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**Chinese online literature: Cross-generation audience's attitudes to online paid reading
and piracy**

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by

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to analyze Chinese cross-generational audiences' attitude differences to online paid literature and digital piracy. The generation cohorts are divided into post-90s, post-80s, and post-70s which refer to the age group of 20-29, 30-39, and 40-49. In terms of methodology, this paper use pilot study to test the effectiveness of the survey and use online survey to gather the data needed. The comparison of percentage, mode, and average are used while analyzing the data. After the analysis, the result shows that Generation "post-90s" is most positive to online paid literature. However, their multiple ways to access pirated resources has big influence on it. This research also found that Generation "post-90s" is most positively supporting piracy and people are more willing to pay for genuine online literature while without access to free resources. This research is important because it gives the brief understanding of cross-generational audiences to the companies in this industry to help them make better decision in targeting and marketing.

Keywords: Chinese online literature; cross-generation; attitude; piracy.

INTRODUCTION

Chinese online literature (COL) is also called Chinese internet literature (CIL). COL contains variety types of e-books, for instance, the most popular one is fiction. Also some others like magazines, newspapers and journal articles are included. With the rise of COL commercialization, both individual and commercial pirate behavior occurred. The pirated websites make the genuine one losing a significant number of profit. There are lots of literatures related to the digital piracy such as pirated software, CDs, films and games. Besides, the topic of COL is used more frequently recently. Researchers analyzed the development of COL, the business opportunities COL brings, the influences of pirated websites caused, and the gender analysis of attitude differences. However, in the topic of COL, there has no literature analyzes the cross-generational audiences' attitude differences.

Due to the limitation of research resources, this paper just targets Chinese audiences. Based on Chinese history and COL background, generation cohorts are divided into post-70s, post-80s, and post-90s. Each generation has its unique characteristics and experiences contributed to different values and attitudes. The post-90s generation grew up with digital products such as mobile phones and computers. They are more closely linked to e-commerce and more knowledgeable with information technology. With the rapid economic development, the post-90s live in an abundant age with some pocket money which allows them to buy stuff they like. Different from the post-80s and post-70s, they've been exposed to e-books and e-payments since they were young. A lot of online writers targeting post-90s become popular. Therefore, that's interesting to discover whether the post-90s have different attitudes to online paid literature while comparing with the post-80s and the post-70s. Besides, it is helpful to analyze whether the post-90s are the most valuable generation in the online literature market. To solve this question, the information from all three generation

cohorts should be collected. In order to gather the data which can assess the public's attitudes, an online survey is used as the main method of this paper.

LITERATURE REVIEW - BACKGROUND

There appears to be numbers of literatures talk about Chinese online/internet literature which booming in late 20th century and early 21st century. Chinese online literatures gain incremental attentions from both writers and readers (Lugg, 2011). Many writers, like Han Han and Guo Jingming, target their audiences as high-school students and college students which account for the largest percentage of online readers (Lovell, 2012). Online community definitely not only be a platform for literature product, it plays a more important roles in Chinese online literature commercialization (Tse & Gong, 2012). The pirate online literature websites emerge in accompany with the arise of formal online literature industry (Ren & Montgomery, 2012). Due to the extremely low risk of being detected and sued by the legal publisher, a large amount of Chinese audiences silently support the commercial pirates and bring high profit to piracy industry (Ren & Montgomery, 2012; Tunca & Wu, 2013). A research related to Chinese software piracy shows that the users' perceived moral intensity influence their attitudes to piracy (Chan, Ma, & Wong, 2013). Another research based on Chinese pirated CDs uses demographic factors to analyze consumers attitude and intention to consume pirated goods (Kwong, Yau, Lee, Sin, & Tse, 2003). Later, an Indonesia research finding about the relationship between gender and attitude to digital piracy indicates that male has more positive attitude in digital piracy than female (Tjiptono, Arli, & Viviea, 2016).

Chinese online literature

Chinese online literature is mainly free or low-fee amateur fictions written by amateur writing enthusiasts (Lugg, 2011; Ren & Montgomery, 2012). In the past few decade, writing and publishing contents are filtered and dominated by user community rather than the magazines or the publishers (Lovell, 2012; Ren & Montgomery, 2012).

Online paid reading

Online reading becomes more and more popular nowadays. Due to the business opportunity of Chinese online literature market growing, the Chinese online literature commercialization emergence (Tse & Gong, 2012). Companies sign a contract with the writer to obtain the licensed online access to the literature which then be charged after readers finished the freemium part of literature. Freemium approach plus micropayment system is a successful business model which first emerged in 2003 created by Qidian company. The audiences are free to have a trial reading of several chapters of the fiction, while companies will realize the fiction's business value through the number of readers. However, after this, if audiences want to continue reading, they should pay few money for the upcoming chapters (Ren & Montgomery, 2012). Usually, pirated websites have unlicensed access and will show up many advertisements in the reading page (Ren & Montgomery, 2012).

Digital piracy

Many industries, like software, film and music industry, have huge loss every year because of digital piracy (Tjiptono et al., 2016). There are two types of digital goods piracy: individual piracy and commercial piracy. Individual piracy refers to the illegal copy and sharing of digital goods by consumers, while commercial piracy is the illegal copy and sale to consumers by the third party to earn profit (Tunca & Wu, 2013). According to Purwanto (2012), blocking illegal download site can not stop people pirating. In terms of internet literature, digital piracy contain the illegal copy, share and purchase of all kinds of e-books such as novels, magazines, journal articles and so on (Tjiptono et al., 2016).

Attention economy

Attention economy requires to draw readers attention in order to gain economic profit or material compensation (Lugg, 2011). With people's satisfaction of sufficient material, attention was developed into a profit-gaining product due to its scarcity (Lugg, 2011). Hence, the readers become both "the consumers and the products" (Ren & Montgomery, 2012).

Many pirate websites provides illegal access to genuine websites VIP content and generate revenue through advertising (Ren & Montgomery, 2012).

Motivation

There are huge numbers of Chinese piracy website to find the contents of fiction which are charged by the formal online literature website (Ren & Montgomery, 2012). Consumers usually make decisions by considering the cost and benefit of each available option. Online reading consumers can choose to purchase literature from legal publisher or commercial pirate, or some individuals who are “technologically savvy” can copy by themselves. The possibility to be detected and sued by the legal authority is extremely low for both individual piracy and commercial piracy (Tunca & Wu, 2013).

Generation Cohorts

People in same generation cohort have similar value and attitudes which are significantly influenced by the historic events they experienced as the grown-up (Ng, Helminger, & Wu, 2016). There is one generation cohorts model commonly used in America, divided into Baby Boomer, Generation X, Generation Y and Generation Z (Grenčíková & Vojtovič, 2017; Ng et al., 2016). However, as the target of this article is Chinese audience, the model should be a Chinese model. After an intricate analysis of significant Chinese historical events, Ng et al. (2016) put forward a Chinese generation cohorts model, which divided into 3 main periods, the era with limited choice, the great Gatsby and the dreamers. However, Ng’s model is mostly based on the political change, such as the change of chairman. Meanwhile, the period divided by this model is not suit for this research. Hence, here comes one popular generation cohorts in China. The generation cohorts are divided by every ten years into post-70s (1970-1979), post-80s (1980-1989), post-90s (1990-1999) and post-00s (2000-2009).

The post-1970s received orthodox socialist values and education of Chinese traditional culture in his adolescence (Zhao, 2019). After 1985, they received all-round impact from the introduction of western culture, which resulted in a profound conflict of values (Zhao, 2019). The post-80s and post-90s youth are the generation growing up after the reformation and in the stage of deep modernization (Bao, 2019). They have totally different growth environment and growth experience from the post-70s. Also, they are different from each other. The post-80s is the first generation in China to contact the Internet (Zhang, 2019). The internet is a very important partner for the growth of the post-80s. The post-90s were born in a period of rapid economic development in China and has experienced the process of the popularization of the Internet in the public life in China (Zhang, 2019; Zhao, 2019). If the "post-90s" are the "Internet" indigenous generation, then the "Post-00" is the "mobile Internet" indigenous generation (Zhang, 2019).

STATEMENT OF HYPOTHESIS

With different ages, consumers have different interests, demands and attitudes (Herrando, Jimenez-Martinez, & Hoyos, 2019; San-Martín, Prodanova, & Jiménez, 2015). Age has a significant relationship with people's attitude towards the innovation, also the original product and pirated products (Kwong et al., 2003). The younger generation are more likely and easily to accept the innovation and change such as mobile shopping (San-Martín et al., 2015). Besides, one research related to information technology issue suggested that the older the people are, the more opposition they have for immoral or unethical issues like IT unethical actions (Peslak, 2008).

Based on the existing idea and research results reported above, the following hypotheses are formulated.

Research Question (RQ): What are the attitude differences between cross-generation Chinese audiences to online paid literature and piracy?

H1: Regarding online paid literature.

1a – Generation “Post-70s” has most negative attitude to online paid reading.

1b – Generation “Post-90s” has most positive attitude to online paid reading.

H2: Regarding digital literature piracy.

2a – Gen post-90s are more positive than Gen post-80s to support piracy.

2b – Gen post-90s are more positive than Gen post-70s to support piracy.

METHODOLOGY

Pilot Study - Qualitative Method

Interviews with three generations will be conducted in pilot studies to figure out the most useful and frequent responses to research questions. Through phone-call, WeChat and in-person interview, every generation cohort has three participants (total 9) attended this pilot study. Pilot study can help researcher to test and refine methodology (Schachtebeck, Groenewald, & Nieuwenhuizen, 2018). In this article, pilot study is used to testing the clarity of questions and sufficiency of answers in the survey.

Online Survey (Quantitative Method)

A survey will be designed in accordance with pilot study and previous related research design (Chan et al., 2013). The survey will be handed out online. Because this research aims to analyze people’s attitude, as a common tool to assess public opinions, online survey is an appropriate method (Lee, Benoit-Bryan, & Johnson, 2012). Compared with the traditional offline survey, online survey have the advantage of timeliness, respondent convenience, low cost, forced answering of questions, and so on (Roster, Rogers, Hozier, Baker, & Albaum, 2007). The claim of anonymity and confidentiality is put at the very beginning of the survey. Then, there is first question about age or year of birth to distribute everyone into their groups (post-70s, post-80s, and post-90s). The total number of survey collected are 238 which contains 86 males and 152 females. Besides, the number of “post-

70s” and “post-80s” participants are respectively 44 and 49, while the number of post 90s participants is 122. The rest is out-ranged participants consist of 16 from “post-00” and “7 from post-60”. They have answered all the following questions that ask about their opinion. Further analysis will process on the base of this survey result.

1. Survey Question on Motivation to Online Paid Reading.

Six options were presented as possible responses for the question :

- Quality
- Copyright
- Advertisement Interference
- Idols
- Variety of books
- No access to pirate

All responses above are the most frequent response from the pilot study. The frequencies are 8 out of 9, 6 out of 9, 6 out of 9, 4 out of 9, 9 out of 9, and 4 out of 9.

2. Survey Question on Online Literature Piracy.

Seven considerations were provided to find out people’s attitudes to piracy:

- Congregational psychology
- Personal benefit / Price
- Quality
- Variety access to pirate
- Anti-big business attitude
- The emergence of mobile network disk
- Ethical issue / copyright

In combination of pilot study and literature review, there are six factors influence consumers’ attitudes towards piracy. The benefits and costs of commercial piracy and

individual piracy are different. Every component above leads to different thoughts and attitudes to the goodness or badness of piracy (Kwong et al., 2003). The options above all come from literature review and have a relatively high frequency in polit study.

3. Survey Question on the Approach to Gain the Literature

Based on the frequency of repeated responses in the Pilot Study, five approaches below are used to access the pirated literature in China. Because these five are most frequently answer be chosen or added by my 9 participants. The frequencies are 6 out of 9, 5 out of 9, 5 out of 9, 5 out of 9, and 4 out of 9 respectively.

- Browser Search
- Search in a specific website
- Software Search
- Sharing through friends (Baidu Cloud network disk)
- Taobao

With the rapid developmet of internet, e-commerce grows fast nowadays. As a creative industry, online literature organization has rival competition with its official and pirated competitors. The commercial piracy gained huge benefits which cause high loss of the official online literature. These five ways may not include all due to the limitation of pilot study and the diversity of online reading approach.

ANALYSIS / RESULTS

A total of 238 online survey questionnaire responses were collected. Table 1 shows the fundamental information of the data which separated into different gender and different age groups. The group of age 0-19, 20-29, 30-39, 40-49 refer to the post-00s, post-90s, post-80s, and post-70s respectively, while the 50+ represents people born before 1970. Due to the limitation of data, the age group of 0-19 and 50+ will not be analyzed in this article.

	0-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total
Male	4	48	13	18	3	86
Female	12	74	36	26	4	152
Total	16	122	49	44	7	238

Table 1: Age distribution

Table 2 shows the percentage of the first choice to get online literature with different age groups. The most preferred way for people to access online resources is free genuine reading which gains the highest score in all three generation cohorts (63.93%, 83.67%, 81.82%). However, the post-90s has a relatively high percentage (21.31%) of using the free pirated resource as their first approach to online literature, which considered to be the reason the post-90s have the lowest percentage on free genuine resource compare with the post-80s and the post-70s.

	20-29	%	30-39	%	40-49	%	Total
<i>First approach to OL</i>							
Genuine resource (paid)	15	12.30%	5	10.20%	4	9.09%	24
Genuine resource (free)	78	63.93%	41	83.67%	36	81.82%	155
Pirated resource (paid)	3	2.46%	2	4.08%	1	2.27%	6
Pirated resource (free)	26	21.31%	1	2.04%	3	6.82%	30
Total	122	100.00%	49	100.00%	44	100.00%	215

Table 2: Distribution of first approach to online literature with age comparison

Similarly, Table 3 shows the percentage of the second choice to get online literature with different age groups. People are more likely to accept paying genuine resources than pirated resource whether in which generation cohorts. The result of the second approach question shows that the post-80s and post-70s are more possible to pay for the genuine resource than to access the free pirated resources. However, the post-90s are more prefer to access free pirated resources which account for the largest part of the second approach to them.

	20-29	%	30-39	%	40-49	%	Total
<i>Second approach to OL</i>							
Genuine resource (paid)	32	26.23%	22	44.90%	18	40.91%	72
Genuine resource (free)	36	29.51%	14	28.57%	15	34.09%	65
Pirated resource (paid)	6	4.92%	0	0.00%	1	2.27%	7
Pirated resource (free)	48	39.34%	13	26.53%	10	22.73%	71
Total	122	100.00%	49	100.00%	44	100.00%	215

Table 3: Distribution of second approach to online literature with age comparison

Table 4 shows that the most popular way to pirated resources is browser search (61.40%), while the second one is friends sharing through network disk (60.00%). The post-90s have the biggest percentage in both using browsers search and sharing though friends (73.77% & 62.30%). Meanwhile, in all aspects, the post-90s have a higher percentage than the average and they are more likely to have more ways to access the pirated resources.

Ways	20-29	%	30-39	%	40-49	%	All ages
Browser Search	90	73.77%	16	32.65%	26	59.09%	61.40%
Search in a specific website	48	39.34%	14	28.57%	5	11.36%	31.16%
Software Search	38	31.15%	9	18.37%	10	22.73%	26.51%
Sharing through friends	76	62.30%	28	57.14%	25	56.82%	60.00%
Taobao	44	36.07%	17	34.69%	16	36.36%	35.81%
Number of ways	20-29	%	30-29	%	40-49	%	
1	37	30.33%	28	57.14%	20	45.45%	
2	36	29.51%	11	22.45%	12	27.27%	
3	21	17.21%	7	14.29%	10	22.73%	
4	16	13.11%	2	4.08%	2	4.55%	
5	12	9.84%	1	2.04%	0	0.00%	
Total	122	100.00%	49	100.00%	44	100.00%	

Table 4: Ways and number of ways to pirate with age comparison

Without considering the order of approach choice, Table 5 using the average and the mode indicates the degree of different factor influence to the pirated online reading with age comparison. The mode indicates that quality (5 = strongly agree) is the most reasonable factor leads people to genuine online literature and has the most significant influence on the post-70s. Furthermore, there is a finding to prove the result that the post-90s has the highest pirated percentage (23.77% & 44.26%) concluded from Table 2 and 3. The data of average shows that whether they can get a free resource to have the biggest influence while they have

no idea how to pirate has the lowest influence in post-90s comparing with the post-80s and post-70s.

<i>Factors lead to pirated OL</i>	<i>Average</i>			<i>Mode</i>		
	<i>20-29</i>	<i>30-39</i>	<i>40-49</i>	<i>20-29</i>	<i>30-39</i>	<i>40-49</i>
copyright	3.885	3.694	3.841	4	4	4
quality	3.869	3.878	4.386	5	5	5
idols	3.221	2.918	3.205	3	4	3
no free resource	3.721	3.490	3.386	3&4	3&4	3
advertisement	3.566	3.653	3.682	4	4	4
no idea to pirate	3.041	3.347	3.500	3	3	3

Table 5: Degree of factor influences with age comparison (genuine)

Similar with Table 5, Table 6 shows the degree of different factor influence to the pirated online reading with age comparison. According to the mode and average of influence degree, the factors lead people to pirated online literature are most likely the cheaper/free price and the emergence of mobile network disk, especially for the post-90s. Moreover, copyright consideration and the disturb of advertisements do not positively relate to access to pirated online literature.

<i>Factors lead to pirated OL</i>	<i>Average</i>			<i>Mode</i>		
	<i>20-29</i>	<i>30-39</i>	<i>40-49</i>	<i>20-29</i>	<i>30-39</i>	<i>40-49</i>
It's cheaper/free.	3.885	3.612	3.432	4	4	3
There are lots of pirated resources.	3.598	3.122	3.273	3	3	3
I don't care about copyright.	2.869	2.816	2.932	3	3	3
The emergence of mobile network disk (e.g. Baidu Cloud).	3.631	3.265	3.591	4	4	3
I don't mind the advertisement on pirated website.	2.705	2.551	2.568	3	3	3&4
I have anti-big business attitude.	2.246	2.592	2.909	2	3	3
Many people use pirated resources (Group psychology).	3.090	3.122	3.432	3	3	3

Table 6: Degree of factor influences with age comparison (pirated)

FINDINGS

The result of the first approach to online reading proves that both H1a and H1b are correct. Generation “Post-90s” has most positive attitude to online paid reading, while Generation “Post-70s” has most negative attitude (90s: 12.30%, 80s: 10.20%, 70s: 9.09%). However, the result of second approach to online reading conflicts with that, mostly because the post-80s and post-70s lack of knowledge to get pirated resources. After the analysis, there is no doubt that H2a and H2b are correct. For example, the percentage of the post-90s to

choose pirated resources as first/second approach is highest of the three generations. All relevant information shows that Generation “Post-90s” is more positive than both Generation “Post-80s” and Generation “Post-70s” to support piracy.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, both two hypotheses are proved to be correct through the online survey. Different age groups have different attitudes to online paid reading and literature piracy. Generation “Post-90s” has the most positive attitudes to both online paid reading and online literature piracy. “Post-80s” and “Post-70s” are less open to pay for online reading and less knowledgeable for piracy. Hence, the support of “Post-80s” and “Post-70s” to online paid reading and piracy is less than the “Post-90s”. This research fills the blank of the age’s influences on people’s attitudes of online paid literature and piracy, which can provide a better understanding of the Chinese online literature market.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

There has data limitation because the data is just collected online within one week through WeChat and QQ. The participants are mostly people in and around writer’s friends cycle, especially the post-90s generation is mostly college student. Also, this article didn’t consider the diversity of occupation, social-level, and so on. The independent variable of this research is generation, hence, this paper only solved Chinese audiences’ attitude differences in cross-generation. There are many other factors such as income, occupation, family status influenced by age and contribute to personal value. Consequently, all these factors can be considered in future research.

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