals three facets in social identity construction among two generations of Chinese fans through Tencent's NBA live streaming service. From the perspective of generational differences, the results of this study have expanded the understanding of the social identity formation of sports fans. The conflicts between two generations lay the foundation for further exploration of the formation of virtual fan communities and their fragmented characteristics, which will be discussed later in the chapter.

6.2.4 Tencent's female commentators play a role in forming gendered identity

This current study also highlights the findings about female commentators to understand the gender difference in social identity formation, for example, male perceptions of females' commentators in NBA games differed to female fans, and tended to be framed by sexist and sexualised perceptions of female commentators when compared to female interview participants who saw how female commentators were entrepreneurial trailblazers who created career pathways for women in sports commentary. Albeit the sample of female fans is small compared to male participants.

The presence of female fans consuming Tencent NBA live streaming service reflects and impacts the evolving media landscape of gender identity in sports viewership. For example, T16 expresses that she is practising commentator skills and looking forward to becoming a commentator in the Tencent NBA team after she graduates from university. This output agrees with the previous study (Stockman, 1994) that suggested that China's younger generation had been more independent than the older generation with the socio-economic development. Based on such independence, the younger generation is attempting to challenge gender inequality in the workplace. The growing involvement of women in sports consumption and professional roles such as commentators indicates an evolution from traditional gender images within the sports media industry. The increasing presence of females in sports content production, consumption and commentary highlights diverse gender roles in the Chinese modern society. Women's voices are becoming a component of China's sports industry in which female commentators provide new perspective of sports and redefine traditional male-dominated spaces. This outcome presents an ongoing step towards gender equality in Chinese sports viewership and commentary.

However, the present study also indicated that the appearance of female commentators in Tencent NBA live streaming service, was often perceived negatively, using sexist and sexualised language by male participants. For example, several users perceived that their inclusion in NBA coverage was a marketing tool to appeal to males and younger users. These perceptions of female commentators display a complex facet of gender identity. Although the number of female fans is increasing the Tencent NBA live streaming service users are dominated by male fans, as shown in the survey of this current research, and they tended to objectify the female commentators or ridicule them as being less knowledgeable than the male commentators. T14 stated that male fans tend to be attracted by females' looks and beauty and the female commentators always entertain the male users in the Tencent NBA live streaming service. In the Chinese context, according to traditional gender norms, females are generally expected to present dual standards of professional presentation and physical attractiveness. This scenario aligns with a previous study (West & Zimmerman, 1987) that proposed that gender is not a characteristic but an ongoing process enacted through societal

norms and expectations. In the current case, the female commentators in Tencent NBA live streaming service are perceived by users according to these societal expectations and media representations. This finding maintains socially constructed ideas about what it means to “do femininity” in the Chinese sports media. It also informs the following discussion on the contradictions between commercialization and gender expectations.

The current study also outlined the commercialization of female commentators in Tencent NBA live streaming service. T2, T3 and T5 stated that Tencent’ s female commentators were used for commercial reasons to attract males, and their beauty and body language were an effective method to appeal to male fans. The appearance of female commentators serves as a typical example of how gender image is presented and reinforced in media coverage. This output confirms existing knowledge (Butler, 2002) that commercial benefits exploit and shape gender identity. T2 criticised Tencent’ s female commentators, who lacked professional sports and basketball knowledge. The critiques demonstrate a bias around gender where women are marginalized because of presumed stereotypes (Messner & Cooky, 2010).

6.2.5 Sex products in NBA live streaming service and gender performance

Besides the female commentators in the Tencent NBA live streaming service, the advertisements of sex health products in the same digital service have further caused discussion about generational differences in social identity formation and the concept of “doing gender” . As the findings of this current study indicated, compared to digital immigrants, digital natives understand advertising strategies for sex health products, such as Jissbon in Tencent NBA live streaming service, as being entertaining and fun. The participant (T10, a digital native) of this current study suggested the promotion of Jissbon in Tencent NBA live streaming service emphasize humour and direct presentation of the product. However, digital immigrants (T2) in this current study expressed resistance and discomfort to such an advertising setup, and they believed that this advertising strategy conflicted with the traditional Chinese value of public communication, especially the images in sports or sports

media, for example, maintaining harmony, modesty, and appropriateness in public discourse and representation. Regardless of whether sexual health product ads are considered acceptable in sports live streaming services, their integration with basketball games seems to draw on sexual innuendos that align with certain plays or actions in the sport. This approach not only relates the themes of masculine strength and safer sexual behavior to basketball but also connects with the predominantly male audience by tapping into their social identity and gendered acceptance of sexual banter among males. (Delete: Regardless of whether sex health product ads are considered acceptable in sports live streaming services, the integration of these two with basketball games tied sport fandom and participation to concepts such as masculinity and minimized the space for female fan socialization and representation . This setup targets the major viewers and consumers of NBA sports in China, men, and their expectations of social identity. For instance, a male participant (T1) mentioned that the most expressed advertisement in Tencent NBA live streaming service was “Best Defensive Player” named after Jissbon. This symbolic image led the users of Tencent NBA live streaming service to connect the advertised product (condoms) with the social identity of male fans in order to achieve the effectiveness of the advertisement.

The findings of this current study also revealed that the promotion of sex health products in sports live streaming service encouraged fans and viewers to practice certain sexualised gender performances. The consumption of such advertisement, whether by male or female fans, is impacted by the idealised male images constructed in the ads. This constructed image of men confirms masculine traits depicted in the advertisements—strong and healthy, and taking the role of being in charge of sexual health. This output aligns with the previous research that suggested that Chinese sports fans attach their traditional values to western open-mindedness when accessing NBA, which is a cultural product from the US.

In brief, the interaction between generational perceptions, commercialization of female roles, and evolving gender identities provides a further understanding on how sports live streaming services can both reflect and reproduce social norms and expectations around gender. Meanwhile, some young women are trying to break the stereotype to achieve a potential

balance in the future.

6.3 An Online Fragmented Fan Community and Subcultural Practices

The third aim of the current study is to understand how Chinese NBA fans engage in the virtual community. This subsection focuses on the debate between fanship and fandom, followed by how digital media reshaped the Chinese NBA fan community and fragmented fan' s virtual community along generational lines and between different digital fan identities and practices, which is discussed in relation to literature on youth and sport subcultural practices. The importance of the fandom vs. fanship debate should be discussed further in the current study because it could enrich the understanding of several concepts in a digital era where media content is increasingly participatory and interactive, for example, media consumption, cultural production, and audience behaviour. From social identity construction to subcultural practice, fans in the Chinese NBA virtual community experienced a shift from fans to cultural producers. The findings of the current study provide evidence for exploring the complex and multifaceted relationships between individuals in the community and the mediated sports they consume.

Under the frameworks of this study, subcultures, fandom, and fragmented communities are three highly interrelated concepts, because all are informed by changes in media landscapes. It is necessary to clarify the relationships among the three, in order to demonstrate how changes in fan behaviour in a digital era has led to a fan community fragmented followed by the emergence of subcultures of Chinese NBA fans in the online environment.

Two concepts have been applied to unpack fans' engagement in Tencent' s NBA virtual community is fanship and fandom. Fanship refers to an individual's personal and emotional connection or attachment to a particular celebrity, character, brand, or media property (in this case, NBA teams or players), while fandom means a collective and often organized community of fans who share a common interest in a particular media franchise, celebrity, genre, or cultural phenomenon. In other words, fanship is a method for fans to construct and

display social identity, while fandom is an approach to generate collective emotions (Goldenberg et al., 2020; Sullivan, 2015) and a sense of belonging to a specific group, for example, subculture.

The interview results of this study presented the fandom among Chinese NBA fans, which was shaped by a series of fan practices. T6 stated that Chinese NBA fans tend to pair the NBA player and use the name “coupled players” in the online forum of the Tencent NBA live streaming service. “Coupling” is a typical fandom practice in the previous study of fans in the entertainment industry (Liang & Ning, 2015), which requires fans to invest emotions in media content consumption and entitles fans to engage in culture creation. However, the difference is that “coupled players” are based on real players rather than fictional characters in TV dramas. The motivations of coupling are different in this instance because NBA fans focus on players’ skills and performance in the games. In contrast, while the fans of TV dramas are driven by the characters’ personalities and emotional growth.

This study uncovers the digital practices of Chinese NBA fans, such as texts on barrage, flooding virtual gifts, online verbal conflicts, and more. In internet media context, barrage provides a real-time commenting system, in which users’ text comments which flood across the screen. For example, T6 and T7 were actively involved in the barrage when they consumed NBA live streaming service while T5 and T14 reported the practices of flooding virtual gifts to the players, teams of female commentators. Subculture refers to a group within a larger culture that shares specific values, norms, behaviours, and practices that set it apart from the dominant culture to which it belongs (Hebdige, 1979; Macionis & Plummer, 2005; Young, 1971). The previous studies (Bacon-Smith, 1992; Jenkins, 2012; Lewis, 2002) considered that fandom is a particular type of subculture centered around a specific interest and passion, for example, music (Brake, 2013) and social codes (Nault, 2018). Subcultures emerged based on a series of factors such as age (Brake, 2013), ethnicity (Tapia, 2019), hobbies (Dupont, 2020), fashion (Park & Kim, 2020), or alternative lifestyles (Nault, 2018). These studies (Hills, 2003; Jenkins, 2012; Radway, 2009) often focus on television audiences who consume TV content and engage in various ways in generating new content. The contents generated by the

audiences spread among fans; thereby, the consumers of TV content become the creators of popular culture. These fan behaviours extend the knowledge of subcultures within the sports fandom. The Chinese NBA fans' digital practices agree with the fans of idols in the entertainment industry, as was reviewed in the literature review chapter, for instance, fans of Korean Waves in China (Wang et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2022).

The present study found that conflicts between the fans in the Chinese NBA community caused the fragmented community, because of a range of subcultural practices largely engaged in by digital natives. The current study indicates generational division emerged in the online Chinese NBA fan community where digital immigrants were nostalgic for the conventional format of fan engagement, and digital natives were oriented more toward digital styles and identities that undermine the norms of immigrants. T7 (digital natives) suggested that he posted comments on Barrage to battle with other fans who have opposite opinions about the player whom T7 supported. However, the digital immigrant in this study had less interest in being involved in the activities of using Barrage. There is a gap between these two generations. In the current study, the team identification of digital immigrants displays a tribal attribute, which means they follow a team or player with loyalty, as T1 (digital immigrant) mentioned that he praised Nowitzki' s experience in only one team in the NBA for 12 years. Digital immigrants see this kind of team identification as the real fans. Previous studies (Consalvo et al., 2011; Rheingold, 1994; Rule, 2017) concerned with the conflicts in the virtual community, for example, Consalvo et al. (2011) discussed issues such as trolling, flaming, and moderation techniques to address conflicts in virtual spaces. This study finds that in the virtual community based on Tencent NBA live streaming service, there are conflicts between different fan groups. The participants of digital immigrants and digital natives have different perceptions of digital practice. The perception differences impacted the involvement of the fan community. Interviewees in this current study used various words to classify the types of fans who are consuming NBA live streaming services, such as, real fans, data-fans, anti-fans, extreme fans, and moderate fans. This typology partly agrees with the classification of previous discussions of sports fan (Hunt et al., 1999).

The researchers (Hunt et al., 1999) conceptualized that five types of sports fans exist: temporary, local, devoted, fanatical, and dysfunctional. Connecting the conceptual framework and the current study's findings revealed that devoted fans are equal to "real fans". They deeply understood the NBA games, have been attached to a team or player for a long time, and consumed the games of only one team or player on the Tencent NBA live streaming service. However, temporary fans, equal to the "fake fans", displayed their support only in specific games and highlights. From the perspective of real fans, a longer time to consume NBA games and loyalty to a team or player were the bottom line to becoming a real fan. Years of accessing NBA games caused a generational conflict in which real fans perceive fake fans as engaging with the NBA only on the surface rather than to a deep level. The distinction highlights a gap between devoted fans and temporary fans where the former invest in sports and the NBA, and the latter is fleeting and event-driven. This distinction reflects broader theories of youth subcultures in digital and sports fandom. As Bennett (1999) argues, youth subcultures today are characterized by fluid, fragmented, and transitory identities shaped by digital engagement rather than fixed subcultural allegiances. Similar trends are visible in Chinese NBA fandom, where younger fans engage in data fandom—a practice involving real-time game statistics and social media interactions—while older, more traditional fans prioritize game-watching and analytical discussions.

Fanatical fans correspond to extreme fans in the current study. Fanatical fans show the most passion for the teams or players among sports supporters. For example, fanatical fans could spend massive efforts or sacrifices to support sports team and players, and they tend to get to the sports venues early on the game day or cheer immersive to the team or player that they support (Hunt et al., 1999). The current study extends the understanding of fanatical fans to the online environment, such as verbal battles on the barrage and purchasing virtual gifts for the teams, players, and female commentators. Indeed, it cannot be denied that live streaming services provide fans with more interactive features than traditional TV broadcasting. Fans can access and consume these digital features based on their demands and interests. However, the participants of digital immigrants (T2, T3 and T5) indicated that extreme fans were dominated by digital natives who engaged in the online activities. These

fan practices supported by digital technology have further generated the fragmentation of fan communities in cyberspace. This shift demonstrates how platform affordances (Baym, 2015) shape contemporary fandom, providing interactive features that amplify fan engagement.

The current study reveals that digital practices categorise the fans groups. The difference between real fans vs. fake fans (anti-fans and data fans) is how different the fans engage with the fans' activities. The categorisation is also essential to social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978). Tajfel (1978) suggests that individuals categorise themselves and others into various groups depending on collective characteristics, for example, ethnicity, religion, and nationality. In the view of real fans, they focus on sports and basketball rather than fans' activities. In contrast, the emergence of anti-fans and data fans tend to use some digital elements to engage the fan's community, for example, barraging and accessing the real-time data of the games. As the interviewees (T6 and T2) mentioned in this current study, real fans should have the ability to independently reflect on the performances of the players and teams rather than engage in verbal conflicts in the barrage. T2 used the word "childish" to describe the practices of anti-fans and data fans in the virtual community.

The interviewees reported that the Tencent NBA live streaming service users formed several small groups in a virtual community depends on different interests, opinions, and methods of interaction. For example, T6 highlighted interacting in the online fan forum, T2, T3, and T11 mentioned barrage, and T3, T2 and T5 mentioned flooding virtual gifts. The finding in the current research offers evidence from the perspective of sports fans to the existing literature about the fragmented community and adds a new factor to the emergence of a fragmented community: digital practice. A few seminal studies explored the virtual community in which people typically interact online, such as forums, chat groups, email, social networking sites, etc. Virtual community differs from traditional community because individuals can share common interests, thoughts, and values and engage in discussion, information exchange, and social interaction without being constrained by physical locations. For this reason, when members of virtual communities consume the same cultural product, fragmented

communities emerged. The fragmented community originally refers to community that are not cohesive due to a series of factors, such as geography (Massey & Denton, 1993), politics (Tucker et al., 2018), culture (Anderson, 2016), technology (Turkle, 2011), or social practices (Putnam, 2000).

The findings of this study reveal that contemporary Chinese NBA fans exhibit a certain degree of reluctance towards the commentators employed by Tencent. T2 indicated that he has a better understanding of the NBA and basketball than the commentators from Tencent, and several other interviewees expressed similar sentiments. These fans tend to choose to mute the games or English commentary because Tencent provides various commentary in the NBA live streaming service. As a result, even though these Chinese fans consume the same game, they receive varying service levels. This is also an essential step in the formation of a fragmented community. Previous studies (Anderson, 2008; Cramer, 2017; Jenkins et al., 2013; Napoli, 2011; White, 2014) also indicated that audience fragmentation in digital media refers to the phenomenon in which traditional mass audiences, once united around a few dominant media sources, are now divided into numerous smaller, niche, and often self-selected audiences.

This section has explored the impact of digital practices on fan categorization, the subcultural dimensions of sports fandom, and the fragmentation of Chinese NBA communities. It builds on existing research by demonstrating that digital-native NBA fans engage in diverse and sometimes conflicting fan practices, leading to tensions between traditional and digital fandom. However, despite these divisions, certain events—particularly those tied to national sentiments and geopolitical tensions—can temporarily reunite fragmented fan communities. This process of reunification will be discussed in the following section.

6.4 Fans United in a Fragmented Community

Tencent NBA live streaming service reflects how Chinese NBA fans united in a fragmented community. This current research finds that the reunification of Chinese fans based on

national sentiments demonstrates dynamics in the interplay of global cultural consumption and national identity maintenance. It is necessary to situate this outcome within the existing literature on sports nationalism, sports diplomacy, and sports media to extend current knowledge and understanding. As indicated by the interview findings in the current study, this subsection will delve into the specific scenarios in which Chinese basketball fans resonate emotionally within a unified national identity.

The Morey Hong Kong tweet incident in 2019 serves as a critical turning point for understanding how national identity shapes the attitudes and behaviors of Chinese NBA fans. The present research suggests a major change among contemporary Chinese fans. NBA fans in China may not accept American values and political positions when consuming cultural products from the US. They are displaying active engagement that enhances China's position and values. This emerging fandom is not typical in other cultures. The shift indicates that the local identity of sports fans is increasingly impacting the interpretations of sports narratives from other countries and cultures in global sports consumption. The evolution of the interviewees participating in this research indicated a complex interaction between global sports products and local Chinese cultural and political positions in certain group activities. This study suggested that Chinese NBA fans may have selective appropriation when assessing Tencent NBA live streaming service. Chinese NBA fans may consume the entertainment components of the NBA and reject or negotiate the cultural and political elements packed into the sports product from the US. Due to the scandal in 2019 involving the former manager of the Houston Rockets, Daryl Morey, and his tweet, there was a backlash by Chinese fans when China was challenged on the international stage. The interviewees (T4, T8, T9 and T14) mentioned that they reduced the frequency of watching NBA games after this incident. This isolated incident led to the possibility that Chinese fans could not watch all NBA games. In addition, the national sentiment of the Chinese fan group was not only against Morey but also increased negative impressions of the entire NBA. This backlash from Chinese NBA fans demonstrated how national sentiments impacted the consumption of globalized cultural products. This is one of a series of examples of online group actions (Huang & Sun, 2014; Xue & Klandermans, 2016; Xue & van Stekelenburg, 2018; Zeng, 2020) that have taken place in

China, and it offers an opportunity to understand further online collective behaviour from the perspective of Chinese sports fans of International sporting codes. Its uniqueness lies in its renegotiation of cross-cultural and transnational affiliations due to these instances where values between nations clash, especially considering the significant political and cultural differences between China and the US.

Although NBA was considered an avenue for promoting cosmopolitan identity (Appiah, 2006; Beck, 2006; Nussbaum, 1994), a participant (T4) mentioned, the sentiment of “being Chinese first” strengthens Chinese national identity in response to the cultural impact of Western cultures. The current study highlights this contrasting trend, namely, the prioritization of national identity over global engagement. This research indicates that one of the contributing factors to this position which counters the literature on cosmopolitan identities being enhanced through cross-cultural consumption could be the hosting of Beijing Olympic Games in 2008. The interviewees suggest that the international sports mega event profoundly impacted the shaping of the national sentiments of Chinese sports fans. For example, before the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008, Chinese fans had a desire for more Chinese elements to be seen on the international stage, such as Yao Ming’ s appearance in the NBA. Scholars (Passa, 2011) have pointed out that the appearance of several Chinese players in the NBA, including Yao Ming, is a case of exporting Chinese cultural products. For instance, as the interviewees (T4) indicated, Yao Ming’s presence in the NBA and his improving basketball skills have become a collective memory for this generation of Chinese fans. The previous studies (Li et al., 2016; Watanabe et al., 2013) have explored the relationship between sports and nationalism, particularly emphasizing China’ s engagement with global sports culture. These studies suggest that transnational and cosmopolitan identities are increasingly shaping fandom in a globalized era. However, the findings of this study complicate this perspective by highlighting how NBA fans rather than embracing transnational subjectivity, and it reaffirms national identity when confronted with diplomatic tensions. The persistence of “us” versus “them” distinctions along national lines suggests that national identity remains a resilient and mobilizing force in global sports fandom. This study engages with and extends existing literature by demonstrating that while Chinese NBA fans operate within a

transnational sports environment, moments of geopolitical conflict reactivate nationalist sentiment, which shapes fan identity in ways that resist purely cosmopolitan narratives.

After China hosted the Beijing Olympics and subsequently became the world's second-largest economy, this current study reveals that there was a shift in the attitude of the Chinese people towards integrating with the world. This shift is reflected in the group behaviour of younger NBA fans in China in particular. The younger generation of Chinese NBA fans (T8) explicitly stated in interviews that they are Chinese fans first, and then NBA fans. Previous studies (Li et al., 2016; Watanabe et al., 2013) found that the macro environment of establishing national sentiment due to the media's presentation of the Chinese athletes in the international or regional sports games has changed. With the double enhancement of social and technological development, the current study points out that China adjusted its sports development strategy after the Beijing Olympic Games 2008. T14 no longer emphasized winning gold medals but promoted local Chinese professional sports to cultivate the domestic sports market. Therefore, it is necessary to continue discussing that how Chinese fans moderate the impacts of imported cultural products on Chinese cultural and political appeals.

This current study also highlights the conflicts between cosmopolitanism and national identity among Chinese NBA fans. It delves into how the accessibility of US cultural and sports products, like the NBA, influences these fans' identities. The interviewees indicate that the interaction between cosmopolitanism and national identity is dynamic. For example, at current stage, the NBA is part of the competition in China's sports market. It needs to compete for market share and audience with a series of professional sports leagues, including China basketball association. it is a catalyst for identity negotiation. The interviewees (T14) noted that Tencent currently also offers streaming broadcasts of basketball leagues for senior schools and university in China. This helps maintain emotional connections for alumni, reinforcing local cultural ties. This raises the question that has not be studied enough before: in such a market-driven environment, does national identity become less relevant to fans? The current study suggests otherwise. It reveals that the younger generation of digital native fans in China, while seemingly less sensitive to national identity, still navigate a complex

landscape in which they negotiate their enjoyment of the game with China's cultural and national appeals. This generates a paradox in which China's global engagement, other than diluting national identity, actually involve a constant adjustment between international impacts and local priorities. This dynamic interaction reveals that fans are actively engaged in shaping their national identities in the face of globalized cultural influences.

In brief, sports play a vital role in shaping, expressing, and reinforcing national identity. Sports games provide a stage for the demonstration of national characteristics, foster a sense of belonging among citizens, and can influence both internal and external perceptions of a nation. However, reunification of Chinese fans based on national sentiments in the context of interaction with NBA exported from the US challenges the existing knowledge that consumption of global products straightforward causes the emergence of cosmopolitanism. Instead, the Chinese NBA fans in an online environment demonstrates a multifaceted process through which such consumption can maintain national identity, particularly, in the context of perceived cultural and political tensions. Sports is a site for fans to actively negotiate their national identity. The outcome of this current study contributes to the further knowledge about globalization, sports diplomacy, and dynamics of national identity in an interconnected world.

CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION

The emerging Internet and digital media environment globally have transformed how people access and consume information through digital and mobile devices. This shift has led to new behaviours in digital media consumption, offering novel opportunities for collective actions and emotional connections in virtual environments. The evolving media landscape is a subject of interest for scholars in humanities and social sciences, who scientifically explore the relationship between sports live streaming, consumer behaviours and social identity construction. This study addressed the behavioural intentions of accepting Tencent NBA live streaming followed by insights into fans' social identity formation in a virtual community. The generational differences in preferences for NBA live streaming services and digital practices between digital immigrants and digital natives are the primary finding in this study. The consumption of NBA on Tencent led to tribal differences, rivalry, and conflict between generations, based around different preferences in terms of media practices and fandom, leading to the categorization of real (digital immigrants) and fake (digital natives) fans. Identities became fragmented in the virtual community on Tencent owing to the vast array of options and digital practices that allow fans to interact with content, i.e. data and metrics, barrage, gifting commentators. These digital practices also shaped subcultural fan identities (data fans, extreme fans, anti-fans). Therefore, fandom on Tencent was about more than the game. Despite the conflict among fan communities on Tencent, which may suggest digital media dilutes and fragments media audiences (i.e. mass national audience broken up into smaller audience segments and digital identities,) there was also a surprising reunification of fans' social identity around national identity and patriotism as a result of politics being introduced by NBA team managers and players, which offended Chinese fans.

7.1 Behaviour Intentions of Accepting Tencent NBA Live Streaming Service

In terms of the first research question, this project delves into the behavioural intentions of Chinese users when accessing NBA live streaming services through digital media. The research's aim is to understand how these intentions correlate with generational group activities in the online space. The study highlights the importance of social benefit as a key

driver for users to engage with the service, suggesting that it plays a vital role in shaping their social identity during its use.

The study investigates various demographic factors, such as patterns of NBA online access, attitudes towards Tencent's NBA live streaming service, and behavioural intentions to use the service among different age groups in China. The analysis reveals that the NBA live streaming service is predominantly male, with older viewers (above 24 years) having longer duration of viewing and membership purchasing than their younger counterparts. It also indicates no significant difference was found in daily viewing hours between these two age groups. The study also highlights differences in service access across different city tiers and varying levels of acceptance based on education, income, and city classification.

In terms of motivations and behavioural intentions, the study identifies different factors influencing usage patterns among various age groups. For users older than 24, factors such as convenience, viewing cost, enjoyment, and social benefits were identified as key drivers. In contrast, for users under 24, the primary motivation was found to be viewing quality. This study also departs from previous research by demonstrating a positive correlation between the perceived cost of viewing and the frequency of using the NBA live streaming service, highlighting a unique aspect of consumer behaviour in the Chinese digital media landscape. Through the lens of uses and gratifications theory, these insights offer a comprehensive view of the behaviours and motivations of Chinese consumers engaging with sports digital media, thereby enhancing our understanding of the psychological drivers behind media usage.

7.2 Social Identity Construction of Two Generation Chinese NBA Fans

The second research question attempts to examine the generational differences in social identity in the process of accessing Tencent NBA live streaming service. It covers how team identification impacts social identity construction for two generations of Chinese NBA fans. The outcomes of the qualitative interviews reveal several ground-breaking insights and arguments concerning the research question, they are, generational differences in media

consumption and social identity, team identification across generations, and national identity in social identity formation.

The present research highlights the distinction between two generations of Chinese NBA fans: digital immigrants and digital natives. Digital immigrants are a generation who had the transition from traditional media and digital media. They suggest a different approach to media consumption and social identity formation compared to digital natives, who were born in the digital era.

Based on the definition of digital immigrants and digital natives that applied in the current study, the former typically was born before 1997 and have experienced the evolution of the media landscape, for instance, from TV broadcasting to live streaming service. This transition greatly impacted the social identity construction of digital immigrants, with a preference for more stable, consistent approach of media consumption. They value better traditional aspects of media usage, for example, loyalty to specific teams or players, considering it as essential components of social identity. Instead, digital natives are a generation of who were born after the first year that Chinese public can access the Internet, 1997. They have the features of the inherent familiarity with digital devices and digital media. This generation shows a more fluid format to access media, for instance, multitasking and enjoying interactive, engaging activities. Their social identity can be more shaped by the dynamic nature of digital media. They also consume actively with media contents, with engaging with personalization and community activities. This outcome reflects a change from the passive consumption to more engaging participation.

This study tries to unpack how the generational differences enhance the approach fan's identity with NBA teams or players. In terms of digital immigrants, they tend to form tribal identifications. This generation of NBA fans in China aligns with historically successful teams of famous players, for instance, Michael Jordan on the Chicago Bulls. This identification format is rooted in the feeling of nostalgia and respect for consistent type of success in the sports. However, digital natives show a consumer-oriented identity. The commercial and interactive

aspects of digital media always impact digital natives' identification with teams and players. This generation love to follow popular trends, actively engaging with online forum, activities in online community, and interactive features on Tencent NBA live streaming service. This phenomenon reflects a wider understanding on sports fandom, in which the experience is not just about NBA games but also related social and interactive components.

The national identity in formatting social identity of Chinese NBA fans is an aspect that cannot be neglected. For digital immigrants, national identity always interacts with sports fandom, in particular, in supports around Chinese players in NBA. These Chinese NBA players are considered as national images; hence, national pride is expressed by cheering these players from China. Compared to digital immigrants, digital natives present a more complex understanding on national identity. When digital natives follow Chinese players in NBA, their enthusiastic is impacted by the feature of digital media. The feature of anonymity and interactivity of digital media often cause the emergency of antagonistic and troll-like identities. This is different from the traditional model of sports fandom, suggesting a nuanced relationship between national identity and the online virtual environment.

7.3 The Fragmented Community and Subcultural Practices

The third research question attempts to examine the fan' s subculture in the online fragmented community. To answer this question, this study discussed the distinctions between fanship and fandom, the evolution of Chinese NBA fans group through digital media consumption, and what factors and how impact the fragmentation of the fan' s virtual community.

it is necessary to compare these two concepts under the context of Tencent NBA live streaming service. Fanship refers to an individual' s emotional relationship with a certain entity, for example, team or player. Personal and individual' s preference and experience can contribute the formation of fanship. Instead, fandom means to a collective community of people who share common values, beliefs, and interests and engaging in group activities and

practices. After analysing the fan' s digital practices, this research argues that fandom contributes to the formation of collective emotions and sense of belonging, triggering the emergency of subcultures, while fanship makes contribution of social identity formation.

This research further studies how fandom has evolved into specific subcultures among Chinese NBA fans, in the context of digital environment. Subcultures refers a group within a larger culture that share distinct values, interest, norms. The findings of the research indicates that the online environment, based on digital media platforms such as Tencent NBA live streaming service, maintains distinctive fan activities and interactions, for example, participating in online forums, sharing content generated by digital media users, and engaging in the fan' s activities in the virtual environment.

Furthermore, this research focuses on how conflicts of identification within the virtual fan community cause fragmentation. This study categorizes the fans into different fan types, for instance, real fans, data-fans, anti-fans, extreme fans and moderate fans. This typology agrees with former studies categorizing sports fans into different groups such as temporary, local, devoted, fanatical and dysfunctional fans. This study argues that the various fan types make contribute to the battles and fragmentation in the fan' s virtual community. In addition, this research reveals what role digital practices play in the process of categorizing fans into different groups. For example, real fans are supposed to concentrate on the sports game only other than fan activities, while anti-fans tend to engage with more digital elements such as barrage and real-time data of the games. This categorization reflects the dynamic methods of how fans engage with online fan activities and offers more understanding of subculture.

Regarding the subculture in the online community, this research has an opportunity to detail the phenomenon of Chinese NBA fans' virtual community in which traditional mass media audiences are divided into smaller and niche groups. This fragmentation is caused by different preferences of how Chinese NBA fans access digital content, for instance, choices of commentary and presentations of the games. The diverse preferences of fans also lead to the formation of a fragmented community.

7.4 Fans' Reunification due to National Sentiments

In the process of addressing the three planned research questions, this study also has the opportunity to observe national sentiments emerging from the consumption of digital media. This is because Tencent is not a state-owned media entity, and the NBA is a sports and cultural product imported from the US to China. This research reflects the unification of Chinese NBA fans in this fragmented community online, including the interaction between global sports consumption and nationalism, impacts from the Beijing Olympic Games 2008, and battles between cosmopolitanism and national identity.

This study indicates that Chinese fans do not absorb the values and political ideas straightforwardly when they are consuming sports imported from the US. It is a complex trend between global sports consumption and Chinese local cultural and political stances. Taking the case of Daryl Morey's tweet in 2019 as an example to analyze, it caused a backlash from Chinese NBA fans. This not only reduces the frequency of NBA views of Chinese NBA fans but also generates negative perceptions among them. It highlighted the essential role of national sentiments in practicing fan activities.

A shift in Chinese national sentiments after the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games and China's growth to the world's second-largest economy is inevitable in observing the nationalism among Chinese NBA fans. This shift highlights the younger Chinese NBA fans' attitudes towards the NBA. This research demonstrates that China has adjusted its sports development strategy to expand the Chinese domestic sports market, changing the previous emphasis on winning gold medals in international sports games only.

This research project ends with the conflicts between cosmopolitanism and national identity in the Chinese NBA fan group. It unpacks how the availability of American culture and sports products impacts fans' national identity. A paradox emerged in which China's global engagement, other than diluting national identity, led to a constant adjustment of the

conflicts between international influences and China' s domestic priorities. Younger fans navigate a complex landscape in which they reconcile the enjoyment of the NBA games with China' s cultural and national appeals.

7.5 Contributions of This Study

This research aims to expand our knowledge about Chinese sports fans in the digital age, focusing on their use patterns, social identity construction and subcultures in online communities. The study examines the users' behavioural intentions of adopting the Tencent NBA live streaming service and extends the understanding of the uses and gratifications theory in the context of sports live streaming services. With the increasing popularity of OTT services worldwide, it is crucial to investigate the users' behaviour in-depth based on a theoretical framework. The findings of this empirical research validate the applicability of the Uses and Gratifications Theory in the realm of Chinese sports streaming services and contribute new insights to the theory. This research presents strong evidence based on the views of Chinese digital media users. The study's results offer theoretically supported analyses for practitioners in the fields of sports communication, digital media, and related industries. This will enable them to gain a better understanding of their users' behaviours and the intentions behind their media consumption.

The findings of this research shed light on generational, and, to a lesser extent, gendered differences in the consumption of NBA content on Tencent. While previous studies have highlighted the distinctions in digital technology acceptance between digital immigrants and digital natives, it is important to note that countries have embraced the internet at different times, and the level of adoption of digital devices and the development of the internet economy also varies among nations. Therefore, this research provides a solid example from China to further investigate the conflicts and competition in identity construction caused by intergenerational differences.

The current research also discussed the gender differences of identity construction in

consumption Tencent NBA live streaming service. The finding highlighted there were differences in consumption of Tencent NBA live streaming service between male and female users. The gender elements impacting identity formation in the Tencent NBA live streaming service, such as, female commentators, sex products and so on, generated different perceptions between males and females. The current research made contribution in twofold: firstly, emphasized the demand to consider gender factors in the design the digital media platform and its promotional strategies to satisfy user experience; secondly, it advanced the exploration of gender differences in the topic of media consumption.

This study delves into the fan practices of a fragmented virtual community, offering insights into subcultures. The research shows how NBA fans from China practice their digital identities within Tencent's content ecosystem, causing the fragmentation of fan communities. The findings in the study reveal that certain practices such as using barrage, flooding gifts to NBA teams and players, and interacting with female commentators have further divided fans into categories such as extreme and moderate fans. These practices have a significant impact on fans' sense of belonging in this online fan community. It provides new insights into theories of the social identity construction process in cyberspace.

This study explores the social identity issues of Chinese fans by analyzing their national identity and examining the shared emotions that emerge within the virtual environment. The study focuses on the consumption of imported cultural products from the US to China and discovers that reunifications occur in virtual fragmented communities. For instance, the collective emotions of Chinese NBA fans are triggered by national sentiments. The findings of this study provide solid evidence and explanation from the perspective of Chinese fans on the fragmentation and unification within fan communities.

7.6 Limitations of This Study

Although the current study successfully achieved its research objective of examining the users' behavioural intentions and unpacking the social identity formation of Tencent NBA live

streaming service, it still has some limitations. In the first place, the sample of the survey is skewed toward male and older users which limits the output to descriptive comparison. This is owing to a convenience sampling method being used due to restrictions imposed by COVID-19.

It is also important to note that the sports live streaming service in China is not limited to Tencent NBA live streaming service alone. Other sports games such as the National Hockey League (NHL), Premier League, Serie A, Bundesliga, La Liga, and many others also reach Chinese fans through live streaming services on digital media. Additionally, there are local services that cater to sports fans as well, for instance, the Chinese Super League and the Chinese Basketball Association. Various sports games appeal to different fan groups, which means their use and gratification will vary. However, this study focuses only on a single sports game on a specific platform. Additionally, each sports game has unique marketing strategies, resulting in greater diversity in building fan loyalty. However, this study does not cover the social identity construction process of fans across a wide range of sports games.

This research also analyzes fans' social identity formation from the perspective of media usage processes, though there are broader perspectives to explore in fan identity construction. Lastly, the pace of digital media development is rapid. To retain fans and a user base, media platforms upgrade and revise their services to meet the increasingly diverse demands of their user base. During four years of conducting this study, Tencent constantly launched a series of functions and designs for its users, with more appealing elements appearing in its NBA streaming service. However, these new elements have not been included in this study. In addition, gender and nationalism are covered in this current research, which contributes to these two issues related to sports communication.

7.7 Directions for Future Study

In order to address these limitations, there are an increasing number of issues that could be further investigated. Firstly, there are more types of gratifications obtained in consuming

sports, which are included in various models. These gratifications could be examined in the Tencent NBA live streaming service, for example, the motivations for using this digital media to access the NBA in China.

In addition, regarding the fan' s social identity formation, gender analysis could be deeper, because there is more power in female participation influencing sports consumption all over the world, and China is no exception. Female fans and female commentators could be separate studies in digital media and sports consumption.

In future research, it is important to include the issue of sports diplomacy, which cannot be neglected. The NBA, a sports and cultural product exported from the United States to China, plays a role in Sino-US diplomatic relations, influenced by geopolitics. Scholars can conduct further analysis on whether it affects social cohesion in China. This is also an interesting topic for research.

7.8 Summary of Chapter

This research offers a deeper understanding of the dynamics of digital media consumption, social identity formation, and the interaction between global cultural influences and national identity in the context of Chinese NBA fans.

In the early 1980s, Chinese people could access NBA games through traditional broadcasting, which interested millions of thousands of basketball fans in the country. Digital media has become major source to the NBA's revenue in China in recent years. This study suggests that fans consume basketball and sports games and shape their identity through media consumption and digital practices. In other words, the NBA's impact is more than just basketball and sports games, as shown in the title of this research.

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Appendices

Appendice 1. Sample Survey Questionnaire (English Version)

Section 1

1 Are you 18-year old?

Yes

No

If yes selected, then skip to 2. Are you accessing NBA on CCTV or Tencent?

If No selected, then skip to the end of Survey

2 Are you accessing NBA on CCTV or Tencent?

-Yes, I'm watching NBA on CCTV only

-Yes, I'm Streaming NBA on Tencent only

-Yes, I'm viewing NBA on both CCTV and Tencent

-No, I am not viewing NBA on both platforms

If No selected, then skip to the end of Survey

On a scale of 1-7, with one meaning "strongly disagree" with five meaning "strongly agree", rate your feeling of live streaming NBA.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Live streaming NBA is one of the most important things I do each day.							
If no Live streaming NBA in media, I would really miss it.							
Live streaming NBA is very important in my life.							
I could easily do without live streaming NBA for several days.							
I would feel lost without live streaming NBA.							

How long in years have you viewed NBA? (fill in from 1-40)

How much time in hours would you estimate that you spend Live streaming of NBA on Tencent on an average day? (fill in from 0-24)

How long in years have you been a member of Tencent NBA Live Streaming service? (fill in from 1-6)

How often do you access content on NBA on the Tencent Sports app?

- More than once a day
- Daily
- Several times per week
- No more than once per week
- Seldom
- Never

On a scale of 1-7, with one meaning “least wanted” with five meaning “most wanted” , rate what content on NBA you are mainly seeking from the Tencent Sports app.

	least wanted	2	3	4	5	6	most wanted
Match reporting							
Match schedule							
Team rankings							
Match highlight video							
Player highlight video							
Behind-the-scene story							
Documentary video							
UGC							
Fans community							
Others (please specify)							

What other channels do you use to consume NBA (check all that apply)?

- Social media (Wechat, Weibo)
- Newspaper
- Local TV sports news
- Attending games
- Radio

Section 2

Each of the following statements is on a seven-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree and concerns the **perceived convenience of Tencent NBA live streaming service**.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
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				Disagree			
Compared to the time I have to invest in watching sport, the use of Tencent NBA live streaming service is beneficial to me.							
I find it convenient to watch NBA via live streaming.							
I find it convenient to live stream NBA on any device.							
I find it convenient to live stream NBA on Tencent anywhere including indoors and outdoors.							

Each of the following statements is on a seven-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree and concerns the **perceived viewing quality of Tencent NBA live streaming service**.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I think Tencent NBA live streaming service provides high-quality content.							
Tencent NBA live streaming service is free of delay, jitter, and buffering							
I think Tencent NBA live streaming service provides better quality service than cable/satellite.							

Each of the following statements is on a seven-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree and concerns the **perceived enjoyment of Tencent NBA live streaming service**.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I think Tencent NBA live streaming							

services entertaining.							
I find Tencent NBA live streaming service enjoyable.							
Tencent NBA live streaming service is more fun than watching on cable/satellite television.							

Each of the following statements is on a seven-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree and concerns the **social benefits of online live streaming for sports content**.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
My friends think I should use Tencent NBA live streaming service.							
Most of my friends use Tencent NBA live streaming service.							
People whose opinions I value prefer Tencent NBA live streaming service.							

Each of the following statements on a seven-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree and concerns the **perceived viewing cost of online live streaming for sports content**.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I think Tencent NBA live streaming service that offer sports content are reasonably priced.							

I have no problem paying money to watch higher quality content on Tencent NBA live streaming service.							
I think the cost of using Tencent NBA live streaming services that offer sports content will make traditional television watching less entertaining.							
I think Tencent NBA live streaming service should offer more pricing options.							
I think the cost of Tencent NBA live streaming services provide me with a better financial value than traditional cable/satellite television services.							

Each of the following statements is on a seven-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree and concerns the **behavioural intention of online live streaming for sports content**.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
My general intention to use Tencent NBA live streaming service is very high.							
I recommend others use Tencent NBA live streaming service.							
I intend to increase my use of Tencent NBA live streaming service in the future.							
Whenever possible, I intend to use Tencent NBA live streaming service.							

Section 3

On a scale of 1-7, with one meaning “strongly disagree” and seven meaning “strongly agree” , rate your feeling regarding **your motivations for streaming NBA online.**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I stream NBA online because it gives me the opportunity to temporarily escape life' s problems							
I stream NBA online because it allows me to forget about my problems							
To me, streaming NBA online is like daydreaming because it takes me away from life' s hassles							
I stream NBA online because I get pumped up when I am watching my favourite team							
I like the stimulation I get from streaming NBA online							
I stream NBA online because I enjoy being physiologically aroused by the competition							
I stream NBA online because I enjoy the beauty and grace of sports;							
I stream NBA online for the artistic value							
I stream NBA online because to me NBA is a form of art.							
I like to stream NBA online because it gives me an opportunity to be with my family							
I like to stream NBA online because it gives me an opportunity to be with my spouse or significant others							
I stream NBA online because it makes me feel good when my team wins							
I enjoy streaming NBA online because it increases my self-							

esteem							
To me, my favourite team' s successes are my successes and their losses are my losses							
I stream NBA online because most of my friends are sports fans							
I stream NBA online because I am the kind of person who likes to be with other people							
I enjoy streaming NBA online more when I am with a large group of people							

Section 4

Sex

- 1 Male
- 2 Female

Age:

Place of residence

- 1 Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen
- 2 Capital cities of a province
- 3 Others

Educational level

- 1 High School
- 2 High School Graduate
- 3 Some college, No degree
- 4 Bachelor' s Degree
- 5 Graduate degrees (Masters, Doctorate, etc.)

Salary in the past year

- 1 None
- 2 Less than 100000 RMB
- 3 100000 to 150000 RMB
- 4 150000 to 500000 RMB
- 5 500000 to 1000000 RMB
- 6 More the 1000000 RMB

Appendice 2. Sample Survey Questionnaire (Chinese Version)

第一部分

1 你已年满 18 岁吗？

是
否

如果选择“是”，请去往 2.你正在通过 CCTV 或者腾讯观看 NBA 比赛吗？

如果选择“否”，该问卷调查终止。

2 你正在通过 CCTV 或者腾讯观看 NBA（美国篮球职业联赛）比赛吗？

- 是，我只通过 CCTV 观看 NBA 赛事
- 是，我只通过腾讯视频观看 NBA 赛事
- 是，我通过 CCTV 和腾讯观看 NBA 赛事
- 否，我从未在 CCTV 或腾讯观看过 NBA 赛事

如果选择“是”，请去往在分值 1-5 的评判标准里，请选择你观看 NBA 赛事直播的感受。

如果选择“否”，该问卷调查终止。

	强烈不同意	不同意	中立	同意	强烈同意
观看 NBA 赛事直播是我们要做的最重要事情之一。					
如果媒体上没有与 NBA 相关的内容，我会感觉很想念。					
在我的生活里，观看 NBA 直播很重要。					
数日看不到 NBA 赛事直播，我也觉得无所谓。					
没有 NBA 赛事直播的日子，我会感到生活很迷茫。					

在分值 1-5 的评判标准里，请选择你观看 NBA 赛事直播的感受。1 代表“强烈不同意”，5 代表“强烈同意”。

你观看 NBA 赛事转播有多少年了？（填写从 1-40）_____

你估计平均每天花多少小时在媒体上关注与 NBA 有关的内容？（填写从 0-24）_____

你购买腾讯会员观看 NBA 赛事直播有几年了？（填写从 1-6）_____

你打开“腾讯体育”获取与 NBA 有关内容的频率是多少？

- 每天数次
- 每天一次
- 每周几次
- 一周不超过一次
- 很少
- 从未

在如下分值 1-5 的评判标准里，请选择你主要通过“腾讯体育”app 关注与 NBA 有关的哪些内容？1 代表“不感兴趣”，5 代表“非常感兴趣”。

	1	2	3	4	5
比赛相关报道					
比赛时间表					
球队排名					
比赛集锦视频					
球员集锦视频					
赛后花絮					
纪录片					
用户自产内容					
球迷社区					
其他（请具体举例）					

你还通过哪些渠道关注 NBA 赛事？（可多选）

- 社交媒体（微博、微信、今日头条等）
- 报纸
- 城市电视台体育新闻
- 现场观战
- 广播
- 其他（请具体举例）

第二部分

在如下分值 1-5 的评判标准里，请对以下关于**使用体育赛事在线视频直播使用方便性**的陈述进行评价，1 代表“强烈不同意”，5 代表“强烈同意”。

	强烈不同意	不同意	中立	同意	强烈同意
相较于我花在观看传统电视直播体育赛事的时间，使用体育赛事在线视频直播更有益于我。					
我发现通过在线直播观看体育赛事很方便。					
我发现使用任意设备观看体育赛事在线视频直播很方便。					
包括室内和户外，我发现在任何地方通过在线直播观看体育赛事很方便。					

在如下分值 1-5 的评判标准里，请对以下关于**使用体育赛事在线视频直播观看质量**的陈述进行评价，1 代表“强烈不同意”，5 代表“强烈同意”。

	强烈不同意	不同意	中立	同意	强烈同意
我认为在线直播为体育赛事制视频直播提供了高质量的内容。					
体育赛事在线视频直播画面没有延迟、晃动和缓冲。					

我认为体育赛事在线视频直播所提供的内 容优于有线、卫星电视。					
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在如下分值 1-5 的评判标准里，请对以下关于**使用体育赛事在线视频直播所获快感**的陈述
进行评价，1 代表“强烈不同意”，5 代表“强烈同意”。

	强烈不同意	不同意	中立	同意	强烈同意
我认为体育赛事在线视频直播娱乐性很 高。					
我发现使用体育赛事在线视频直播很快 乐。					
体育赛事在线视频直播较有线和卫星电视 更有趣					

在如下分值 1-5 的评判标准里，请对以下关于**使用体育赛事在线视频直播社会性收益**的陈
述进行评价，1 代表“强烈不同意”，5 代表“强烈同意”。

	强烈不同意	不同意	中立	同意	强烈同意
我的朋友们认为我应该使用体育赛事在线 视频直播服务。					
我的绝大多数朋友在使用体育赛事在线视 频直播服务。					
拥有我所认可观念的人们优先使用体育赛 事在线视频直播服务。					

在如下分值 1-5 的评判标准里，请对以下关于**使用体育赛事在线视频直播花费**的陈述进行
评价，1 代表“强烈不同意”，5 代表“强烈同意”。

	强烈不同意	不同意	中立	同意	强烈同意
我认为提供体育赛事在线视频直播服务的 价格合理。					
对于需付钱观看高质量在线体育赛事视 频，我没有问题。					
我认为使用体育赛事在线视频直播服务的 开销将导致观看传统电视娱乐性降低。					
我认为体育赛事在线视频直播服务应该提 供更多价格选择。					
在经济价值方面，我认为体育赛事在线视 频直播为我提供了优于较传统有线、卫星 电视更好的服务。					

在如下分值 1-5 的评判标准里，请对以下关于**使用体育赛事在线视频直播行为意向**的陈述
进行评价，1 代表“强烈不同意”，5 代表“强烈同意”。

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
我使用体育赛事在线视频直播服务的整体 意向非常高。					
我推荐其他人使用在线体育赛事视频直 播。					

在未来，我打算加大体育赛事在线视频直播的使用。					
无论在哪里，只要有条件，我打算使用体育赛事在线视频直播服务。					

第三部分

在分值 1-7 的评分标准里，请选择你是否同意下面的陈述。1 代表“强烈不同意”，7 代表“强烈同意”。

	强 烈 不 同 意	非 常 不 同 意	不 同 意	中 立	同 意	非 常 同 意	强 烈 同 意
在线观看 NBA 赛事视频直播可以暂时让我逃离生活中遇到的问题。							
我使用在线视频直播观看 NBA 赛事，因为它让我忘记生活中的烦恼。							
对于我，使用在线视频直播观看 NBA 就像一场梦一样，它让我远离生活中的困扰。							
我使用在线视频直播观看 NBA，因为看到我喜欢球队的比赛时，我感到热血沸腾。							
我喜欢从在线视频体育直播中所得的刺激感。							
我在线观看 NBA 直播，因为我享受着那种生理上被比赛唤醒的感觉。							
我在线观看 NBA 视频直播，因为我喜欢这项运动的魅力与优雅。							
我现在观看 NBA，因为它的艺术价值。							
我在线观看 NBA 视频直播，因为对我来说 NBA 就是一门艺术。							
我喜欢在线 NBA 视频直播，因为它给了我和家人在一起的机会。							
我喜欢 NBA 在线视频直播，因为他给我和配偶以及其他重要人士在一起的机会。							
我在线观看 NBA 视频直播，因为当我的球队获胜时，我感觉非常好。							
我喜欢在线 NBA 视频直播，因为它能增加我的自尊心。							

对我来说，我喜欢的球队获胜就是我的胜利，他们的失利就是我的失败。							
我在线观看 NBA 视频直播，因为我的绝大多数朋友都是球迷。							
我在线观看 NBA 视频直播，因为我是那种想其他人保持一致的人。							
当我和很多人在一起时，我更喜欢在线观看 NBA 视频直播。							

第四部分

性别：
男
女
无可奉告

年龄：_____

居住地：
1 北上广深
2 省会城市
3 其他

教育程度：
1 高中在读
2 高中毕业
3 无学历技术培训在读
4 本科
5 硕士、博士

去年个人年收入
1 无
2 人民币少于 10 万
3 人民币 10 万至 15 万
4 人民币 15 万 50 万
5 人民币 50 万至 100 万
6 人民币 100 万以上

Appendice 3. Semi-structured Interview Guide (English Version)

Basic information
Age, Occupation, Martial status, Education level, Income (monthly), City of residence

General questions

- How many years have you watched the NBA? Why do you like watching the NBA?
- Do you think current NBA games are good to watch? Why? What factors are used to evaluate whether the NBA is good or not?
- If you were to use a scale of 1-7 to express your adoption of NBA live streaming service on digital media, which level would you be? Does this rating match how much you like the NBA itself? Why?
- Please share your thoughts on whether you have watched NBA games broadcast live on CCTV.
- How many years have you accessed the NBA through Tencent live streaming service? Please share your thoughts on Tencent live streaming service.
- Have you ever paid for Tencent to access Tencent live streaming service? If so, how much does it cost?
- Are you happy with the current services provided by Tencent NBA live streaming service? Please tell me how you feel?
- How do you generally plan your daily routine? How do you arrange your leisure activities on your days off?
- In addition to NBA games, what other content do you consume through digital media? Please discuss your feelings.

Topic 1 Media Digitization

- In the past seven years, when Tencent provided the NBA live streaming service, in what ways do you think it has changed your viewing habits? What is your understanding of the NBA games? Have you formed any new viewing habits?
- Please share your opinions on barrage in Tencent NBA live streaming service. Did you post text on barrages in Tencent NBA live streaming service? Do you turn on the barrage or turn it off when you access NBA games on Tencent? Why?
- Please discuss your opinions of female commentators on the Tencent NBA live streaming service.
- Please discuss your opinions on sending virtual gifts to female commentators on the Tencent NBA live streaming service. Have you ever given gifts to female anchors? Why?
- What are your comments about commentators selling merchandise on the Tencent NBA live streaming service? Under what circumstances would you purchase?
- Please share your opinions of NBA live commentary. Do you think it is biased in Tencent's NBA commentary?
- Would you access the NBA games without commentary? Or choose the original English commentary? Why?
- Do you think the pricing of Tencent NBA live streaming service is explained clearly? Talk about your opinions.
- Have you made income by consuming the Tencent live streaming service of NBA? If so, can you share your experience? If not, why not?
- What is the craziest thing you have done while consuming Tencent live streaming service?
- Where do you open Tencent Sports to access the NBA live streaming service?
- In Tencent NBA live streaming service, which advertisement impressed you the most? Why?
- What are the shortcomings of Tencent live streaming service of NBA? Why?

- When you consume NBA games through Tencent's streaming service, do you think the teams and players are more attractive to you or the media service itself?
- Can you imagine what your life would be like now without digital media?
- How do you use digital media to engage with the world? If you have ever experienced an era dominated by traditional media, what are the differences in access to information between the two?
- Why is digital media so important when you consume content related to sporting events?
- Have you joined the online NBA fan groups in China? If so, can you introduce the basic operation of this community?
- Will you use social media to interact with NBA players? Which NBA player's social media account do you follow the most? What types of content are you paying attention to? Please give examples.

Theme 2 Cultural Exchange

Is there your home team in the NBA? If so, which team? What are your criteria for choosing your home team? Player? Coach? Or the city where the team is located?

- Which pricing system in Tencent NBA live streaming service do you prefer? Why?
- What kind of relationship do you have with your home team? Will you spend money on your home team? What is your value of spending money on a team or player?
- In your mind, what are the characteristics of China's NBA culture? Please give examples.

Theme 3 Subjective Awareness

Do you think there are conflicts between China and the United States regarding relations between the two countries? If so, will these conflicts affect your passion for the NBA? Why?

- What are the Chinese elements in Tencent's NBA live broadcast that impressed you most?

Topic 4 Sports Diplomacy

- Do you understand "ping pong diplomacy"? Have you noticed the recent coverage of this event in the Chinese media? What is your comment on this?
- As a fan, how do you understand sport as a diplomatic tool? Is your attitude positive or negative about this? Why?

Appendice 4. Semi-structured Interview Guide (Chinese Version)

基本情况

年龄 职业 婚姻状况/子女情况 教育程度 收入状况/月 居住地

一般性问题

- 你观看 NBA 多少年了？为什么会喜欢看 NBA？
- 你觉得现在的 NBA 比赛好看吗？为什么？哪些因素用来评价 NBA 好不好看？
- 如果用 1-7 个等级来表示对数字媒体直播 NBA 的接受程度，你会是哪个等级？这个评级和你喜欢 NBA 本身的程度相匹配么？为什么？
- 如果有看过 CCTV 直播的 NBA 比赛，请谈谈你的观感。
- 你通过腾讯直播观看 NBA 有多少年了？请谈谈你对腾讯直播的观感。
- 你有为腾讯观看 NBA 直播付费过么？如果有，付费多少？

- 你对目前腾讯 NBA 直播提供服务满意吗？请谈谈你的感受？
- 你日常生活的工作日是怎么大致安排行程的？休息日，你都怎么安排自己的闲暇生活？
- 除了 NBA 直播，你通过数字媒体还会观看其他的哪些内容？请谈谈你的感受。

主题 1 媒介数字化

- 在过去 7 年腾讯直播 NBA 是的时间里，你觉得它在哪些方面改变了你的观看习惯？你对 NBA 的理解？或者是形成了什么新的观看习惯？
- 请谈谈你对 NBA 直播弹幕的印象。你会发弹幕吗？你是打开弹幕还是关闭看直播？为什么？
- 请谈谈你对 NBA 直播女解说的印象。
- 请谈谈你对主播刷礼物邀约的印象。那你有为女主播刷过礼物吗？为什么？
- 关于主播直播售卖周边，你是什么态度？什么情况下你会购买？
- 请谈谈你对 NBA 直播解说的印象。你觉得腾讯的解说员们有偏向吗？
- 你会选择无解说的直播版本吗？或者选择原声解说吗？为什么？
- 你认为腾讯直播 NBA 付费标准解释得清晰吗？谈谈你的印象。
- 你有因为通过观看腾讯直播 NBA 产出内容而挣到钱吗？如果有，可以分享经历吗？如果没有，为什么呢？
- 你看腾讯视频直播 NBA 时做的最疯狂的一件事情是什么？
- 你都会在哪些地方打开腾讯体育观看 NBA 直播？
- 腾讯直播 NBA，哪个广告给你印象最深刻？为什么？
- 腾讯直播的 NBA 有什么缺点？为什么？
- 通过腾讯直播观看 NBA 直播，你觉得是球队、球星对你的吸引力大还是媒介服务本身对你吸引力大？
- 如果没有数字媒体，能否想象一下你现在的的生活是什么样子？
- 你是如何使用数字媒体与世界接触？如果您曾经经历过传统媒体主导的时代，这两个时代有的信息接触有哪些差异？
- 当你消费与体育赛事有关的内容时，为什么数字媒体如此重要？
- 你是否加入了中国线上 NBA 球迷会？如果有，能否介绍一下这个社群的基本运行情况？
- 你会使用社交媒体与 NBA 球员互动吗？NBA 球员的社交媒体账号，你最关注谁？关注的内容包括哪些类型？请举例说明。

主题 2 文化交流

- 在 NBA 里，有你的主队吗？如果有，是哪一支球队？
- 你选择主队的标准是什么？球员？教练？球队所在城市？
- 你更喜欢哪一种腾讯 NBA 直播的付费方式？为什么？
- 你和你的主队有着什么样的感情？你会为你的这支主队花钱吗？花钱的标准的是什么？
- 在你心中，中国的 NBA 文化有什么特征？请举例说明。

主题 3 主体意识

- 你认为在两国关系问题上，中美之间目前是否存在波动？如果有，这些波动是否会影响你对 NBA 的热情？为什么？
- 你印象最深刻的腾讯直播 NBA 画面里的中国元素有哪些？

主题 4 体育外交

- 你了解“乒乓外交”吗？你是否注意到中国媒体近期对该事件的报道？对此，你有何评价？
- 作为一个球迷，你如何理解体育是一个外交工具？对此，你的态度是褒还是贬？为什么？