

CESUO AS NONHUMAN ONLINE FAN PERSONA ON WEIBO

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ABSTRACT

As media platforms expand, fan communities reshape both the industry and the ways to interact. Cesuo [厕所, toilet], unlike algorithmic social bots, is user-operated: real individuals enforce norms, moderate content, and coordinate discourse—while mimicking bot-like behaviour. This distinctive form of information exchange in Chinese internet culture plays a dual role in fandom, functioning as both an organisational tool and a mechanism of identity regulation. As a fan NHOP, Cesuo represents a digital persona decoupled from individual identity, enabling collective performance through personal accounts. This study identifies key traits of fan NHOPs in Cesuo: rulemaking, anonymity, use of fan-specific slang and memes, and emotional engagement via fan paratexts. Drawing on qualitative analysis of two representative Cesuo accounts, the research examines their construction, operation, and embedded power structures. By engaging with and extending the NHOP framework, it argues that Cesuo enables fans to forgo individual identity in favour of shared persona, fostering emotional resonance and a sense of belonging. Though it may appear as a single bot-like entity, Cesuo is a collaborative creation.

KEY WORDS

Cesuo, Chinese Fandom, Fan emotion, Persona, Fan slang

INTRODUCTION

In an era marked by the proliferation of media platforms, fan cultures continue to grow and evolve, becoming a defining feature of contemporary media engagement (Stanfill, 2019). One of the most striking developments is the “fanisation” of Chinese social media (Gray et al., 2017), where intense fan activity, hate behaviour, and organized practices dominate celebrity fandom (Yin & Xie, 2024, p. 622). Platforms like Weibo, resembling Twitter, meet fandom’s demand for low-cost identity construction, social connection, and information sharing, fostering emotional bonds and cross-regional friendships (Zhang & Pentina, 2012; You, 2013; Huang & Sun, 2014). *Cesuo* emerged within this context, shaped by Weibo’s role as a fandom hub. As a new form of user-generated content redistribution, *Cesuo* has become a widespread form in fan practices. Through two case studies, this paper identifies key features of *Cesuo*: anonymity, use of fan slang and memes, suppression of individual identity,

promotion of collective persona, and the production of paratexts as a form of emotional labour.

Sina Weibo is a Chinese social media site that provides a platform for users to share pictures and text, with a 140-character limit, much like Twitter (Roberts & Koliska, 2017). Yu, Asur, and Huberman (2011) found that people tend to use Sina Weibo to share jokes, images, and videos; a significant percentage of posts are retweets (Yu et al., 2011). In contrast, they found that mainstream media and current events had a much greater influence on trending topics on Twitter. This finding is consistent with previous research on Twitter and other social media, which has shown a significant influence by mainstream media sources (Asur, Huberman, Szabo, and Wang, 2011), indicating a more grassroots nature and authoritarian governance on Weibo. Social media in China exists in a somewhat contradictory state, being both the site of vast user participation and subject to censorship by monitors who redact unwanted content from sites (Mina, 2014).

Scholars have consistently examined Weibo fans' online identities. Yin (2020) highlighted Weibo's community-building features—*Chaohua* (super topics), chat groups, and *Resou* (trending)—emphasising data fans' digital labour in generating *liuliang* (data traffic) and the emotional rewards and sense of belonging it fosters. In later work with Xie (2024), she identified fans' collective participation in a "Platform Language Game," arguing that constructing an idol fan identity requires engaging in this shared discourse and co-producing platform logic. Weibo fandom also increasingly intersects with political discourse. For instance, Jiang et al. (2022) linked fan practices to real-world agency, showing a rise in donation activity among celebrities and fans during the pandemic. Similarly, Huang et al. (2023) analysed cancel culture on Weibo, framing it as a form of direct political participation. Existing research often centres on idol fandoms, focusing on platform governance, algorithms, and micro-influencers, while overlooking other fan communities due to their digital opacity and alternative forms of expression. This is particularly evident in studies of data fan organizations, where fandom diversity is often ignored. Shifting focus to non-data fans and their distinct uses of Weibo reveals alternative identity constructions and fan production practices.

Before examining *Cesuo*, it is important to consider its precursor—the Bot. Social media bots originated as automated Twitter accounts connected to databases, enabling scheduled posts and interactions (Gao, 2021). These programs, varying in autonomy, are designed to mimic human behaviour and engage users. A well-known example is the Big Ben account (@thebigbenclock), created in 2010, which tweets "BONG" hourly to replicate the clock's chime. While bots are often linked to political manipulation, market disruption, and misinformation in algorithmic studies (Ferrara et al., 2016), their role on platforms like Weibo has shifted. Many Weibo bots are manually operated by real human users who simulate robotic behaviour, targeting specific audiences, interests, or emotional states. Drawing on the bot account culture prevalent on Twitter (Gao, 2021; Yurenbengbeng, 2019), manually operated bots on Weibo deliberately emulate the attributes of genuinely automated bots. A particularly salient indicator of this performative practice can be observed in their naming conventions: these accounts typically structure their user IDs in the format "[domain

name] + bot,” thereby signalling their alignment with the broader bot culture. These accounts serve as digital spaces where strangers gather under the robot persona to share genuine experiences and emotions within a performative framework.

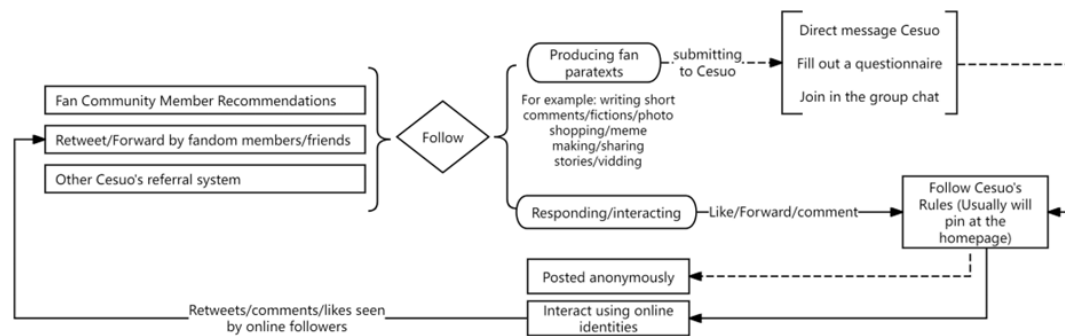


Figure 1: Flowchart of how users use *Cesuo*

Compared to bots established across diverse lifestyle and interest domains, *Cesuo* platforms are more concentrated within fan culture contexts. Their establishment methods mirror those of bots, yet they do not adhere to conventional bot naming conventions. Instead, most *Cesuo* accounts employ more covert names, as exemplified by the two accounts examined in this research. Unlike bots, *Cesuo* operates with greater subtlety, relying heavily on insider language that limits accessibility to non-fans. Account names are often cleverly constructed, referencing the fandom’s themes while functioning as inside jokes intelligible only to dedicated followers. The term *Cesuo* (厕所, "toilet") is metaphorical: activities within these communities are described as “using the toilet,” suggesting both the private, sometimes crude nature of the content and the fandom’s self-deprecating humour. *Cesuo* accounts generally fall into two categories: those uniting fans around a specific cultural text—often in anime, idol, or game fandoms—and those offering a space for emotional venting (Chen, 2023). This study focuses on the former, in line with its fan studies framework.

As illustrated in Figure 1, *Cesuo* and bots share similar operational models: both accept submissions under set guidelines, review content, and publish through a central account. Fans follow *Cesuo* for various reasons, either contributing paratexts anonymously or engaging with posts—all within the boundaries of *Cesuo* norms. Themed accounts often centre on particular shows, games, or music—for instance,

@voughtinternationalcoweloveyou [沃特公司我们喜欢你] for *The Boys* (2019–),

@guidebot tocareersforpostgradchemical&lawstudents [化学法学研究生未来就业指南

bot] for *Breaking Bad* (2008–2013) and *Better Call Saul* (2015–2022), or on identity-based

fandom accounts like @ haveyoufem-self-shippershadenough [梦女你们闹够了没] and

@schoolperformingartsatseniorcentre [夕阳美兰亭雅舍老头太学表演系]. This study

prioritizes these identity-centred accounts, focusing on collective performance over media content.

This study examines two representative examples of *Cesuo* accounts, namely @haveyoufem-self-shippershadenough [梦女你们闹够了没] and @schoolperformingartsatseniorcentre [夕阳美兰亭雅舍老头太学表演系]. Content published on *Cesuo* accounts is drawn from anonymous submissions by other users and is released in a “de-personalised” manner. Taking @haveyoufem-self-shippershadenough as an example, this *Cesuo* standardizes all submissions into a specific format that eliminates personal references: [Anti/Against “反”] + content. Figure 2 demonstrates one such straightforward submission frequently encountered on @haveyoufem-self-shippershadenough. These submissions are typically concise; for instance, the example in Figure 2 consists merely of a rhetorically charged question expressing dissatisfaction, designed to spark further discussion in the comment section.



Figure 2 The sample of submissions in @HYFSHE

***CESUO*: INDIVIDUALLY COLLECTIVE AND COLLECTIVELY INDIVIDUAL**

Cesuo embodies a dual, seemingly paradoxical identity: it is both a communal space open to fan submissions and a singular account managed by an individual fan. Its collective nature resembles an anonymous, human-operated hashtag—both are fan-driven structures built using platform tools. In fan communities, hashtags are often used with notable sophistication. On platforms like Tumblr, thematic tags not only increase visibility but also foster connections among users with shared interests, sometimes becoming content in their own right (Stein, 2017). While hashtags typically help users expand their audience and shift from micro-publics to broader collectives (Barbour et al., 2017), they lack the capacity for uncensored, niche, and tightly targeted communication. In this context, *Cesuo* fills that gap, offering a more controlled and intimate channel for fandom expression.

In response to specific needs within fandom, this research finds that *Cesuo* has developed as a specialized platform offering a discreet, tailored space for fan interaction and expression. As shown in Figure 1, contributors remain anonymous to other users, and fans can access relevant content simply by following a *Cesuo* account aligned with their interests. The *Cesuo* persona emerges through fans’ private, anonymous submissions, with rule adherence and linguistic conventions functioning as performances of collective identity. Relying on its fanbase, *Cesuo* constructs a unified Nonhuman Online Persona (NHOP) to manage and curate content, parodying a bot-like presence to mitigate censorship risks.

Nimmo (2017) identifies three markers of bot-like behaviour: high activity, anonymity, and amplification. Activity level—the frequency of posts—is often the clearest sign of automation; anonymity indicates minimal personal information; amplification refers to boosting others' content through reposts. *Cesuo* mimics the first two traits. It posts regularly, clearing submissions on a consistent schedule, and maintains strict anonymity. As illustrated in Figure 1, *Cesuo* provides no personal details. While administrators occasionally break character, they typically refer to themselves not as "I" but as *Pi Xia* (皮下, "under-the-skin"), signalling a separation between the human operator and the *Cesuo* persona. For example, @schoolofperformingartsatseniorcentre will sometimes "flash appear" to warn users to be cautious with submissions, hinting at risks of reporting, review, or account suspension. Ultimately, *Cesuo* binds individual expression to collective will, blurring their boundaries while continually adapting its rules to preserve this fusion.

PERSONA-INFLECTED FANDOM AND NHOP

Marshall, Moore, and Barbour (2019, p. 3) define the online persona as a collection of digital objects publicly projecting individuality toward a collective, serving as a means of integrating the self into larger social formations. As such, a persona operates as a conduit through which individuals engage with collectives, shaped by both human and non-human actors (Moore, 2020). These personae may function autonomously or emerge from collaborative performances. Drawing from John Fiske, Michel de Certeau, and Dick Hebdige, Marshall, Moore and Barbour (2015) identify two dimensions of *style* within persona construction: the expression of self through symbolic assemblage, and adherence to recognizable genres for public legibility.

In today's digital landscape, Stanfill (2019) argues that fan has become a social reality—fan terminology is now widely used as a form of positive self-identification. Jenkins, Ito, and Boyd (2015) further suggest that fan identity has evolved into a kind of cultural capital, often surpassing traditional markers of social status within participatory cultures. Hills (2002) emphasizes that fan culture is neither purely collective nor entirely individual—it is both discovered and constructed. This aligns fan studies with persona studies in recognising the ongoing interplay between personal performance and collective identity. Fan personae may appear as literal masks in practices like cosplay, but more often they consist of curated physical and digital artifacts that act as indices of identity (Moore, 2020).

From this perspective, shared fandom accounts like *Cesuo* align with the collectively constructed persona described by Marshall, Moore, and Barbour (2015), wherein "a persona can inhabit a collective sense of self... across a shared group of people" (p. 3). Such personae often arise from a collective will, are presented through a unified interactive interface, and serve communal purposes—examples include game characters, parody accounts, virtual influencers, and other Non-Human Online Personas (NHOP). NHOPs represent coherent digital presences not directly tied to a single human being. These may include brands, locations, or artificial intelligence.

NHOPs also follow Moore, Barbour, and Lee's (2017) five dimensions of online persona: public, mediatized, performative, collective, and intentionally constructed. Recent

work in persona studies has begun exploring NHOPs across various forms—podcasts, robots, and fictional characters (Connell & Moore, 2023; Holland, 2021; Connell, 2024). Holland (2021) was the first to fully integrate non-human personae into the field, examining how NASA’s Opportunity Rover was shaped into a collective persona through user-generated digital postcards. This case reframes NHOP not as a fixed identity, but as a dispersed, collaborative construct. Building on this, Connell (2024) analysed the character Aloy from the *Horizon* video game series, exploring how fans co-create NHOP through intertextual, interactive, and paratextual practices.

Another concept related to NHOP is the “virtual persona,” commonly represented by “virtual influencers” in marketing. Virtual influencers are computer-generated figures deliberately designed to resemble humans, enabling them to build connections with consumers similar to those of traditional influencers and thereby exert comparable influence (Kumar and Aravamudhan, 2023), providing brands with a means to humanize their digital presence and foster stronger emotional ties with consumers. Both virtual influencers and artificial intelligence are artificially constructed, interactive personae. Yet they differ from *Cesuo* in two respects: first, while virtual influencers and AI are “programs and machine-generated content imitating humans,” *Cesuo* represents the reverse, namely, “humans imitating machine-generated content.” Second, unlike virtual influencers, which serve commercial purposes and consumer engagement, *Cesuo* is a community communication tool jointly created by administrators and fans, with its NHOP collectively developed and lacking explicit commercial intent.

Intertextuality refers to the ways texts connect through citation, imitation, adaptation, satire, and other forms of reference. Intercommunicativity expands this by emphasising the ongoing exchange and interaction between texts. Genette (1991) introduced *paratexts* as the “packaging” around a core text—titles, prefaces, footnotes, covers, advertisements—that shape how a text is interpreted. These elements guide, influence, or even manipulate readers’ understanding. Ng’s (2018) symbolic capital model integrates both industry professionals and fans into the production of paratexts, recognising the growing importance of fan-generated contributions. In digital spaces, paratextual practices now reflect complex relationships among fans, media content, and creators. As Moore et al. (2017) and Moore (2020) note, such practices deeply influence emotional engagement and community formation. Through creating and sharing unofficial texts and paratexts, fans cultivate professionalized personas and build shared textual experiences (Highfield, 2016).

Paratextuality is also essential to NHOP assemblages, where it reflects the socio-cultural layers embedded in their construction (Connell, 2024). Like *Cesuo*, parody accounts mimic public figures or fictional characters, creating memes, and posting in-character responses to real-world events (Highfield, 2016). These accounts blur the lines between performance and persona, enabling fans to collectively produce content and identities within digital fandoms.

Fan personas are inherently dialectical, encompassing both emotional and political dimensions. Fandom practices align with Barbour’s (2015) three-tiered model of persona construction: the professional level emphasizes autonomy, skill display, and innovation; the

personal level engages in challenging norms and systems; and the intimate level highlights emotional intensity and sensitivity. This framework reflects the dual nature of fan identity, where symbolic expression merges political resistance with emotional attachment. For instance, Russo (2017) warns against interpreting slash fiction solely as queer resistance, noting the importance of its entanglement with entertainment industry dynamics. Similarly, Popova (2018) shows that fans operate on affective, emotional, and intellectual planes, using their enjoyment as a tool for social critique.

A CASE STUDY OF @HYFSHE AND @SPASC

This study analyses two *Cesuo* accounts with sufficient data for case studies. Unlike accounts tied to specific fan sites (e.g., celebrities or media franchises), both selected *Cesuos* cater to broader fan categories, fostering interaction across diverse fandoms and making them particularly representative. The cases are @ haveyoufem-self-shippershadenough [梦女你们闹够了没] and @schoolofperformingartsatseniorcentre [夕阳美兰亭雅舍老头太学表演系], both explicitly labelled as *Cesuo* accounts. Account names, profile images, and content were manually collected, covering the period from January 1 to July 31, 2024. Initial observations included pinned posts, avatars, background visuals, posting frequency, and timing, which informed the accounts' submission and management rules. Posts with over 300 likes were reviewed and thematically grouped; repetitive themes were removed as new ones emerged until thematic saturation was reached. Each account yielded a dataset of 100 posts, coded and categorized using NVivo 14. Thematic Analysis (TA), as defined by Braun and Clarke (2006), guided the process, allowing both inductive and theoretically informed approaches. To ensure ethical compliance and anonymity, only textual content was collected, with additional screening to exclude suspected underage users and posts involving explicit content. The final dataset included 200 posts along with interaction metrics (likes, shares, comments).



梦女你们闹够了没 8-28 01:18 已编辑

投稿须知: 微博正文
 小号防走丢: 梦女我们不要闹了的主页
 九月互卢贴: 微博正文
 爱看可买:
 小玩具 特别好用: 微博正文
 润培护手霜 沐浴露 身体乳 有八折券: 微博正文
 骂梦文案合集: 微博正文

submission rules: link
 alternative account: link
 friends-making place: link
 Adverts for discounted goods (Cesuo's finance income): link
 templates for dissing selfshippers: link

请注意文字投稿格式以及
 照片素人id面部打码

please mind the form of submission and facial
 mosaics for non-public figures

QR code for filling the submission
 questionnaire

Figure 3: The Pinned Post of @ haveyoufem-self-shippersshadenough [梦女你们闹够了没]

Rules Come First

Analysis of two *Cesuo* accounts shows that their public interfaces—usernames, avatars, backgrounds, descriptions, and pinned posts—convey substantial information. These elements fall into two main categories: identity markers (e.g., avatars, usernames) that distinguish each *Cesuo*, and rule-based content that defines submission protocols, language and formatting guidelines, and interaction norms. @haveyoufem-self-shippersshadenough (abbreviated as @HYFSHE) centres on anti-fem-self-shipping discourse. The term “Fem-self-shipper,” from the Japanese *Yumejoshi* (夢女子, “dreaming girl”), describes women who imagine personal relationships—romantic, platonic, or familial—with fictional characters or public figures. These fans often create anime-style avatars and produce narrative or visual content to express these fantasies. In contrast, anti-fem-self-shippers reject this practice and constitute @HYFSHE’s core community. With 290,000 followers and Weibo verification (comparable to X’s blue checkmark), @HYFSHE’s pinned post contains key links, including *Cesuo* rules and post templates (see Figure 2). Submission guidelines specify eligibility (excluding fem-self-shippers), acceptable content (anti-fem-self-shipping), formats (e.g., blurring faces or usernames), and the operational model (*Cesuo* does not moderate but posts directly). The avatar—a girl holding a sign that reads, “Even without sister-in-law, [your bro] won’t date you either”—satirizes unrealistic celebrity fantasies, reinforcing the account’s oppositional stance. A QR code in the pinned image links to the submission form and reiterates major rules. The background image features a screenshot captioned “who’s next to me,” adding another layer of irony to the interface.

@schoolperformingartsatseniorcentre (hereafter @SPASC), a Weibo-verified entertainment blogger with 31,000 followers, centres on older male actors and cultivates a niche fan community where followers humorously refer to themselves as “gerontophile patients.” Its avatar includes the subtitle “Hook up with elderly,” and the background is a modified banner reading “Causing trouble for social elderly,” with “social” erased—playfully subverting the original text to reflect self-deprecating humour. Like @HYFSHE, @SPASC’s pinned post outlines submission rules emphasising discretion and self-censorship, reflecting concerns over platform moderation. The account also curates a campaign board linking industry events and fan activities via hashtags. A sense of intimacy is cultivated through affectionate terms like “husbands” for followers, while submission and interaction are guided by detailed protocols.

In line with Moore’s (2017) persona framework and Connell’s (2024) analysis of NHOPs in gaming contexts, fan practices operate within platform-specific constraints and cultural norms. Connell et al. (2024) note that NHOPs express themselves through the affordances and restrictions of technology, policy, and cultural expectations. Platform moderation—through terms of service, algorithmic filtering, or human oversight—shapes how online characters appear and behave (Marshall, Moore and Barbour, 2019). For example, forums like *r/cyberpunkgame* enforce rules that structure user participation. Similarly, *Cesuo*’s internally established guidelines reflect not only external regulation but also the fan

community's proactive role in setting up roles and maintaining order within these mediated spaces.

April 32nd: Anonymity as Intimacy

Anonymity is a defining feature of *Cesuo*. Fans often create distinct online personae using semi-pseudonyms or ambiguous names, keeping their real-world identities separate (Moore, 2020). *Cesuo*'s naming strategy refers to the way of depersonalisation, which differs from individual fan profiles, focusing on a collective identity rather than personal preferences. For example, @HYFSHE's interrogative name clearly expresses its opposition to fem-self-shipping, positioning itself as "I" or "we" in contrast to "You," thereby fostering a sense of community among followers. Likewise, @SPASC humorously adopts the guise of an elderly educational institution, referencing actors in their 40s-50s to create a playful, intimate tone. Among Moore et al.'s (2017) five dimensions of persona, "publicness" highlights how online roles evolve from small-scale interactions to larger, shared audiences.

Beyond *Cesuo*'s inherent depersonalisation, which fosters collective inclusivity and keeps anonymity of administrators, its operating model, as shown in Figure 1, ensures complete anonymity of submitters and other users. An analysis of *Cesuo*'s published content reveals no identifiable links to submitters, and even social media accounts remain concealed, encouraging engagement solely with the content itself. This anonymity creates an environment where submissions are typically more candid and direct.

As shown in Figure 4, the submission process utilizes anonymous survey software, requiring only text and image uploads. To further protect user privacy, *Cesuo*'s rules stipulate that all non-celebrity photos must have faces and identifiers mosaicked before submission.

The image shows a submission form for Cesuo with several red annotations. At the top, blue text says '请注意文字投稿格式以及照片素人id' (Please pay attention to the text submission format and the photo person ID) and '面部打码' (Face blurring). A red arrow points from this to a red box containing the text: 'Please note the format of the text submission and the need to mosaic the faces of non-public figures.' Below this, a red box contains the text: 'the text submission, use [anti/against] form'. Another red arrow points from the text '面部打码' to a red box containing the text: 'please upload the pics: face with no mosaic will be reject, try to put it all together in one picture'. The form itself has three sections: 1. Text submission (with a note about format), 2. Image upload (with a note about ID and mosaic), and 3. Another image upload (with a note about mosaic). Each section has a '选择文件' (Select file) button and a note '(不超过10M)' (No more than 10M).

请注意文字投稿格式以及照片素人id
面部打码

Please note the format of the text submission and the need to mosaic the faces of non-public figures.

*1. 文案，没有只输入【反】格式不对不清

2. 请上传图片：图片没素人打码不接（ID也要打码），能拼成一张图尽量拼成一张图，大图也打码以上不打码不接

3. 请上传图片：

the text submission, use [anti/against] form

please upload the pics: face with no mosaic will be reject, try to put it all together in one picture

选择文件
(不超过10M)

选择文件
(不超过10M)

Figure 4 The software to submit for Cesuo users

Cho's (2022) study on K-pop fan activism highlights how anonymity fosters the "dynamism and multitudinous quality" (Coleman, 2014, p. 33) within fan groups, enabling unity around social issues. Similarly, *Cesuo*'s administrator remains anonymous and neutral, adopting a robot-like persona. However, both @HYFSHE and @SPASC occasionally break character, creating moments akin to breaking the fourth wall, which adds a layer of humanity to their professional image. These occasional revelations of humanity, as seen in Figure 5, foster humour and rapport. Using Barbour's (2015) three-tiered performance framework, *Cesuo* transitions from professional agency to intimate emotional depth through these "humorous interactions." This approach diminishes the perceived distance between *Cesuo* and its audience. For example, @SPASC's termination notice (Figure 5) humorously positions the administrator like a theme park employee in costume, with the use of the fictitious date "April 32nd" signalling a playful moment, removing the mask and engaging in a light-hearted exchange.



Figure 5: @SPASC administrator randomly posts as the human operator

In summary, *Cesuo*'s NHOP is greatly shaped by deliberate anonymous performance, group-oriented names, and casual playfulness. Unlike Opportunity Rover, *Cesuo* remains a non-human character enacted by a single or limited number of humans, with fans similarly engaging in the performance. Just as Opportunity's fans anthropomorphize it, *Cesuo*'s administrators and fans anthropomorphize *Cesuo* NHOP for humour and intimacy. This process erases individual identity details, creating a unified NHOP. Despite the anonymity, submissions and interactions follow strict guidelines, similar to a masquerade dress code. While anonymity masks social identities, the resulting connections, fostered by interactions, cultivate intimate feelings among submitters, reinforcing the role of anonymity in shaping fan personas, which now offer more practical value than ever.

Slang as Language Game

NHOPs are mediatised assemblages of original, remixed, and appropriated digital content, enhanced with filters, emojis, memes, and photo manipulation (Connell et al., 2024). Fans adhere to unwritten rules of participation, such as using fan-specific slang, common in game mods and Reddit posts. In *Cesuo*, slang is another key feature alongside anonymity. This slang often emerges contextually and must be understood by outsiders to integrate into the community. Featured in pinned posts and submissions, slang includes foreign words, dialects, numerical elements, and icons, or interpretations, homophones, and repetition to subvert tradition (Kundi et al., 2014). While this paper does not explore slang evolution in detail, it considers these language practices as tools for navigating collective behaviour and symbolising fan identity. Common examples in *Cesuo* include "99" for long-lasting character relationships, "plq" for "comment section," and "mn" for "Fem-Self-shipper," with pear and lemon emojis representing the actor Ning Li, due to phonetic similarities in Chinese.

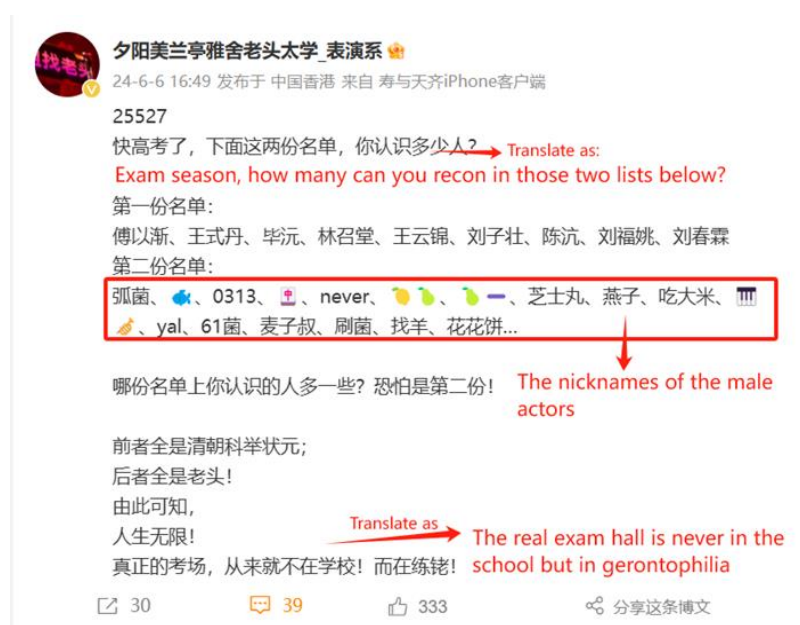


Figure 6: The example of fan-invented terminologies

Slang, as a form of language variation (Chambers, 2008), is typically informal, irregular, and dynamic, often difficult to understand, witty, and linked to youth culture (Liu et al., 2019). Eble (2009) argues that slang, as an informal vocabulary, fosters social connections and belonging within groups, while also conveying rich meaning. The rise of the internet has accelerated the evolution of online slang. Beyond its entertainment value, fan slang is closely tied to growing censorship and self-regulation. For example, Ng and Li's (2020) analysis of the term "socialist brotherly love" reveals how fans subtly express queer desires under censorship, hinting at romantic feelings between two male characters. Yin and Xie (2024) conceptualize this through Wittgenstein's "language game," which suggests that language meaning is shaped by its context and use. They apply this framework to describe the

linguistic tactics Chinese fans use to navigate censorship, reflecting a shared response among many Weibo users.

The technological and linguistic skills in such participatory cultures suggest that participants may be aware of how surveillance and censorship work on a platform...Fans who develop platformised language competence may circulate specific formats and act sequences to keep posts in grey areas on social media. (Yin and Xie, 2024, p. 637)

Due to shared motivations and censorship, many *Cesuo* accounts transform slang into rules, using specific names and terms to maintain safety. These slang phenomena reflect subcultural language tendencies. As Hebdige (1979) noted in *The Meaning of Style*, members of a subculture overcome individual differences to adopt a shared language, as seen in *Cesuo*'s fan space. This subcultural language, as Rivkin and Ryan (2004) explain through Certeau's (1984) theory of tactics, "creates counter-hegemonic rituals and stylistic practices that allow for play in an otherwise deterministic social system." *Cesuo*'s slang acts as a guerrilla tactic, evolving into a distinct linguistic framework within the fan community. This fan slang forms a language game that highlights the collective and intercommunicative nature of NHOP. As fans integrate into the *Cesuo* ecosystem, this shared language shapes their persona, influencing how they read and interact with others. The ongoing evolution of this vocabulary creates a dynamic linguistic landscape, requiring continuous engagement to maintain one's persona and stay current with community trends.

Let us party...by gossiping

The analysis of two *Cesuo* accounts revealed a range of user-personal-based interactions, including discussions, debates, and mutual support. The high level of engagement among *Cesuo* followers fostered dynamic exchanges that both challenged and reinforced ideas. Notably, many submissions were deeply personal, sharing individual fan experiences, opinions, or questions. These personal submissions often prompted substantial community responses. For example, a user confided in @HYFSHE about feeling betrayed by a real-life friend after they both became slash fans. In another instance, a user shared their inner turmoil with @SPASC:

How does everyone manage their mindset when following older celebrities, especially the Fem-self-shippers? I have so many things I want to say but no one around me can relate. I feel like I'm getting deeper and deeper drawing into this.

Fans recognize the collective potential of *Cesuo*'s attributes to solve individual questions. Community members actively engage in discussions about shared experiences, offering support and advice. Many users choose to submit personal experiences to *Cesuo* rather than post them on their own accounts, avoiding the risk of being seen by those involved. Others comfort fans who feel betrayed, sharing their own similar experiences to offer support. The anonymity of *Cesuo* creates an environment where users can interact more openly, forming intimate connections around shared content rather than personal identities. *Cesuo*'s structure enables the rapid formation of temporary, tight-knit communities around its

content. From the perspective of persona performance, self-presentation is a balancing act between personal intimacy and public professionalism, requiring careful articulation to remain authentic (Moore et al., 2017). Certain submissions can spark extensive discussions and become parts of *Cesuo*'s character. For example, in figure 7, on @HYFSHE, a submission criticising self-shippers, featuring an edited screenshot of a male celebrity's indifferent reaction to fan art, received significant engagement. This post, with 1,703 reposts, 1,287 comments, and 22,000 likes, was later incorporated into @HYFSHE's homepage background. These shared experiences foster communal enjoyment and reinforce the feeling of belonging.



Figure 7: The post by the submitter later became the home page background picture

Conflicts and disagreements also arise due to the close-knit nature of *Cesuo*. Some submissions may be questioned or opposed by other users, with even *Cesuo* administrators stepping in to make judgments. For example, if @HYFSHE posts something unrelated to self-shipping or supporting it, the comment section may sarcastically mock or refute the post, with users sometimes suggesting its removal. At @SPASC, when a celebrity scandal arose, a repost tagged the celebrity's account, violating @SPASC's rules, leading to a public block by the *Cesuo* admin. In another instance, when a submission featured a well-known male singer instead of an actor, users bluntly reminded the submitter, "no matter how urgent, you can't randomly use *Cesuo* (toilet)."

In *Cesuo*, topics such as gender and geopolitics are often shared along with fans' personal experiences like Booth (2015)'s observation that passionate, critical fan engagement often occurs outside academia. *Cesuo* submissions often use humorous criticism to articulate their stance, as exemplified by the following three highly discussed posts:

Is "You're so well-behaved" even a compliment? It makes me want to throw up—it's what those in power say to their subordinates. Fem-self-shippers only end up diminishing themselves

I'm already dizzy from the words "East Asia." East Asia has many meanings - it's a geographical concept, an international region, a racial designation ...Madame Butterfly is being performed by self-shippers every day, not only they are lacking female consciousness but with racial awareness still stuck in pre-Civil War times

What's wrong with feminising old men? It's normal for someone with a masculine appearance, temperament, and personality to have a delicate inner self... When we look for feminine beauty in mature men, isn't that a kind of queer advocacy?

The first submission expresses the contributor's stance on gender politics, interpreting men's praise of women's obedience as a form of structural violence, which informs their opposition to self-shiping. The second examines the intersection of race and gender, critiquing fem-self-shippers who blindly identify as "East Asian women." The final submission offers an alternative view of fan identity, framing it as an exploration of queer pluralism. Hills (2002) builds on MacDonald's (1998) focus on hierarchies in fan culture and Bourdieu's theory of social capital to explain how fans compare knowledge, rankings, and prestige within and across fandoms to debate value.

...the fans' sense of possessiveness, ownership, and textual attachments are already in place before 'normative organisations of the proper which specify what counts as a good object of desire or pleasure; a proper mode of access or entry to it; and an appropriate range of valuations' can be said to act on fan interpretation. (Hills, 2002, p. 35)

From Hills' perspective, *Cesuo* functions as a "normative organisation," where fans collectively negotiate a stable set of values. *Cesuo*'s political values align with Moore's five dimensions of persona, specifically the value dimension, which depends on agency, reputation, and prestige. In *Cesuo*, value is expressed through contributions to NHOP that align with its established values, ensuring that NHOP's prestige reflects a positive political dimension. These submissions rationalize fan practices while highlighting *Cesuo*'s political nature. The platform fosters individual narrative rebellion while showcasing diverse political ideologies at the collective level. The discussions and engagements around these values reinforce a stable yet dynamic NHOP, reflecting both fan practices and political identities.

Producing Sentimental Paratexts

With the closeness in the *Cesuo* community, this space is characterized by rich sentimental expression among fans for seeking a community consensus, to illustrate this, below considers a user's reflections following the male actor's scandal:

...In real life, isn't he just an ordinary man? The perfect filter is something we add ourselves. Seeing the good in others and finding them likable is because of the goodness in our own hearts, isn't it?

Fans criticize their behaviour and spread such reflections to advise others who have been hurt like them. Such submissions encourage each other and constantly examine their relationships with celebrities and believe that the friendships created through shared fan

identity and labour are more important than the celebrities themselves. For example, another user's submission after hearing negative news about this actor:

...seeing so many fan fiction authors leave the fandom makes me feel empty inside. In fact, many of my impressions of (him) came from these fan fiction authors. I hope all my friends take care of themselves.

Additionally, sarcasm and self-deprecation are major characteristics of *Cesuo*'s negative language style, expressing more complex emotions such as disdain, playfulness, and resignation. For example:

Because these older guys are who they are, they'll deliberately avoid certain things and pretend not to see them even if they do. I prefer them as commodities, so can they please hide their ordinary man side? Be more of a product, less of yourself.

Bacon-Smith's (1992) ethnography on female queer fandom highlighted the importance of fans' subjective feelings and desires. She argued that female fans' queer writing relies on "telepathy and empathy" as metaphors for the closeness women value in relationships. Fans' interpretations of original works can evoke either pleasure from control or anxiety from meaninglessness. Stein (2015) noted that social media platforms facilitate the exchange of collective sentiments, which play a key role in constructing digital narratives. In *Cesuo*, emotional connections among fans surpass their attachment to official sources, characters, and celebrities. The digital objects born from these interactions align values within the group, offering emotional fulfillment and a sense of belonging, with fan identity becoming less important than the community and shared values it fosters (Figures 8 and 9).



Figure 8: Fan-created paratext of memes



Figure 9: Fan-created paratext of screenshot editing

Cesuo acts as a platform that consolidates fan works, providing a space for diverse content. While fan-created paratexts usually circulate within niche communities, *Cesuo*'s collaborative nature increases their visibility, expanding fan networks. The platform hosts a variety of multimedia paratexts, including campaigns, fan fiction, memes, and celebrity-related discussions. Contributors edit photos, create videos, or produce memes and short fiction to promote favoured characters or pairings. Fans engage in interpretative practices, aiming to evoke emotional resonance and expand the reach of their content, as seen when a Tuan/Zheng shipper posts recommendations in @SPASC,

I'm delighted that in 2024 there are still so many people who appreciate the works of both Tuan and Zheng. Ladies who enjoy shipping Tuan/Zheng, please feel free to engage in lively discussions (in comments). Wishing (both actors) a long and prosperous artistic life.

The ongoing creation of paratextual content plays a crucial role in shaping persona. Fans often identify themselves through anonymous submissions, such as declaring their affiliation as Tuan/Zheng Shippers or referring to celebrities as "my guy" in regular posts. These paratexts serve to promote fan sites rather than claim ownership over the content. Fans navigate the space between canonical and fan-created content, seeking both professionalism and personal connection. The production of paratexts on *Cesuo* allows fans to position themselves within a spectrum of individual expression and collective interest. The goal is to encourage more creators and paratexts, fostering community engagement and sentiment exchange. For example, Tuan/Zheng shippers submit edited fan videos to @SPASC, inviting others to join the conversation. Edwards (2012) emphasizes the importance of context in activating objects, suggesting that emotionally engaged interactions are essential for full comprehension. As he notes, the affective nature of objects shapes social relationships,

allowing paratexts to circulate on social media with emotional resonance. These digital objects carry both historical and emotional weight, reflecting the mediated dimension of NHOP. Through *Cesuo*, fans anonymously shape the personas of their favourite celebrities, with the production of paratexts serving as a form of mediation. Fans contribute to the construction of *Cesuo*'s NHOP while promoting the personas of admired celebrities, attracting new followers, and encouraging participation in the shared process of knowledge accumulation and reinterpretation.

CONCLUSION

This study explores the rise of *Cesuo* accounts on Weibo and their influence on the development of fan personas. *Cesuo* operates manually to mimic bot-like behaviour, focusing on specific themes, often addressing the interests of diverse fan groups. These accounts function as digital hubs where fans can anonymously share their feelings, comments, and transformative works within predefined guidelines. Drawing on persona studies, the research examines how fandoms collectively shape *Cesuo* as an NHOP.

This paper calls for further exploration of NHOP, highlighting its collective characteristics within fan culture contexts. The findings underscore the importance of fan rules and anonymity in fostering a safe environment that supports self-expression and the development of close connections between *Cesuo* and its followers. The study also examines *Cesuo*-specific slang as a tool for evading censorship and reinforcing community cohesion. Personalized submissions, often in the form of gossip-like exchanges, contribute to *Cesuo*'s stable and deliberative collective values, reinforcing NHOP through external validation. Additionally, the production of paratexts serves as a form of emotional reproduction. Rather than emphasising professional expertise or loyalty to canonical content, fans engage in paratext creation to seek emotional support and peer contributions. The analysis reveals two distinct personae in *Cesuo* interactions: the *Cesuo* account as NHOP and the fan persona shaped by submission rules and interaction norms. These personae shift between individual expression and community standards, creating a dynamic interplay of identities.

The research suggests that *Cesuo* represents a shift in fan NHOP construction, where community collective persona-builds outweigh individual identity performances. This study responds to previous scholarship, which has argued that NHOP constitutes a collective accomplishment composed of individuals holding divergent positions (Holland, 2021). However, unlike other studies on NHOP that emphasize its challenge to traditional conceptions of identity grounded in human agency and psychological selfhood (Connell, 2024), in this context, the construction of NHOP is better understood as individuals seeking to acquire emotional capital and cultivate a sense of community intimacy in a safe and censorship-free space.

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