



Fandom and Fanfiction in Entertainment

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Abstract: The way *fanfiction* has influenced entertainment culture is an interesting phenomenon. Fans can make their favorite celebrity a global sensation within short span of time. Though fandom or fanfiction is not a novel phenomenon, however the way it has undergone transformation with the emergence of digital media is critical. Digital revolution has postured profound effects in determining the fan culture in media and entertainment industry. Digital media has widened the scope of “*fan-celebrity*” relation. The boundaries between media content producers and consumers are being redefined. This study explores the fandom in entertainment and media industry. Literature suggests that there exists a symbiotic relation between consumers and producers and both work for mutual benefit. The study has applied qualitative method i.e. in-depth interviews to investigate the phenomenon. Under the theoretical foundation of Uses and Gratification this study found that the emergence of digital media (particularly social media) has reformed the entertainment culture with increased influence of the fans. Fans play significant decisive role in determining the nature the entertainment content being produced.

Keywords: Fandom, Entertainment, Media Content, Digital media, Celebrity.

1. Introduction

Media researchers, especially entertainment researchers, have observed number of factors that describe the apparent attraction towards media content. It may include obsession with characters, engrossment with storyline, as well as there are certain psychological delights that consumers can obtain from the media content (Cohen, 2001). However, variety of studies based on entertainment explain that viewers have experience with entertainment content of media that leads to liking, appreciation and further investment. Similarly other investigations into the area suggest greater attention of the audience is highly based on the psychological perspectives (Oliver, 2008). There are number of explanation that are often associated with the notion of fandom in general. “Media fandom is a phenomenon that encourages individuals to collectively and socially unite within a subculture based on shared interests or appreciation of a media world or product” (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010). Additionally fandom is also perceived as a form of subculture based on common identity uniformly found among the individuals who share interest in a media message (Jenkins, 2006).

With the passage of time fandom is turned into fan communities and members tend to develop their social identity. This sense of identity serves to give the recognition. Moreover this notion fandom has been successful to earn

support throughout many milieu, like sports, music, film, drama, arts and literature (Baym, 2007). Fandom has been a significant topic that attracted number of media and entertainment scholars. Variety of dimension in this area has been the focus of the different studies done in this regard. Starting from personal, social and aspects cultural different psychological and communal aspects has been investigated in association with the phenomenon of fandom. There has been observed a completely new social identity, rituals and subcultures that reshaped the overall cultural and social identity within the community (Cohen, 2003). The notion of passive audience has long prevailed the media and entertainment industry. Contrary to it fandom culture gave rise to active consumers of the media content. They play active role while collecting and consuming media messages especially entertainment. Therefore they are perceived as more than just viewers rather efficient producers of the cultural capital with more knowledgeable view of the media (Jenkins, 2000).

For the consumers to be engaged as “fans” identification of the content play a significant role. Identification may take place when consumer is exposed to a particular character or a narrative. Similarly it can also happen while audience tends to share the perspective of a character in a narrative and take part in his or her experience (Eyal & Rubin, 2003). Likewise fans are more likely to feel resemblance with their favourite characters and may be attracted toward the storyline. These are the viewers that have high tendency to understand the perspective, goals or motives of the characters they like. Moreover identification may also happen when fan ritualize certain practices (Soukup, 2002), such as indulging in a social network that increases the level of knowledge of the their favorite characters in media. These practices nurture a strong mutual connection within the fan community allowing an increased involvement in fan based social rituals and related practices (Fraser & Brown, 2002). However the level of exposure to the media content varies for the fans of any form media message. Therefore media coverage is highly inspired by not only the awareness level of the consumers about the media object but also type of their interest (Abelman & Atkin, 2002).

Cultivation approach also effective in this regard, the persistent exposure to certain themes in media content can lead to particular perception of the world on part of the viewers (Gerbner, 1998). Similarly the recurrent exposure to storylines is likely to have an impact on the way audience responses (Sanders & Tsay-Vogel, 2014). The more consumption of media products is associated with the acceptance and agreement with the rooted values found in the narratives for example, loyalty, morals, friendship and pursuit for subjective ideals etc. Additionally the frequent exposure to books, films, drama and songs etc. encourage the interest of the viewers to be the part of those sharing the same interest (Algoe & Haidt, 2009). Those who are more thoughtful and self-reflective about their desires are more expected to be engaged in fan based communities for the sake of pronouncing their interests. Studies have found that fandom is encouraged by effective and expressive link between oneself and objective reality of the world around (Sandvoss, 2013).

While considering their personal and social identity fans take part in communities to get emotionally attached. Studies also suggest that fan engagement is done to acquire not only emotional attachment but also to attain a certain level of personal growth and development. Similarly the sense of curiosity and exploration also reassure exposure to novel experiences (Kashdan, Rose, & Fincham, 2004). Among multiple reasons, pleasure and impact has been the top priorities of fandom. Noted in a study, “*fully account for the pleasures and enjoyment of fans without which their regular and dedicated consumption of their given object of fandom cannot be explained*”. In contemporary digital era it has been witnessed a profound effect on fandom through empowerment and disempowerment of the consumers. A symbiotic relationship has been established between corporations and the consumers while the distorting the boundaries between them. Thus technology is creating to the formation of new culture (Pearson, 2010). The notion that exposure of television content is more likely to create perception of the social reality. Although the concept is certain but the uncertainty is all about the nature of the relationship between perception and exposure of content. The concept of “cultivation effect” (coined by Gerbner and his colleague) suggested the relationship between time a person spends watching television and the extent to which reality is perceived in accordance with the reality shown in television as a positive phenomenon (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1994).

However, the intrusion of technology in fandom is conceived differently, some of fan communities laud the opportunities provided by the digital era while others simply take it as an infringement of corporate supremacy into every space of fandom. The reconfiguration of the relationship between producers and consumers in digital era is

being considered at scholarly level (Rehak & Scott, 2007). Contemporary media industry and the consequent fan culture has undergone a shift with the emergence of internet. Internet and digital media has facilitated the fan to reach out their favorite celebrities in a way that could never have been imagined before. The current study focuses on the idea the way digital media has enabled fans to empower or disempower a particular celebrity both locally and globally. Fans have got an influence over the mainstream media to be selective about not only the content it creates as well as the celebrity it considers for a particular role.

1.1 Objectives

This research focuses on the following objectives;

- To study the role of social media in promoting fan culture in media and entertainment.
- To investigate the effects of fandom and fanfiction on celebrity making in media and entertainment
- To explore the effects of social media on the nature of the content creation in mainstream media

1.2 Research Questions

Following research questions are the focus of the study;

- Does social media fandom decide the nature of content of mainstream media and entertainment?
- Is fan culture effective enough to make celebrities out of their favourite characters?

1.3 Scope of Study

The contemporary media culture is going through transformation, especially with the emergence of social media. Fans have become influential in entertainment industry. They have become active participants in the whole media structure. This phenomenon of fandom has become the matter of scholarly concern. This study investigates the scope of fandom in entertainment and media. The mutual association between consumers and producers is critical for the researchers. This research helps to locate the scope of fandom in current media and entertainment culture.

2. Literature Review

Fandom is regarded as a subculture where people follow the common object of interest and as a result develop the feeling of fellowship and compassion with others. These followers are called fans and they devote a whole lot of energy and time to track each and every detail related to their object of interest. They become part of social network where they separate the people of casual interest from people associated to specific fandom. Fandom is not bounded to a specific human activity or interest as it can focus on a person such as “celebrity”, even include fashions, genres or the entire set of hobbies. Therefore, the term fandom referred to a specific group of fans with fascination for same object. However it is to be mentioned that this term was primarily used for sports followers (Stanfill, 2019). Modern fandom is considered to be first rose from the fans of literary detective character “Sherlock Holmes”. People held public mourning and gathering when the character was killed in the story and as a result first Fan fiction was created (Poore, 2013). The modern fan subcultures in West were created by the science fiction fandom and fantasy genres, dated back to 1930s. Science fiction fandom now manage organizations and organized clubs in many cities around the globe (Moskowitz, 1990).

Media fandom focuses on the relation between television characters and film media franchise. Some famous franchise includes “Star Trek” which the most fan following. This has inspired fans to create fan art and fan fiction. In this way media fandom was separated from science fiction fandom and became more prominent. Now video room is provided with the creation of fan vids and analytical music videos in Media West convention (Jenkins & Tulloch, 2005). Another famous fandom is anime and manga fandom which originated from Japan in 1970s. In West it began as an offshoot of science fan fiction where copies of Japanese manga were imported by the fans. The start of fan subs started when before anime was licensed in America fans began to leak the film copies and subtitle them following by sharing in the anime fandom community (Guo, 2020). Fans associated with a fandom communicate with one another. In order to exchange latest news and updates they attend fan meetings and conventions. Fanzines and newsletters are published and exchanged one of the example include Amateur press associations which is well known form of fan networking and publication. These subcultures were basically based on print media however with the passage of time they have adopted the modern technology like internet as a mean

of interaction and communication (Galuszka, 2015).

In addition, fans use internet to obtain detailed information and updates of every moment based upon their fan base. Fans share their admiration as well as criticism on a specific performance by joining discussions boards and fan based forums (Théberge, 2005). In these discussion forums new fans are always welcomed while for long time fans some contributors are valued from other ones to some extent. It is worth noticing that such discussion boards have proven to be effective as they can directly influence the media itself. Moreover, they influence producers and writers of the show as well. It is evident from the case of a television show “Glee” (Wood & Baughman, 2012). In other case of the television series “firefly” which was cancelled its fandom affected the media so much that a movie was created with same storyline (McCormick, 2018). Fan fiction is a sort of admiration depicted by fans for their subject of interest. Fans create stories which are fictional but they contain same story setting or universe and characters of their preferred fandom. Writers now write fan fiction to gain popularity and readers by using most followed characters in the storyline. It is not necessary that fans would create the story with same plot and characters sometimes they use same characters but with entirely unique plot and on occasion same plot is used with different characters. Fan fiction can take different forms other than writing like featured video making as well (Conrad & Hawley, 2021).

Cosplay is becoming more in practice and famous now a days as it has incorporated in events and parties as a prominent part. Fans excitedly take part in cosplay. Cosplay is an amalgamation of costume and play which involves the creation and wearing of designed costumes which are related to the characters from a specific work. It may also involves the role playing which is recreation of scenes or developing same kind of behavior as an inspiration from the chosen work and character (Lamerichs, 2013). Some of the fans create analytical music videos including fan vids which are totally from a fan’s point of view. Some of them create fan art as well which focuses on the source of fandom. The terms “fanac” or “fan labor” are used for these types of activities as an abbreviation of “fan activity”. Fan activities and association has been facilitated since the emergence and excessive use of internet. internet based activities include various creation from the fan such as “shrine” a stipend a dedication for their favorite character from the work, wallpapers and screen savers for computer and mobile screens and avatars including costume and complete get up just like the character. This fan work is exchanged and distributed to fandom community members by the use of internet (Schott & Burn, 2007).

Edits which are basically the pictures and photos of chosen fandom characters in different settings created by fans for entertainment. Tumbler, Pinterest and Instagram are the main social media networks involved in sharing of edits (Phillips, 2012). This content is available for various different fandoms to see. Gifs or gif sets related to fandoms are also created and circulated in online fan communities. They are created by mixing or adding in actual content to generate non canon scenarios. Moreover, they minute moment or expression can also be captured by these. Gifs are the depiction of true feelings of fans about the characters or events revolving around their fandom known as “reaction gifs” (Elahi, Lan, & Sheikh, 2020). Many organizations are run by active fans which take part in creating positive impact in the society and in participate in philanthropy activities. “harry Potter Alliance” is a Harry Potter fan base extensive civic organization which has an online sector which manage campaign related to basic human right issues by associating and in partnership with other non-profit groups and advocacy (Jenkins H. , 2015). A large number of college age and above students are the active member of this organization. Another example of such fandom base organization is “Nerdfighters” which originally fight against the negativity and meritocracy in the society as well as use “decreasing world suck” as a motto. This organization comprises of high school students and they formed after a YouTube channel “Volgbrothers” rose to fame and popularity (Tarvin, 2021). Entertainment industry including television and film considers “fanbase” as the total sum of fans devoted to a certain subject of interest either organize or not. In media fans following is rather and impactful factor. Media fans can openly admire and criticize any TV series or film. They can turn any cancelled series or movie into success. In case of Hollywood many such examples are prominent such as “Star Trek” in 1968 (Phillips, 2012), “Xena: Warrior Princess” in 1995 and “Jericho” in 2007 etc. In case of cancelled series firefly another movie “Serenity” was the result instead of another season. Another prominent case includes the creation of “Veronica Mars” film from “Kickstarter” campaign which was made possible due to the participation and facilitation of fans. Use of social media has facilitated fans in this regard as they can openly support their favorite shows. Fans of the show “Chuck” launched and actively participated in the campaign to save the show when it was on the verge of being

cancelled. They used twitter hashtag to enhance the awareness and their dis likeness regarding cancellation of show (Thomas, 2021). Moreover, they bought products from the sponsors of the show. In the same way for the addition of a character “Steve Holt” in another season of “Arrested Development” fans fought over the social media and in the form of campaign. By the use of Facebook and Twitter the campaign “Save Steve Holt!” including the hashtag and use of a website shows the active participation and devotion of fans in their object of interest (Locker, 2022). Moreover, if such outcries and protests have no positive or successful impact but such activities depict the increasing self-awareness among the consumers of entertainment. It suggests their growing interest and involvement in entertainment as they deliberately appear to insert their power and influence in it. Fan activism is the term most fitting for such trend (Jenkins & Shresthova, 2012). Use of social media like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram has changed the relation of professionals with their fans. It has given fans an easy access to public figures and celebrities like actors, writers, artists, creators, designed in fact people from every field of life and inspirational personalities. Now they can easily communicate with them, follow daily happening in their life personal as well as professional. Such personalities are now involved in updating their fans to keep them in touch. Therefore online platforms has further facilitated fans to connect in more than one way and actively participate in fandom and other fan events (Bury, 2017).

Fans have made career for themselves from the work they do in fandom. For instance, the writer of the novel “Fifty Shades of Grey” E.L James first wrote this book based on “Twilight” series as a fan fiction but due to violation of the site terms and services the story was taken down. Afterwards the writer rewrote the novel by taking any reference of “Twilight” and republish the work in 2011 on another website. This book proved to be a massive hit when published in print form where 100 million copies were sold. Many fans of the “twilight” were not happy with the writer to use fan fiction as a source of popularity and the felt is against the spirit of their fandom community (Harman & Jones, 2013). Moreover, many companies use fans to test their games by offering early access and for promotional purpose. Such fans complain about not being paid for their work and time. In a case of television series “Glee” the fans were not compensated when used to created promotional material (Wood & Baughman, 2012). Entertainment industry is actively involved in the promotion of its work to the fandom community by directly considering each member. They sponsor and present conventions which are dedicated to fandom promotional purposes. Media studios often create exhibits for the elaboration. For the promotion of existing work and the one intent for future release panels are organized featuring writers, celebrities and director of the film and television series where fans directly engage with them with questions and answers sessions, screening of sneak peek previews and branded supply giveaways. Therefore, it is worth mentioning that interest, reaction and perception of the fandom community over the work which is being promoted influences the film studios and other media projects involving television and print media as well. Fandom community compels studios on how and what to proceed with the products they are promoting and exhibiting (Stanfill, 2019). A transformed form of fandom or fan culture is under study by the number of researchers. The digital revolution has assisted to establish a symbiotic relationship between viewers and the content they are exposed to in media and entertainment industries. The role of internet has grossed an integral role in determining the scope of fan communities.

3. Methodology

While considering Uses and Gratification theory the current study applied qualitative methodology to investigate fandom in entertainment industry. In-depth interviews were conducted to trace a deeper insight into the issue under consideration. Interviews of seven celebrities and experts from the entertainment industry were conducted. Themes and sub-themes were carefully devised to analyze the collected data.

4. Findings

Table 1: Findings

Themes	Sub-themes
Knowledge about fandom	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meaning of fandom• Awareness about the media content• Role of fans in entertainment industry

Factors influencing fandom	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Psychological aspects• Emotive aspects• Fashion trends• Scope of fan culture
Relation between fandom and nature of media content	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The symbiotic relation fandom and entertainment content• Interdependence of fanfiction and mainstream media• Content choices and fans
Fandom and digital media	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• endorsement of favorite celebrities• Space provided by new media• Fan culture and stardom• “Blurring” the boundaries between producers and consumers
Need of fanfiction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staying up to date• Promotion of consumerism

4.1 Knowledge about Fandom

Entertainment industry finds itself partial without any supporters or “fans”. The participants of the interview agreed with the notion that fans are the ones that gives complete meaning to the entertainment industry. Fandom has become an integral part of the media and entertainment productions. The respondents also believed that the majority of the fans are unaware about their role in defining the nature of media or entertainment content. Similarly, they also opined that fans blind followers and don’t tend to consider the product or celebrity logically. On the other hand, some of the respondents related that fans are actually active participants in the entertainment industry who know their power to influence the nature of the media content being produced as well as the actors being selected in certain roles.

4.2 Factors Influencing Fandom

There has been number of factors, related by the participants of the interview, influencing fandom. There are certain psychological factors that encourage fandom among the consumers of the entertainment media content. Consumers locate different psychological and emotional in productions of entertainment and media. They found certain elements relatable in media messages like dramas and films. However, those who are unlikely to discriminate between real life and fiction shown by media found themselves strongly influenced by the content they are exposed to. Consequently, they start admiring not only the content but also the actors who play their favorite role (they can relate to). The respondents believed that consumers become fan of the content or the actors due to the emotional catharsis. Similarly, other participants also suggested that along with the gratification of emotional and psychological needs, fashion trends are also significant factor in determining the fandom.

4.3 Relation between Fandom and Nature of Media Content

Media content, especially entertainment industry, has always been found complemented by number of admirers and followers. Therefore, the respondents of the interview also agreed that fans and entertainment industry can be found in a symbiotic relationship. It means that both sides benefit from one another. Media content seems to be highly dependent on the desire of the fans. Producers highly consider the like and dislikes of the fans. Not only nature of the media content but also the selection of the actors is done in compliance with the demands of the fans. However, some of the respondent opposed this idea and related that fake symbiosis is promoted by the media producers to maximize their profit. Fans and indulged in the content that producers want them to follow. Celebrities are intentionally given certain roles that are more engaging for the fans. They start following those celebrities and want to see them in more entertainment projects. On the other hand, other respondents believed that media, especially mainstream media, has become dependent on fans and their choices.

4.4 Fandom and Digital Media

The interdependence of fandom and entertainment industry is apparent phenomenon. Fans decide the worth of the entertainment content. They admire certain message (drama, films etc.) to make it a super hit. Similarly, their rejection of the certain content can lead to failure for the producers. The respondents of the interview believe that the emergence of digital media has strengthen fan-content relationship. The emergence of social media has ensured direct link between fan and celebrities. “Stardom” is highly dependent on “fandom”. Different social media platforms have minimized the distance between fans and their favorite actors. In other words, the boundaries between the producers and consumers has been blurred with the emergence of social media. In fact, some of the participants opined that digital media has reformed the fan culture and reshaped it in more influential way. Wearing like favorite actors, interacting with fans and building fan communities has been possible with the help of different social media networks. A celebrity gets more chance to work when he or she has more fan following on social media than others. Fans can make a celebrity out of an ordinary person overnight. Social media has encouraged such trends within the entertainment industry. The participants also agreed that anyone who has huge fan following become celebrity and can easily get chance to work in the industry. Thus in current age of social media maximum fan following is the only qualification to be called a “celebrity”.

4.5 Need of Fanfiction

In contemporary media and entertainment industry fanfiction is considered as a mean to stay up to date. The respondents believed that fans find it trendy to follow certain celebrity. On the other hand, media practitioners do that to promote consumerism. To reach the maximum profit huge number of consumers are engaged by the producers. Thus both sides have reason to abide by the concept of fanfiction and fandom in entertainment and media industry.

4.6 Discussion

Admiring the media content has always been the integral part of the entertainment industry. People that love certain actors want them to be taken up in maximum projects. In other words, these admires, also called *fans*, are important in guiding the producer’s decisions. As observed in a study fans are more likely to feel resemblance with their favourite characters and may be attracted toward the storyline. These are the viewers that have high tendency to understand the perspective, goals or motives of the characters they like. Moreover identification may also happen when fan ritualize certain practices (Soukup, 2002). The level of attachment with the content and the actors have evolved over the time. Studies also suggest that a symbiosis has been created between potent media corporated and and potetial fans inspiring the ways to new form of culture formation in entertainment industry. Participants of the interview also supported the notion the media content is no more producers concern rather it is being influened by the fans and the admirers. The interference of fans in entertainment industry has been further strengthened by the emergence of different social media platforms supported by digitl media. Majority of the respondents agreed that media content is no more sole concern of the producers, rather it has become a mutual concern of the producers and consumers. In related studies from personal, social and aspects cultural different psychological and communal aspects has been investigated in association with the phenomenon of fandom. There has been observed a completely new social identity, rituals and subcultures that reshaped the overall cultural and social identity within the community (Cohen, 2003). The respondents of the interview related that there are different factors that determine the level of fandom in entertainment. personal choices, desires, psycology and emotive factors play significant part in determining the fan followng of a particular media content or celebrity.

5. Conclusion

Fanfiction is not a new development. Media content and entertainment has always been followed by huge number or admirers and critics. However, the emergence of digital media, especially number of social media platforms, have provided huge space for the interaction between fans and celebrities. The contact between them has become uninterrupted like never before. Fans can approach their favorite celebrities and share their thoughts. The interaction can be negative as well. The criticism of by the fans has also become important contribution of social media interaction with celebrities. Finding of the study concludes that symbiosis can be traced between fans and

media producers. Media content has become dependent on the fans and their desires. Opinion of the fans is significantly transforming the nature of the media and entertainment content. Fans not only want to see their favorite actors in different entertainment projects but also want the nature of content be according to their choices. Fans can make certain content or actor a hit or flop overnight. This fandom is promoting a new culture in entertainment and media industry. Therefore, fans are more than simple consumers, rather they are active viewers with significant influence over the nature of the media messages. Since media producers are not the only responsible for the production of media content, it is suggestive that fans, as active consumers, can play constructive part in this regard. Meanwhile media and entertainment content is a mutual concern of the producers and consumers, more effective and constructive content can be generated to improve the standards of entertainment industry in particular and media industry in general.

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