

The psychology of "Yumejoshi": female fans and the utopian phenomenon in self-insert fanfiction

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Abstract. With the advancement of the times, a growing number of women have engaged in interactions with idol celebrities. The ways in which "female idol fans" understand themselves, consume, and express themselves with new energy. Today, by writing and reading narratives about their interactions with idols, female fans are increasingly broadening pathways for enriching their self-worth and fulfilling psychological needs. Such practices also powerfully demonstrate a profound reinterpretation and destigmatization of the term "female idol fan" within the patriarchal structure. By conducting a quantitative questionnaire survey that collected data on writing and reading frequency, occupation, and preferences regarding Yumejoshi literature genres, this study adopts the Uses and Gratifications Theory as an analytical framework to examine this fan cultural phenomenon. It explores how the writing and reading of Yumejoshi literature enhance female fans' sense of self-worth and happiness. [Yumejoshi (夢女, literally "dream woman") is a Japanese term for a specific subgenre of fan culture and fiction, primarily created by and for women. The corresponding Chinese term is 梦女文学 (Mèngnǚ Wénxué, "Dream Girl Literature").]

Keywords: female fans, self-insert idol fanfiction, idol-following self-insert fans, uses and gratifications, utopia

1. Introduction

Current research on women's writing and reading often leans towards mainstream and general fanfiction, with relatively fewer studies dedicated to more specific female subgroups. In the study "Research on the Phenomenon of 'Yumejoshi Literature' in Fanfiction Creation," the researcher focuses on the collective phenomenon of Yumejoshi literature and women's written expression. The creation of fanfiction, including "Yumejoshi literature," largely transcends the simplistic notion of "fans expressing affection." It harbors an expectation to influence female readers and a desire to shape vibrant, ideal character portrayals. Embedded in the creative process of fanfiction and Yumejoshi literature is young female creators' perception of their social identities and their subjective aspirations. Through crafting fictional personas, they engage in inward self-exploration and seek outward resonance [1]. The expression found in Yumejoshi literature reveals a new dimension of reading. The psychology behind its "use and consumption" is particularly worthy of investigation and inquiry.

Lin Kun applied the Uses and Gratifications Theory to delve into the "gratifications" and "non-gratifications" of TikTok short video users, proposing strategies for the innovative development of mobile short videos [2]. The present study seeks to enrich psychological research on female fans' consumption and reception of Yumejoshi literature in the contemporary era. By integrating the phenomenon of Yumejoshi literature with the "Uses and Gratifications" theory as it pertains to female fans, it seeks to foster a more nuanced public understanding of women's expression and needs. This research centers on how the writing and reading of Yumejoshi literature enhance individual happiness and personal value for female fans. Based on this focus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

(H1) The writing and reading of Yumejoshi literature increase the happiness levels of female fans.

(H2) The engagement with Yumejoshi literature strengthens connections within the female fan community.

2. Literature review

2.1. What is Yumejoshi literature

Yumejoshi literature is a subgenre within the realm of fanfiction. The term "同人 (tongren)" originates from the Japanese word "どうじん (dōjin)," which originally meant "like-minded individuals" or a group sharing the same interests. Subsequently, the term 'dōjin' was adopted within Japanese anime and manga cultural circles to denote the practice of groups with shared interests creating derivative works based on prototypes from existing cultural products [1]. As the dōjin culture grew, it subsequently flowed into the world of Chinese adolescents, with an increasing number of young people in China beginning to participate in the creation and expression of tongren culture.

Yumejoshi literature refers to narratives where women, centering themselves as the subject and from their own perspective, write about a series of interactions with their "dream character" (a term for the object of their affection). "Fandom Yumejoshi" literature specifically constitutes the self-writing experiences of female idol fans within this broader category. The term "Fandom Yumejoshi" itself is an emotional label used by female fans for their corresponding "dream celebrity," representing a new self-definition of their community identity. Some women self-identify as "Yumejoshi," finding deep connections with themselves and other women through writing or reading Yumejoshi literature. The key distinction from "Yumejoshi" in other circles is that the "dream object" for "Fandom Yumejoshi" is a real, existing celebrity individual. Through the expression of the "Yumejoshi's" individual psychological needs, the existence of the celebrity figure is refracted into various facets within this "dream" space.

The development of Yumejoshi literature has been remarkably rapid in recent years, with a vast number of female fans engaging in reading and writing within this genre. Its hallmark characteristic is an extremely deep, immersive perspective. Through first-person "I" narration, the portrayal of the dream celebrity character within the text is typically shaped according to the creator's inner preferences. The style of Yumejoshi literature is highly variable, and its scenarios are diverse. The genre's diverse types, associative and interactive attributes, immersive perspective, and female-centric narrative features enable many female fans to obtain a sense of subjective well-being and self-worth that is often unattainable in real life. Compared to other types of Yumejoshi products, the "traditional literary" characteristics of textual narrative more easily attract female fans to generate hazy, imagined intimate interactions. This quasi-spatial form of expression allows female fans to participate with an attitude that is both private and shared. Through methods like "re-creation," they engage in textual reproduction and meaning reconstruction of their idol stars within the textual world, forming a highly creative space for cultural practice [3].

2.2. The psychological mechanisms behind writing and reading Yumejoshi literature

The writing and reading of Yumejoshi literature fulfill the spatial need for textual release and psychological expression among female fans. The immersive narration and the first-person "I" perspective construct a highly personal emotional world within the text. Viewed through the lens of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the writing of Yumejoshi literature facilitates a transition from fulfilling needs for sensory enjoyment to needs for social belonging within a community, and further extends towards self-actualization [2]. The textual creation by female fans not only constructs a space for the desire for intimacy but also establishes expressive connections with others and within the community. The mutual communication among women, who share a narrative 'emotional house' evolving from the private to the communal, embodies a 'hand-in-hand' collective expression of female fans.

Online communities are virtual spaces where users with similar hobbies, goals, or needs, through frequent interaction, ultimately undergo changes in psychological emotions and relationships [4]. Within this space, the publication of Yumejoshi literature carries strong community attributes, such as the use of tags on Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book). These tags effectively allow users to target their creations precisely, thereby attracting more like-minded individuals. In the comment sections of many Fandom Yumejoshi literary works, numerous women express further reading desires. They share Yumejoshi literary works with each other, form and actively participate in group chats dedicated to specific "dream celebrities," thereby forming a virtual space for the evolution of emotions and relationships.

3. Method

In this study, a random sampling method was adopted for the questionnaire survey. A total of 83 questionnaires were distributed, and specifically, 83 were collected, with 63 being valid and usable. The questionnaire targeted female fans, gathering information on their age, frequency of use, and recent self-assessments of internal sense of value and self-esteem. Guided by the Uses and Gratifications Theory, systematic sampling and data collection were conducted on fan gathering platforms, including Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book), Weibo Fan Super Topics, and dedicated 'Yumejoshi' fan accounts. This research deeply focuses on investigating the female fan demographic. Through a comprehensive analysis of the questionnaire results, combined with the practical framework of Uses and Gratifications, this study proposes that female fans enhance their sense of self-worth and happiness through their engagement with Yumejoshi literature.

The research is divided into five sections. The first part collects individual demographic information of the female fans (including age, occupation, sexual orientation, the celebrity they follow [including the celebrity's gender and fanbase size], and estimated expenditure on fandom activities). The second part focuses on the usage of Yumejoshi literature (including platforms used, frequency of reading and writing, and duration of engagement with Yumejoshi texts). The third and fourth parts measure well-being and personal sense of value, and the experience and perceived impact of using Yumejoshi literature, respectively. Finally, an open-ended question about Yumejoshi literature is included to collect more detailed data on the diverse needs and emotional psychology of female fans when engaging with these texts.

According to the latest survey results, 84.34% of the respondents in the study belong to the student demographic. Regarding the duration of their fandom involvement, 34.94% of the female fans have been engaged in fandom activities for nearly five years. In terms of monthly financial investment in fandom activities, 51.81% of the female fans spend between 300 and 1,000 RMB.

4. Results

4.1. Acquisition of happiness

The writing and reading of Yumejoshi literature also provide female fans with immersive emotional fulfillment. Relevant questionnaire statistics, visible in Table 1, show that 79.52% of the surveyed female fans identify as "Yumejoshi." Regarding the duration of their engagement with Yumejoshi literature, 44.58% of the respondents have engaged with such texts for more than one year. The usage of Yumejoshi literature is high across various media platforms: 89.86% of female fans access it on Weibo, while 62.32% seek out their preferred Yumejoshi literature on Xiaohongshu. Other platforms like AO3 and Lofter account for 30.43% and 57.97% respectively, as shown in the aforementioned data.

As indicated by previous research findings, the world constructed from the "I" perspective is highly immersive, allowing female fans to create a novel, endearing, and self-affirming image of their dream character and an associated emotional space through writing. This immersive creative experience provides female fans with a profound sense of psychological satisfaction, generating significant spiritual and emotional resonance, and thus enhancing their overall sense of subjective well-being.

Table 1. Survey statistics on behaviors and exposure related to "Yumejoshi"

Dimension	Specific Classification	Percentage
Q1: Identify as Yumejoshi?	A. Yes	79.52%
	B. No	20.48%
Q2: Platforms for Yumejoshi Literature	A. Weibo	84.86%
	B. Xiaohongshu	62.32%
	C. Lofter	57.97%
	D. AO3	30.43%
	E. Other Platforms	28.93%
Q3: Duration of Exposure to Yumejoshi Literature	A. No Exposure	16.87%
	B. Less than 6 months	9.64%
	C. 6 Months	2.41%
	D. 1 Year	26.51%
	E. More than 1 Year	44.58%

The writing and reading of Yumejoshi literature provide female fans with emotional compensation and emotional projection. In the survey, 36.23% of female fans reported low satisfaction with their lives, while 56.52% felt they had not yet attained the things they want in life. The narrative structure of Yumejoshi literature allows these fans to temporarily escape into a self-constructed "utopia." Additionally, 23.19% of female fans indicated a low sense of achievement in their real lives. Through the plot construction and textual imagination in Yumejoshi literature, female fans feel encouraged by their dream characters within these textual interactions. Aspects they cannot currently attain in reality can be compensated for through collective solace and psychological fulfillment in this utopian space.

Specifically, 78.26% of female fans agreed that the world of Yumejoshi literature offers them a significant escape from real-life pressures. Meanwhile, 72.46% of Yumejoshi literature users reported feeling a unique connection with their idol through these texts. Creating Yumejoshi literature empowers female fans to construct a world aligned with their innermost desires. Compared to the emotional compensation derived from

reading, the self-created interactions between the "I" and the dream character in active writing carry personal projections and ideals. Notably, 62.32% of female fans expressed that creating a new Yumejoshi world gives them a sense of creative achievement and satisfaction. This utopian space effectively preserves their voices and offers a vast domain for subjective creation that exerts a positive influence on their real lives.

On the other hand, reading Yumejoshi literature offers a psychological space where they can experience corresponding emotional compensation and projection without the need for active creation. Through reading such texts, 75.36% of female fans also reported feelings of achievement and satisfaction (as shown in Table 2).

Table 2. Personal happiness/sense of value related to Yumejoshi literature usage

	Response Option				
	Item				
	1	2	3	4	5
Q18: I am satisfied with my life.	9 (13.04%)	16 (23.29%)	25 (36.23%)	13 (18.84%)	6 (8.70%)
Q19: So far, I have gotten the important things I want in life.	17 (24.64%)	22 (31.88%)	19 (27.54%)	9 (13.04%)	2 (2.90%)
Q22: I feel that I have many good qualities.	3 (4.35%)	10 (14.49%)	15 (21.74%)	22 (31.88%)	19 (27.54%)
Q23: I take a positive attitude toward myself.	3 (4.35%)	14 (20.29%)	17 (24.64%)	22 (31.88%)	13 (18.84%)
Q25: I am able to do things as well as most other people.	4 (5.80%)	12 (17.39%)	20 (28.99%)	23 (33.33%)	10 (14.49%)

(1 - Strongly Disagree, 2 - Disagree, 3 - Neutral, 4 - Agree, 5 - Strongly Agree)

Note: The items were adapted from the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES).

One female fan noted that the process of creation and reception enables her to temporarily withdraw from this "frustrating world" and immerse herself in the idealized realm of textual creation and reception. Simultaneously, she also felt the "love within the words" through both creating and reading. Extensive engagement with immersive texts enables them to enhance their mood during this process, finding their own sense of happiness and self-worth. Freud believed that literary works are projections of the writer's subjective emotions and desires. In this sense, the "dreaming" practice of Yumejoshi precisely embodies a fantasy of "becoming" a certain type of person and "possessing" specific emotions [5]. Reading, consequently, is a crucial part of the Yumejoshi's participation in this self-projection. The demand for reading Yumejoshi literature centers on and perspectives from "female needs," allowing aspects of the self and quasi-intimate relationships that they desire in reality but find difficult to achieve to be realized and evoked within the text. Within the narrative of these texts, some female fans mentioned that certain writers possess very delicate prose, through which they can learn about unique cultures from different regions and dimensions. These Yumejoshi literature, through nuanced emotional portrayal and personalized storylines, enhance the character's sense of realism, affinity, and unique charm [6]. This enables the romantic fantasies desired by female fans, or even simple and direct physical desires, to find better expression through reading Yumejoshi literature.

Female fans achieve social recognition and self-actualization by writing and publishing their own Yumejoshi literary works. They integrate into fan communities and specific interest circles, refine and affirm

their own group identity, establish their social circles, and thereby fulfill needs for emotional expression, social identity, and social interaction [7].

4.2. Consumption and production within Yumejoshi literature

4.2.1. Genres and purchasing of Yumejoshi literature

The demand for Yumejoshi literature remains persistently high on platforms like Weibo, Xiaohongshu, and Lofter. A significant majority, 63.77% of female fans, prefer reading Yumejoshi literature over creating it themselves. Given the abundance of Yumejoshi literature across diverse platforms, female fans can consistently access well-crafted stories and satisfying "dreams" within their communities to obtain emotional compensation.

The survey data indicates that female fans spend considerable time reading Yumejoshi literature. The longer the time spent, the higher their demand for its textual narratives. Specifically, 42.02% of female fans engage with Yumejoshi literature multiple times daily. Their invested time and usage frequency fully demonstrate the substantial emotional motivation and solace that Yumejoshi literature provides them.

The genre demands for Yumejoshi literature are diverse, ranging from one-on-one romantic relationships to ensemble casts, covering virtually every conceivable type. Statistically, one-on-one romantic and intimate relationships dominate the reading preferences, accounting for 84.06% of the demand. For many female fans, reading Yumejoshi literature effectively helps them escape real-world troubles and pressures. In these fantastical worlds, many women experience feelings of being understood, loved, and needed.

However, this also leads some female fans to develop disappointment or excessively high standards for real-life intimate relationships after encountering idealized depictions in texts. Notably, 72.46% of female fans reported that the happy scenarios in the texts and their own emotional needs make them feel disappointed with the intimate relationships in their actual lives.

While seeking psychological gratification through reading, some female fans purchase Yumejoshi literature online. Prices are typically determined by the required plot complexity or follow a low fixed rate based on word count. Although a considerable number of women do not purchase Yumejoshi literature, the significant volume of online commission posts indicates varied choices among female fans regarding purchases.

4.2.2. Social belonging within the female community

The use of Yumejoshi literature profoundly reflects the emotional and communal bonds within female networks, fulfilling fandom-related needs. Contemporary fan circles often exhibit a stratified structure. Fans utilize social media platforms such as Weibo Super Topics, WeChat groups, QQ groups, and dedicated fan apps to construct their own online community matrices. These form fan organizations featuring a broad peripheral layer and a cohesive core, characterized by comprehensive and clear internal division of labor [8]. Through interactions with other members, individuals within these circles develop a collective identity specific to their community [9].

Much of the dissemination and creation of Yumejoshi literature occurs within such communities, where it is effectively spread and discussed. In the process of engaging with Yumejoshi literature, female fans interact with many like-minded women through actions such as liking, commenting, and reposting. This demonstrates that female fans are not alone on their journey of using Yumejoshi literature. The diversity of genres, the focused and often specific nature of its target audiences, largely attracts more female fans to participate in this female-centric utopian practice.

The reciprocal expression inherent in both reading and writing allows the content created by some female fans to be seen by other women with similar "dream" orientations. The flow of emotions and needs between creators and readers broadens the boundaries of the immersive experience. Survey data indicates that many

women prefer reading Yumejoshi literature and subsequently participating in discussions about it. In the chorus of voices calling for updates ("求更"), users' identities reach out towards a broader world.

5. The world of Yumejoshi literature: diversified expression and media dissemination

5.1. Expression and queerness in Yumejoshi literature

Contemporary "queer" broadly denotes sexual minorities and gender-diverse groups that exist outside traditional mainstream sexual orientation frameworks. "Queerness" signifies a perspective critical of fixed identity expressions and gender norms. This study explores the intersecting identities of female fans and sexual minorities. As communication technologies become deeply embedded in social life, the internet has become a crucial channel for Chinese youth to seek cultural identity [10].

Both creators and readers of Yumejoshi literature hold diverse views on the relationship dynamics portrayed from their perspectives. Many female fans perceive the relationship between the "I" and the dream celebrity character in Yumejoshi texts as romantic, predominantly based on romantic love. Simultaneously, within a Yumejoshi culture largely dominated by heterosexual narratives, numerous fans who self-identify as sexual minorities persist in their queer creations. Engaging with Yumejoshi literature enables them to better understand themselves, strengthening their identity and sense of belonging.

Awareness and knowledge related to sexual minority status and neurodiversity further affirm their self-expression. Disillusioned with the romantic love standards perpetuated by heteronormativity, individuals with queer consciousness refine their critical lens toward the external world through engagement with Yumejoshi literature.

5.2. Media dissemination of Yumejoshi literature: present and future

In recent years, women's discursive space and self-expression within online media have undergone unprecedented expansion [8]. The current status and future trajectories of Yumejoshi literature are closely intertwined with the growing female consciousness of female fans and their increasingly active fandom engagement. Currently, a single hashtag for "Yumejoshi literature" on the Xiaohongshu app has already reached 200 million views, while the "fandom" hashtag has exceeded tens of billions of clicks. The community of female fans and Fandom Yumejoshi literature is far from a small, isolated corner. The uniqueness of Yumejoshi literature and the diverse expressions of female fans have distinctly become part of the landscape of female desire and needs in the new era. As media platforms continue to evolve, the voices of female fans are increasingly resonating with broader audiences.

Although the use of Yumejoshi literature, exclusive to female fans, still exists within patriarchal traditions of romantic love, the collective behaviors of women—writing, reading, and using these texts—have constituted a rich case study of a social phenomenon. Perhaps the connection between female fans and Yumejoshi literature will radiate with new brilliance in the days to come.

6. Conclusion

Employing the Uses and Gratifications Theory and a quantitative research method via Wenjuanxing, this study explored the psychological mechanisms underlying female fans' engagement with Yumejoshi literature. The findings demonstrate that female fans experience enhanced subjective well-being and a stronger sense of self-

worth through the creation and reception of Yumejoshi literature. The emotional projection and self-satisfaction experienced within these texts represent an expression of their deeper desires. From its creation driven by demand to its dissemination, Yumejoshi literature fosters happiness and community connection for a vast number of female fans, thereby promoting the positive expression of female desire in the new era.

The survey data for this research were primarily collected from platforms such as Weibo Fan Super Topics, Xiaohongshu, and Douban. A limitation of the study is its relatively limited use of interviews and in-depth investigation. The "utopian collective landscape" currently emerging online around Yumejoshi literature is rendering the unique expressive modes of female fans more visible to broader audiences. Future research could delve deeper into the internal narrative structures and character portrayals within Yumejoshi literature, conducting more text-centric analyses. Furthermore, the implicit gendered writing presents opportunities for diverse feminist explorations.

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