Fandom and Popular Culture in the New Media Age Specialization

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Abstract: According to media scholar Jenkins Henry, fans can prefer popular media as an avenue of acquiring ideas through texts and making them creative and innovative for personal use. The popular culture theory suggests that a culture industry tends to prioritize making a profit from fan activities instead of focusing on production quality. Historically, culture is used to express or pass ideologies between generations; therefore, the next generations are likely to lose the original contents of the text in the case of popular culture fandom. However, the participatory theory suggests a different way of understanding media fans. Rather than classifying media fans as social misfits, cultural dupes, and mindless consumers, they can be referred to as manipulators of meaning and active producers. Therefore, fandom culture and media are social activities that promote fans to develop their communities to enable them to express themselves (Hills, 2017). The fans' freedom promotes an open community where fans can critique various ideas spread or promoted in the media. The paper analyses the Fandom and Popular Culture in the New Media Age Specialization and its trends in several thematic areas.

Keywords: Pop culture, Fan economy, New media users, Mass culture, Gendered fan culture

1. Introduction

Fan culture is the classification of people interested in a specific industry or activity that brings fans and satisfaction. The term fan describes being an interested party in a sport, music, shows, cinemas et al. Often, youths are associated with fans and make up the largest percentage of participants and spectators in the fan culture, also known as fandom. However, fan activities cut across all age groups while others are specific to a certain fan group (Gray et al., 2017)[1]. Recently, media has emerged to be the driving force in popularizing fandom and increasing access of spectators and participants to the fan culture. Participatory fan culture enables fans to promote or share valuable knowledge and information to entertain or read by other fans (Lamerichs, 2018)[2]. Media has enhanced and changed the trends of fan culture by promoting it from a minority culture to be part of the mainstream culture practiced globally.

Therefore, fan culture development and new-age media introduction have prompted research into the topic (Hills, 2017)[3]. However, the fan culture continues to cause friction as it finds its position in society, including tense relationships, conflicts, contradictions, and a rise in myths and misconceptions. But what is the role of fandom in the new media age? How can these communities create meanings for themselves? And how do these meanings integrate with the larger media system? These are the questions this paper will attempt to answer. Our research will focus mainly on the interaction between fans and mainstream media. Also, It will re-evaluate and broaden current perspectives on fandom (fan culture stratification) and the new media age. It will explore these connections from two perspectives: media theory and cultural theory. Additionally, the paper will look at the challenges facing the accommodation of fan culture in the community.

2. Fandom Culture and Theories

The lively and ever-growing online culture of fandom plays a significant, multifaceted, but understudied role in the new media age. Fan culture is the groupings of fans according to specific cultural presentations and text, and their stratification distinguishes the difference between fans and non-fans. It describes fan communities that share a common aspect of the enjoyment of popular culture, including movies, books, TV shows, sports teams, or sports. Without any doubt, it is now widely accepted that these fan communities form an important part of the complex media ecosystem (Lamerichs, 2018). They occupy a special position as active audience members with distinctive reception practices and activities such as commenting, fan art-making, and online community building.

On the other hand, participatory culture supports and is part of the actors in a specific fandom. The fans are responsible for promoting a specific fandom, causing other fans to align with the popular fandom. Driven by the pursuit of collective ownership over famous people and franchises they love, fans have always been enthusiastic participants in their favorite fandoms (Hills, 2017). They watch and discuss TV dramas, attend activities related to their idols, fill out forms for voting platforms, and make online comments.

Cultural theory studies the relationship between media, culture, and society. Scholars have explored multiple fields to understand this relationship, including cultural studies, postmodernism, postcolonialism, and feminism. These fields have made progress in understanding the mechanism behind different cultural artifacts with different functions or meanings. Beyond the meaning of cultural artifacts for society, cultural theorists have also thought about the significance of these artifacts in developing cultural identities (Lamerichs, 2018). It is also worth noting that cultural theory has explored how fandoms are formed. For example, David Hesmondhalh discusses how fans are turned into "media consumers," an identity conferred on them by the media industries. He suggests that media producers usually form this new identity to prevent fans from being seen as competitors instead of their content creators.

On the other hand, media theorists include fans in their theories of media (Hills, 2017). Hesmondhalh, for example, demonstrates how he understands fans as new social groups who play important roles in the development of popular culture. And media theorists have analyzed how these groups have a contribution to producing cultural artifacts.

3. New Media Age and Theories

Relatively, media taps into the power of fan culture to operate and earn profits. The contents of the fan culture are drawn from commercial culture and spread through the underground economy. Despite fan cultures that include music fans groups, sports fans promote participatory culture; it also encourages artistic production and creative expression by those taking part in the activities. Media is an essential tool for sharing information and promoting communication. However, it has expanded its scope to tap into the ever-growing fan culture. It focuses on popular groups and culture and makes it part of the media system (Booth, 2018)[4]. Therefore, fans are prompted to rely on media to access their respective fandom and connect with respective fans across the world.

Further, the new media age has enabled technological advancements to create groups in online platforms that bring members of the same fandom together. Thus, making connections between members, participants, and spectators of a specific fandom. Therefore, it is possible through media to share information, artistic expressions, and creative writings with other like-minded fans. Additionally, the visual and audio accessibility has made the experience of fans' culture amazing and efficient to participate.

Media industries are an important part of popular culture in the new media age. As consumer brands, they are powerful forces that shape mass culture and social life. And they work to maintain control over their products and markets. However, this also means they cannot easily transform their products to reflect continuous consumer demands changes. They try to keep their products as close to original as possible (Stanfill, 2019)[5]. Cultural industries are thus sometimes considered as ideal protective spaces that control the flows of cultural products.

Media theory has long explored the relationship between producers and spectators in the new media age. There are plenty of texts, including Paul Starr's "The Rise of Popular Culture in Early America" (1982) and Stuart Hall's "Encoding/Decoding" (1980), which focus on how the media system affects individuals or certain segments in society (Booth, 2018). These scholars all emphasize that people are not merely receivers of content but active creators of meaning. However, this understanding of media has ignored the role of fandom in the new media age. At the same time, these scholars also seem to neglect that the relationship between spectators and producers is not always one-way; often, it is two-way, including both decoding and encoding by the audience (Gray et al., 2017). Thus, there is need to explore these relationships to understand how fandom interacts with popular culture in the new media age.

Media theorists such as Howard Becker, Donald MacKenzie, and David Hesmondhalh have all dealt with the issue of fandom in their works. They all observe how broadcast content is objectified by homogenizing practices and analyzed as a source of identity. As a result of this analysis, fan communities

are viewed as new social groups who share aesthetic and social norms. It is said that the development of the Internet and digital media has changed the way fans interact with their favorite characters or celebrities' via media content (Booth, 2018). The platform for these interactions is no longer limited to broadcast channels such as TV shows and movies. Still, it includes websites, BBSs, and blog forums – any new forms of media – where fans can discuss their favorite content with others worldwide. The media theorists often categorized these website activities as "fansubbing" culture by adopting fans' character.

4. Fan Culture Stratifications

Fan culture takes different forms that categorize fans according to specific groups of interest and participation. The stratification defines the participatory aspect in a specific popular culture; an individual participates in a fan culture with the following characteristics. According to Hesmondhalh, "fans" are divided into subgroups based on their preferences in television shows, movies, or games. But fan groups are completely different because they do not have subgroups based on their preferences in media products. Within the fandom community, there are various levels of interaction. Some fans may play together or even create fan fiction or fan art. Others may trade media content in the form of digital files, but there is no hierarchy in terms of their level of interaction (Lamerichs, 2018). Some fans do not interact with other fans, and some fans might even hate each other's works. But members in fan groups are described as "best friends" or "allies." This can be explained by the phenomenon that fan groups are the geeks who share their passion for Japanese culture.

The natural rule of participatory stratification is based on the following favorable factors. Firstly, the fan culture needs minimum barriers to civic engagement and artistic expression; the fan grouping needs to be socially friendly and allow members to showcase their skills. Secondly, the fan culture needs to encourage the creation and sharing of individuals' ideas and creations within the fans culture group; fans can easily subscribe to an accommodative fan group. Thirdly, fans have the pleasure of being part of a fan group with seasoned leaders, mentors, celebrities, or prominent people who can pass significant information or mentorship to the members (Hills, 2017). Besides, it is human nature to associate with a popular or a winning social group; the same case applies to identifications of fan cultures. The most popular fan groups attract a significant number of fans. Finally, the social connection plays a significant role in bringing together members that feel to belong to a specific social class. For example, games like golf and polo tend to attract high-class fans, while soccer and athletics are mostly associated with middle-class people (Stanfill, 2019). Therefore, fans identify with a fan culture they feel comfortable with or align with their ideologies and philosophies.

5. Classification Phenomenon and Division of Labor

Classification of fans is may not be distinctive because fans participatory or spectatorship is random depending on an individual's social preference. Social class can be an avenue of classification because many fan culture activities are associated with the class. Members of a specific class are likely to be part of a specific sport because of the shared form of luxury or satisfaction. However, the most visible classification in line with labor division is gender classification (Gray et al., 2017). Gender is classified according to the participation of fans in their respective fan culture sub-groups. For example, the writing industry, fan art, and fan fiction are associated with female participants. Relatively, affirmation or physically engaging activities like collecting merchandise are dominated by male characters. However, it does not mean that the gendered roles cannot be exchanged; men can participate in women-associated fan culture and vice-versa. The definition of classification and identity is measured based on dominance, and it often forms a stereotype associated with fandom, not the real or true picture.

The gendered fan culture and media perception depict a community with assumed responsibilities hence division of labor. According to Henry Jenkins, there is a split in media fandom between the traditional perception of male-dominated fandom and the growing interest of females in the respective fan culture. The dynamics and changes brought about by technological advances have enabled women to have a space in the fandom world to showcase their prowess and creativity (Stanfill, 2019). For example, the writing, as mentioned above industry was dominated by male characters. Still, women have proven to be in a position to challenge their male counterparts in offering more writing skills.

6. Cooperation between Fans and Fans Communities

Scholars have paid more attention to how creators use fans as tools in their creative processes (Gray et al., 2017). For example, Japanese animators often collaborate with fan sites to produce TV shows. Likewise, many musicians interact with their fans through Facebook and other social media websites. Fans not only create content for the creators who endorse them: they also produce content for themselves. On the other hand, some companies try to use fans as a "testing" ground. For example, when a computer game company releases updates on new games it plans to release, it usually asks its fans to test the games and find bugs in them (Hills, 2017). This is because testing computer games can evaluate whether or not the current version of the game is ready for public release, and that fan input can help companies decide how to re-release their products. These examples show that creators and users often interact with each other within certain social contexts.

Fans and fan groups develop various relationships with content creators through social media sites like Twitter or Facebook. These relationships include the following: co-creation, where fans make "fanworks" which are based on the media content of their favorite creators; trading, where fans exchange media content with other fans via social media sites; and distribution, where fans distribute media content produced by their favorite creators to other fans. In any case, these relationships can be one-sided because a fan group might not be based on a shared interest with a creator based on a fandom (Booth, 2018). For example, Microsoft often talks to its online service users to generate ideas that might be useful for future products and provide incentives for users to participate in its research projects. Still, this does not mean that these dialogues between fans and creators are mutually beneficial.

7. Conflicts between Fans and Fans Communities

Fan culture, community, and fans often experience frictions in its applications. Initially, fan culture was based on traditional practices that aligned with the community's beliefs and practices. The introduction of media has caused a paradigm shift in behavior, division of labor, change of roles, gender and sexuality, and mode of operation (Stanfill, 2019). The challenge of incorporating modern practices and beliefs into the community causes societal friction. Often, fandom fans are seen with the view of the need to "grow up." Growing up implies abandoning the media-associated fan cultures because it is seen as a waste of time and resources. Relatively, community stereotypes affect the practice of fandom. For example, the perception that men should dominate or make up the majority of the participants in the transformative world has been overturned; women are taking up the roles of men (Hills, 2017). Gender biases are evident in the communities that are not open to the exchange of roles and division of labor. Media and fan culture have brought about "immoral" practices that are not in line with the community perception and definition of ethics.

8. The Rights and Interests Interaction between Fans as a Whole and Non-Fans, Media, Platforms and Stars Externally From a Macro Perspective.

When people talk about technology, they usually think of the digital age. It is easy to assume that the new media environment is dominated by digital technology, and it is difficult for us to imagine a world without it. The adoption of digital technologies in different industries and social life has not always been consistent or uniform worldwide. Fansubs were born at the height of the VHS era. Still, they spread even in countries where films and TV shows were not broadcast on videocassette recorders (even though fansub groups sometimes produced tapes for broadcasting) (Lamerichs, 2018). The adoption of digital technology becomes even more complicated when the social groups or individuals use the Internet to distribute content. However, it is still difficult for them to receive video files on their computers. Thus there is need to explore how technology impacts fandom in the new media age.

Today, our work with the mass media is often mediated by screens, whether LCD or plasma or cell phone display screens. These screens are always between the participants and what they want to experience want to experience. But there are various technologies available on these screens—from hard drives and NAND Flash memory chips, Web browsers, streaming videos, etc.—that can retrieve information from various sources of information. This information includes text documents, audio files, images, and videos on websites, forums, or blogs. Therefore, when reading books, playing video games or watching TV shows and films, Web service is used to provided by cable or satellite TV (Döveling et al., 2018)[6]. And when publishing our writings, it can be done through social media websites after obtaining a website domain name and a hosting website. Internet usage is now not limited to accessing

personal information like bank account information and health records; it has become a tool for fans and creators of content (Hesmondhalh). So what does this mean?

On the one hand, the development of digital technology has made everyone's life easier because these technologies have significantly reduced both the time and effort needed for our daily life (Booth, 2018). This is especially true for fansubbers, which can scan pictures and text on the Internet and use it to understand or translate foreign languages. On the other hand, it means that our lifestyles are increasingly linked with computer technologies. This kind of connection with the mass media via screens has empowered fans and made them feel increasingly alienated from their everyday lives (Hesmondhalh). It is possible that this alienation partly explains why the amateur activities of fandom are so popular these days (Döveling et al., 2018).

9. Conclusion

The development of digital technology does more than making things easy for us; it creates new opportunities for people to exchange information on the Internet. Throughout the new technology, "fans" have exchanged information about obscure texts and TV shows among themselves. Also, they can fill a gap in their knowledge on the subject of the text they seek to understand and provide a way for them to share their own experiences with other fans. In this sense, the Internet has been a significant platform for fandom. The Internet is also a tool that can help establish new social groups. In this sense, it is not only the shared interests of fans that led them to gather on fan sites but also their shared experience on the Internet (Döveling et al., 2018). The Internet has also become a place where digital technologies intersect with traditional media industries and modes of consumption.

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