

Chapter 5

To Be Continued...

Fan Fiction and the Constructing of Identity

Patrik Wikström

Jönköping International Business School, Sweden

Christina Olin-Scheller

Karlstad University, Sweden

ABSTRACT

This chapter contributes to the existing body of knowledge on fan fiction by reporting the findings from a quantitative and qualitative study on fan fiction in a Swedish context. The authors contextualize the fan fiction phenomenon as a part of a larger transformation of the media sphere and the society in general where media consumers' role as collaborative cultural producers grows ever stronger. They explore what kind of stories inspire the writers and conclude that as in many other parts of the entertainment industry, fan fiction is dominated by a small number of international media brands. The authors show how fan fiction can play an important role in the development of adolescents' literacies and identities and how their pastime works as a vehicle for personal growth.

INTRODUCTION

Storytelling is a fundamental part of human culture. Throughout the history of human civilization storytelling have allowed communities and societies to convey knowledge, norms and values between generations, and it has served as an important tool for people – young and old – in the crafting their identities. The act of creating and sharing stories is by necessity based on some kind of communication technology and the character

of these technologies influences *how* stories are created and shared and to some extent *what kind* of stories are created and shared. Clay tablets, codices, eReaders, and the remaining plethora of more or less influential communication technologies all contribute to the development of storytelling.

During the last centuries, traditional tools for writing and distributing literature have established a romantic image of the male author who creates and shares his stories with the world, and an admiring audience which listens and appreciates the works of the genius. It seems as the latest major communication technology – the Internet

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-60960-209-3.ch005

– questions this basic structure and enables the establishment of a somewhat less unidirectional structure for storytelling. The Internet allows the formerly passive audience to actively contribute to the stories which are shared among the members of global and local communities. This chapter explores how one specific aspect of the Internet transforms an equally specific aspect of storytelling. At the centre of our attention lies a phenomenon known as *fan fiction* – stories based on well-established¹ characters and structures, but written by the fans of these well-established characters rather than by the original author. While fan fiction is far from a new phenomenon, we will look at how the Internet has released this form of expression from the shackles of the offline world and enabled it to develop into an integral and vital part of Internet culture.

After introducing concepts, theoretical approaches, and methods, the chapter will present the findings from a quantitative and qualitative study on fan fiction and fan fiction writers. Questions regarding who is writing fan fiction and what kind of stories they are inspired by are followed by an exploration of how the development of literacies and identities are stimulated by reading and writing fan fiction. Lastly, the chapter makes general conclusions and suggests opportunities for future research.

BACKGROUND

After the industrial revolution and before the advent of digital communication technologies, the capability to create and disseminate information throughout society was concentrated to a limited number of fairly powerful organizations. These organizations were strong enough to be able to acquire the scarce resources and the expensive equipment required in order to operate a newspaper, a television station, or a book publisher to be reckoned with. Common people were more or less shut out from cultural production and were

sentenced to the role of the consumer – passively watching, reading and listening to the works of others.

However, during the second half of the last century, technological development contributed to a radical increase in the accessibility of these scarce communication resources. More and more people were able to create their own stories and share their creations with the world. New practices for using media content emerged and a culture sometimes referred to as a ‘remix culture’ (e.g. Lessig, 2008) or a ‘participatory culture’ (e.g. Jenkins, 2006a) became part of the normal way of life in the digital world. Today, the world’s six most visited web sites (excluding search related sites) can be categorized as *peer* media i.e. media services which are (1) interactive; (2) the most valuable content is generated by amateurs rather than by professionals; (3) and the emphasis is placed on contact and community elements rather than on information per se (Küng, 2008: 86; <http://www.alex.com>).

The transformation of consumers of media into *producers* of media has been noted by many scholars and can be considered a part of a general societal transformation (e.g. Firat, 1987). Several scholars have explored this transformation from a media perspective and have used terms such as ‘prosumption’ (Toffler, 1980) or ‘produsage’ (Burgess & Green, 2009) to label this kind of media consumer. Others have suggested the concept of ‘contribution’ as a way to de-emphasize the otherwise somewhat troubling production-consumption dichotomy (e.g. Olin-Scheller & Wikström, 2009).

Fan fiction is a phenomenon which has a longer history but which nevertheless can be seen as a specific manifestation of these trends. Fan fiction is normally written without a commercial purpose and without the approval of the author of the original text. Throughout history there are numerous examples of fans who have been inspired to write their own stories based on the characters which they treasure. One early example is the group of Jane Austin followers who during the end of the

12 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:
www.igi-global.com/chapter/continued-fan-fiction-constructing-identity/50694

Related Content

Communication Overload in Online Communities in Higher Education: A Case Study

Joao Batista, Helena Santos and Rui Pedro Marques (2022). *International Journal of Technology and Human Interaction* (pp. 1-16).

www.irma-international.org/article/communication-overload-in-online-communities-in-higher-education/293194

Measuring the Success of Social Software Adoption in the Firm: Empirical Evidence and Model Design

Melanie Steinhüser, Stefan Smolnik and Uwe Hoppe (2012). *International Journal of Social and Organizational Dynamics in IT* (pp. 34-47).

www.irma-international.org/article/measuring-success-social-software-adoption/69528

The Computer-Related Self Concept: A Gender-Sensitive Study

Monique Janneck, Sylvie Vincent-Höper and Jasmin Ehrhardt (2013). *International Journal of Social and Organizational Dynamics in IT* (pp. 1-16).

www.irma-international.org/article/the-computer-related-self-concept/96940

State-of-the-Art of AI-Driven Smart Technologies

P. Selvakumar, Rashmi Akshay Akshay Yadav, R. Devi, Pritam Lanjewar, Aditya Dive, Raj Kumar and T. C. Manjunath (2026). *The Social Impact of Next-Generation Smart Cyber Technology* (pp. 85-112).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/state-of-the-art-of-ai-driven-smart-technologies/391996

Behavioral and Physiological Responses to Computers in the Ultimatum Game

Aleksandra Swiderska, Eva G. Krumhuber and Arvid Kappas (2019). *International Journal of Technology and Human Interaction* (pp. 33-45).

www.irma-international.org/article/behavioral-and-physiological-responses-to-computers-in-the-ultimatum-game/214929