# RESEARCH ON INFORMAL LEARNING CHARACTERISTICS OF ACG DOUJIN COMMUNITY IN THE AGE OF WE-MEDIA

Qing Qing Xu[1,a], Jun He*[1,b] and Qiao Yan Fu[1,c]

[1]Xiamen Academy of Arts & Design FuZhou University Xiamen,China
No. 852, Ligong Road, Jimei District, Xiamen, Fujian.
Xiamen, Fujian Province, China
[a]morimoriq@foxmail.com, [b]dr.hejun@qq.com, [c]wushen321@foxmail.com

## Abstract

ACG is short for Animation Comic Game and it's doujin culture refers to creation activities and corresponding products based on original works. With the development of We-media, doujin culture has become increasingly prosperous. Doujin fans gather together on we-media platform t share creation experience and works. As one of the popular internet culture types, doujin culture has been favored by researchers in communication sciences. However, little attention has been paid to the research of informal learning generated in ACG doujin community communication. This paper focuses on the research of informal learning originated in doujin community social communications and analyzes morphological characteristics of individually initiative and informal connected learning generated in ACG culture environment that youngsters participated in and out of classrooms. Through this, certain beneficial ideas might be given to education researchers about how to construct self-learning environment, lead learners to originate self-learning delight and activate inner motivation of learning.

**Key words:** Informal Learning, Doujin Community, Self-learning environment

## Introduction

The public tends to pay more attention to the recreational value of the doujin community online than to its culture and art value in composing. In fact, doujin works fully embody the spirit of free writing, and spontaneous writing and communication among individuals in this community contribute to the creating and spreading of social knowledge and practical experience. The subjective and initiative experience sharing and mutual learning demonstrated in doujin activities present characteristics of informal learning including subjectivity, sociality, interactivity, non-structural property, etc.

## Doujin culture and the ACG doujin community in an era of We Media

### A. Doujin culture

Doujin culture is an online subculture popular among teenagers currently. The word "doujin" is generally considered to originate from the word "どうじん" in Japanese, indicating a group of people with the same interest. Besides, the word "doujin" refers to independent writing immune to impact of commercial activities, which, therefore, faces fewer limits but more freedom. In addition, doujin writers possess more initiatives over their works.

Doujin works involve noncommercial small-scale original works and those re-composed based on anime, video games, film and television programs. The famous game "*TouHou Project*" produced by Team Shanghai Alice, a doujin gaming community from Japan belongs to the former category. But the doujin works more commonly known come from the latter category, namely, those deriving from original works. Doujin works are diverse in types, including but not limited to doujin comics, illustration, music, videos, novels, etc.
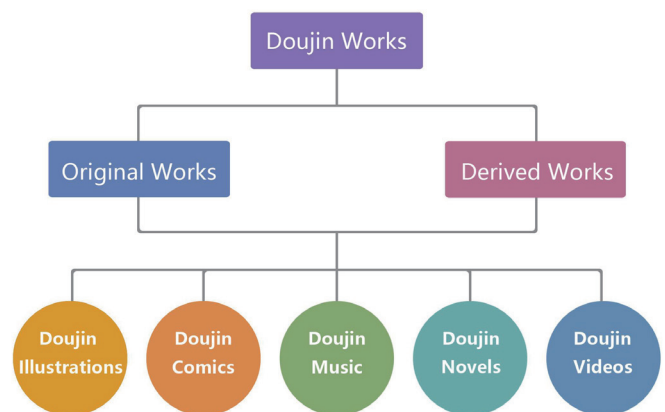


Fig. 1 Types of Doujin Works

Doujin culture, with its characteristics of independence, freedom and diversity, appeals to a good number of young people in pursuit of individuality and enthusiastic for self-expression, who, based on their interests and hobbies, form doujin communities where they keep communicating and sharing, thereby boosting and facilitating their own cultural circle. In the meantime, it is now on the way from a minority culture to a more public one, and becomes a pop culture.

### B. The ACG doujin community in an era of We Media

We Media, also known as Citizen Media or Personal Media, serves as a route and carrier through which people provide and share their own experiences by means of modern and electronic measures. Besides, it is an emerging information transfer form in the era of digital network, and has characteristics including privatization, popularization, generalization, and independence.

Activity launching and information transfer of doujin community in early period were mainly conducted through regular meeting or post, and doujin works were collected by means of printing press like Doujinshi. As communication and experience sharing among members of doujin community were limited, its scale was relatively small.

With the arrival of We Media, limitation that once blocked the development of doujin culture are removed, and information sharing and transfer gain speed as well as convenience. In the era of We Media, emphasis of doujin culture quickly shifts from entity to network, and compared with Doujinshi which is based on entity, the online We Media is undoubtedly an easier and faster sharing medium which embodies the culture better than printing press. Enthusiasts of doujin culture all over the world get together online based on the same hobby, forming a group where no discrimination concerning region, race, gender and social status exists. Anyone interested in doujin culture can join in the group. As information in We Media spreads quickly and extensively, doujin enthusiasts can post, browse, and propagate doujin culture freely, which not only arouses interests of outsiders, but can facilitate the vitality and creation of inside the community.

Composing and sharing of doujin works have formed a unique mode of "culture economy" as every member of this community plays a role both as producer and consumer. In creation and exchange of the doujin culture, what the members value is spirit-oriented feedback like recognition and sense of pleasure, and cultural consumption, which has exceeded material consumption, becomes a symbolic concept.

### The Concept of Informal Learning

Learning consists of formal learning and informal learning with the former indicating learning acts in formal situations like academic education in school or continuing education which are implemented and organized by professional education institutes or organizations; informal learning is learning acts where knowledge is spread through social interaction, and compared with formal learning which emphasizes knowledge transmit and passive structural teaching, informal learning reflects learners' subjective initiative which is launched, regulated and managed by themselves and has characteristics like independence, sociality, flexibility, interactivity and non-structure.

Instead of a simple mode of stimulus-response, learning is a process of meaning construction where thinking, reflection, operation, practice and sharing integrate with each other, so does informal learning which plays a significant role in individual development and social transformation. Informal learning can be considered as a kind of cultural and social activity, the process of which involves creation and reconstruction of social knowledge. It lays emphasis on variability and constructiveness of knowledge.

Not only does informal learning indicate a learning method and situation, but it reflects a learning concept.

In the era of knowledge-based economy, learning has transformed from a staged one to a lifelong one, and informal learning that takes place anytime and anywhere has integrated into our daily life. Comparison between formal and informal learning is listed in the form below, from which characteristics of informal learning can be better demonstrated.

TABLE I
FORMAL LEARNING ANF INFORMAL LEARNING

|  | **Formal Learning** | **Informal Learning** |
|---|---|---|
| Time | In specific time | Anytime |
| Site | In fixed sites | Anywhere |
| Dominant role | Teachers, comment, praise and criticize | Learners |
| Learning mode | Guidance-based | Self-learning |
| Learning process | Passive, organized, systematic, structural | Active, spontaneous, non-systematic, non-structural |
| Purpose | With clear purpose | With clear purpose or happening randomly |

### Characteristics of Informal Learning in ACG Doujin Community

It is commonly seen in ACG doujin community that members with outstanding skills are not professionals or majors in related domains. Instead, most of them are amateurs whose skills are achieved through self-learning.

When personal interests meet opportunities of self-actualization and -expression, spontaneous informal learning will be generated naturally.
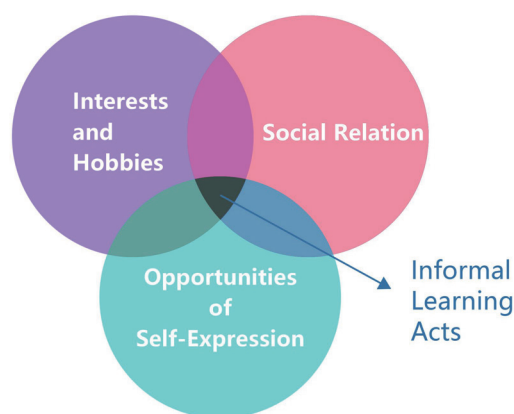


Fig. 2 Informal learning acts in doujin community

Motivations contributing to informal acts among doujin members originate from two aspects: members themselves and social relations among them, namely, inner motivation and external motivation. Inner motivation of members consists of three parts: interest, self-expression and sense of achievement, which indicate their enthusiasm for the works, eagerness for self-expression, aesthetic pursuit and sense of achievement generated from composition. External motivation resulting from interaction among doujin members is composed of recognition, competition and communication, which refers to the sense of joy and gratification gained from others' appreciation of their own works, competition and mutual learning among members and acquaintance with more like-minded friends.
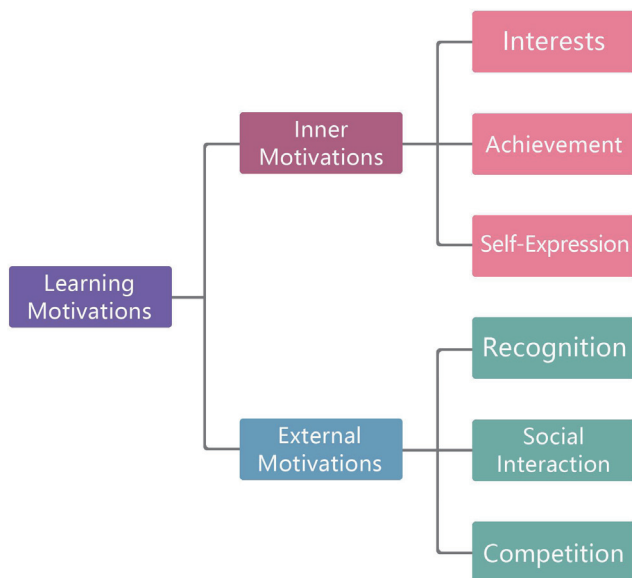


Fig. 4 Cycle system of informal learning act with sustainable dynamic in doujin community

*A. Initiative and activeness*

As is mentioned above, informal learning is launched, regulated and managed by learners themselves. Since it is an active and personalized learning mode, learners have initiative over their learning, which is also the core in doujin activities. With activities of composing and sharing among community members purely out of their eagerness and the act of self-learning totally originating from personal interests, they are self-enhancement and -realization based on personal interests. It is the members in the community who play a dominant and leading role in composition and skill learning.

The leading motivation of informal learning in doujin community is interest. More and more researches show that interest plays an active role in motivating us to carry out and participate in deeper learning, due to which learning and composing of doujin members are active and positive. Members, through information and course searching and consultation, actively get knowledge and learn skills, summarize experience and integrate and reconstruct their knowledge network in the practice of composing and sharing, which is completely self-directed.



Fig. 3 Motivations of informal learning in doujin communities

As Weston Churchill once said "I'm ready to dive in, but I don't like being taught", due to inner motivations among community members and the relatively positive external interaction atmosphere, an environment which stimulates self-learning is formed in doujin community. Members in the environment are transformed in mindset and learning is no longer passive and dull. The members, facilitated by their enthusiasm and interest, try to learn a certain skill, gain senses of joy and gratification after finishing their own works and get others' recognition in mutual sharing. With positive feedback and achievement inspiring them to press ahead and make progress, the harmonious communication and competition among community members can motivate them to keep bettering themselves, thereby composing high-quality works and creating a cycle system with sustainable dynamic.

In the following part, I will expound the characteristics of informal learning acts in doujin community from three aspects including initiative and activeness, sociality and interactivity, fragmentization and non-structural property.

*B. Sociality and interactivity*

Unlike formal learning in which knowledge directly or indirectly comes from textbooks and teachers, knowledge of informal is diverse in origins including communication with family members, colleagues and neighbors and information from television and network. Informal learning is of sociality, and the non-educational social interaction is one of the main channels to get knowledge while doujin composing and sharing of works is such social interaction involving knowledge transmission. When exchanging ideas concerning works, members of doujin community have discussion about composition techniques, aesthetic experience, story narration etc. In the meantime, members can get acquainted with, observe and learn from each other through works sharing. Shortcomings and problems discovered in communication can be solved with the help of other's experience and tools like internet, thereby improving themselves and enhancing their social competence.

Learners need a sense of belonging, and informal learning

should be conducted in an ideal environment for social interaction. Informal learning emphasizes interaction and cooperation among learners with shared culture a major feature of it. Most learners take delight in sharing experience, which can better stimulate sustainable learning acts, and thanks to the atmosphere where communication and composing are encouraged, most members are willing to share their experience and ways of getting knowledge, thus to help newcomers solve their problems. A positive mode of interaction has been formed in the community based on self-made course and mutual learning.

### C. Fragmentization and non-structural property

Fragmentization and non-structural property in doujin community indicates that learning time is fragmentized and knowledge obtaining is non-structural.

Unlike formal learning which involves teachers, fixed sites, time and contents, informal learning is diverse in forms, and it isn't subject to limitations like time, event or site. Fragmentized time like class intervals, periods while waiting in line and before sleeping can be used to get skills on internet or through mobile devices.

The skills and experience summarized through composing and communication of doujin works originate from creation and reconstruction of social knowledge. It transforms abstract inert knowledge into an active thinking mode and knowledge system. But, after all, the empirical learning outcomes drawn from non-authoritative individual thinking lacks normalization. Besides, the self-learning of community members which is based on previous experience, courses or their practice isn't systematic, and the learning acts are non-structural.

### Conclusion

The constantly increasing pressure from basic education puts learners into a passive and negative state, in which they are forced to learn instead of being driven by eagerness for knowledge. In addition, the rigid basic education mode imposes the same knowledge model on all learners. However, in informal learning of ACG doujin community, an active, positive and energetic learning mode can be found, where members express their feelings and create their own significance in the process of reading, communication, sharing, composing and recomposing. They equip themselves with skills and experience, hoping to improve themselves in the next communication, and the positive feedback achieved in sharing continuously inspires members to perfect their learning acts, which serves as self-realization in leisure and entertainment for them. According to experts' research on teenagers' sharing and composing in doujin communities, they are of a certain significance and value in innovating traditional education mode and creating a learning context which can stimulate students' self-learning acts.

### References

[1] Victoria J. Marsick and Karen E. Watkins,*Informal and Incidental Learning,*Special Issue: The New Update on Adult Learning Theory,Volume 2001, Issue89,Pages 25-34.

[2] Nada Dabbagh and Anastasia Kitsantas, *Personal Learning Environments, social media, and self-regulated learning: A natural formula for connecting formal and informal learning*, The Internet and Higher Education,Volume 15, Issue 1, January 2012, Pages 3-8.

[3] Lau C.Y., *Popular Visual Culture in Art Education: A Group Creativity Perspective*, Creative Arts in Education and Culture, Landscapes: the Arts, Aesthetics, and Education, vol 13. 2013, pp 83-95.

[4] Efland A, *From creative self expression to the rise of the creative class: A speculative inquiry in the history of education,* International Journal of Arts Education, 2010, 8(2), 1－17.

[5] Parsons, M., *Boxes and corrals: Creativity and art education revisited*,The International Journal of Arts Education, 2010, 8(2), 31–41.

[6] Lau C.Y., *Group creativity in the popular visual culture of Asian ethnic groups: A model for art education,* Australian Art Education,2011,34(2), 119－137.