

**ISSN** INTERNATIONAL  
STANDARD  
SERIAL  
NUMBER

ISSN-2321-7065

**IJELLH**

**International Journal of English Language,  
Literature in Humanities**



**Volume 7, Issue 6, June 2019**

[www.ijellh.com](http://www.ijellh.com)

Renjitha Reghunath

Assistant Professor

Department of English

St. Xavier's College for Women, Aluva

M.G University, Kottayam

Kochi, Kerala, India

[renjithareghunath80@gmail.com](mailto:renjithareghunath80@gmail.com)

Dr. Tessy Antony C.

Associate Professor and Research Guide

Department of English

St. Teresa's College(autonomous)

City : Kochi

State: kerala

New Media and The Shifting Paradigms Of Fan Culture: A Study Of Fan Fiction, Fandom  
And The Shift In Consumer Industry

Abstract

With the advent of new media technology, there has been a massive push towards digital capitalism. Simultaneously Fandom and Fanfiction emerged as the new participatory culture that turned online users to consumers of fandom. The digital natives have adopted this new online world despite its obvious flaws. However it also made them easy targets for capitalists who turned their interests into commodities.

Keywords: teens; fans; fanfiction; new media; digital; Harry Potter; Communication; fandom.

## Introduction

Ever since the late nineties internet has captured the attention of people from various walks of life, irrespective of age and gender. From Baby Boomers to digital natives, the internet has managed to understand the community dynamics and captivate and convert even the most stubborn ‘tech wary’ individuals. The word, the sound and the image also underwent a radical shift and went from being three separate entities to a single unified form – the digital form.

With the old Media, it was difficult producing the image and the sound simultaneously within a single medium and they seldom coexisted in the same sphere. The word was readily accessible in the print form. The 21<sup>st</sup> century preference for multiple modes of communication was fulfilled by the New Media technologies which was ‘multimodal’ in form. The sound, word and image now existed as one format and often overlapped each other.

The purpose of technology has changed with time to suit the needs of people. Changes in Lifestyle as well as advancements in science and technology enhanced and improved life. This resulted in a greater demand for high-tech ‘on-the-go’ applications to improve life in terms of speed, ease and connectivity. One such example would be the changes introduced by Amazon and Google, two of the most influential multi-national companies. The Amazon smart home and Google home systems have automated and digitized homes with promises of simpler stress free lives. Everything from electronic devices to home appliances can now be controlled remotely. Such momentous changes are taking place simultaneously across the globe. Such technological innovations have also altered the media and communication industries.

Modern day youth engage in multiple literacies and are experts at remixing a variety of media. They are comfortable with the Digital Media because of its interactivity and its nonlinearity, rather than the old sources which includes documents, prints and texts.

The Young adults of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are digital natives and are masters at consuming and producing digital technologies. In addition to this fascination with the digital world, they also share an interest with all forms of subversive fiction from the supernatural and dystopia fiction to the shape shifter genre. These Young Adults are also adaptable and capable of handling multiple online identities. They like the anonymity and freedom that comes with the digital space. They like the constant stimulation of moving from one technology to another. They do this with fluidity and ease, juggling multiple (virtual) identities.

The cyber world thus becomes a channel for self expression. They follow their idols both offline and online. Their affiliation and idolatry tendencies towards their cultural icons or superstars materialize in the form of fan fiction. Fandom or fan culture is one of the most influential and a marketable artifact of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Popular culture academics in the US and the UK trace the beginnings of an identifiable fan culture and community from the 1970s. These tendencies were first identified by Henry Jenkins in *Textual Poachers* (1992). There is early evidence of fans coming together around science fiction television shows like *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.* (1964-1968) and the original *Star Trek* (1966-1969) (Pande Rukmini *The Conversation*).

Fanfiction is quite popular with the young teens despite the severe criticism against this genre. It is creative in terms of content and form and cannot be considered recycled fiction. Fanfiction is fiction created by fans based on their idols. These idols are usually television characters, music artists, film actors or even comic characters. They are given a new presence and perpetually live on in the pages of digital archives. Fans who are obsessed with their favourite stars or characters are often left unsatisfied with the close of the book or

after the movie. They want their characters to live on and be part of their lives. Fanfiction is then a fan's way of bringing to life their idols and have them partake in the life they lead. Fans are emotionally invested in the characters and their narratives are mini sequels with modern settings with unexpected and unconventional twists.

Fanfiction is hardly a new phenomenon, but that doesn't always mean it was safe to write. For a time, in certain fandoms, writing fanfiction could get you a letter from a lawyer. Now, however, the internet has given fandom enough leverage to allow the dubiously legal practice of writing about other people's characters continues to flourish (Jackson 2018).

This new genre underwent a subtle change over the years but it took years for the fiction to escape the dishonor associated with it. The 21<sup>st</sup> century has favoured this new found fandom and has elevated it to new heights. It was created and read by teens all across the world and is usually found amidst the Young Adults section. However, unlike all the other sub genres in the Young genre, Fan fiction's position is rather unstable and occupies a rather awkward position and writers of fanfiction target a specific audience – the fans. Their works are meant to be read only by the fans that have a clear idea about the canon they have written about.

The Young Adult Fiction has a smattering of sub genres that occupies specific spaces. But in the case of the Fan Fiction however, there is a lack of constancy in terms of themes and narrative style. Another factor that sets it apart from others genres of the Young Adult fiction is that it can only thrive in the digital environment. Other genres like chick literature and paranormal fiction do have a non digital origin. The birth of Fan Fiction has a lot to do with the dawn of the fan community which in turn is indebted to the internet that made it possible for groups of people having similar taste and passion to come together and occupy a common space. This space then grew into massive proportions into groups and finally into official fan based communities. This however did not happen overnight. The fan came

together when there was a common goal or purpose; which could be to discuss the shortcoming or flaws of their 'subject' fandom, or to broaden the pleasure of the rather limited nature of the characters, plots, or settings in the fiction they worshipped. For example with the publication of *Harry Potter*, which was a series of novels, by J.K Rowling, fans could not get enough of the fantasy world or its characters. It had at least a few dozen websites dedicated to discussing things from the model of the brooms incantations to spoiler alerts on plot twists. Like for instance the website *mugglenet.com* is one of the largest and the most popular fan based community. It is varied and has everything from polls, potter history, podcasts to potter essays and flash games. It is an international collaborative community that is dedicated to maintaining the interests of its fandom. On closer look we understand that the fandom and fan based communities are more than mere fiction or stories. They are also a source of income and that they generate revenue. It is also a commodity and the economics of it does not escape our attention. A quick glance through the *mugglenet* site provides us with a valuable insight into what sells and how much.

Yes, you read that correctly. We promise your eyes are not deceiving you. Universal Parks & Resorts reported that Wizarding World of Harry Potter fans have drunk 20 million butterbeers since the Wizarding World of Harry Potter at Universal's Islands of Adventure opened its gates in 2010....According to reports, butterbeer sales reached one million after a year of the first park opening. The other 19 million sales have occurred within the last seven years. The fandom's magical butterbeer drinking skills seem to be growing somewhat exponentially (H, Catherine 2018).

Catherine's other posts include more information about Harry Potter merchandise and other hot releases available to the fans. This is only the tip of the iceberg because there are several multinational entertainment corporations like Warner Bros and Universal studios that are selling or at least promoting their products through these communities. This is yet another

unique feature of fandom or fan culture. This alone hints at the growing and indelible force of fandom and fan based fiction. Most of these fan fiction are written by women.

## Conclusion

The 21st century with its advancements in technology has shrunk the world and recalibrated the way it viewed people, society and itself through the digital medium. The digital natives have adopted this new online world despite its obvious flaws. What remains to be seen is whether the emergent trends will stay. The dynamic and inconstant nature of the new media literacies are what made it popular and relevant to the postmodern world. It's participatory and interactive nature spoke to the digital natives in a way they understood. It also helped build their identity and self esteem. However it also made them easy targets for capitalists who turned their interests into commodities. Fandom is linked to the consumer industry with its system of manufacture, and consumption. However they cannot be said to be victims of the capitalist system, rather they are willing participants. What is interesting is the environment they fabricate for the fans, which seems to promote and champion their interest is only seemingly symbiotic because it legitimizes the fan culture through propaganda via visual media, production and distribution of fan based merchandise. Conversely this production is deliberate and self-centered and is only concerned with purchase and profit and not cultural context.

## Works Cited

- Black, Rebecca W. "Online Fan Fiction, Global Identities, and Imagination." *Research in the Teaching of English*, vol. 43, no. 4, 2009, pp. 397–425. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/27784341](http://www.jstor.org/stable/27784341).
- De Kosnik, Abigail. "Should Fan Fiction Be Free?" *Cinema Journal*, vol. 48, no. 4, 2009, pp. 118–124. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/25619734](http://www.jstor.org/stable/25619734).
- H, Catherine. "Butterbeer Takes Over the (Wizarding) World: Sales Top 20 Million Cups Sold." MuggleNet, 20 Oct. 2018, [www.mugglenet.com/2018/10/butterbeer-takes-over-the-wizarding-world-sales-top-20-million-cups-sold/](http://www.mugglenet.com/2018/10/butterbeer-takes-over-the-wizarding-world-sales-top-20-million-cups-sold/).
- Jackson, Gita. "It Used To Be Perilous To Write Fanfiction." Kotaku, Kotaku.com, 16 May 2018, [kotaku.com/it-used-to-be-perilous-to-write-fanfiction-1826083509](http://kotaku.com/it-used-to-be-perilous-to-write-fanfiction-1826083509). Herzing, Melissa Jean. "The Internet world of fan fiction." (2005).
- Pande, Rukmini. "Explainer: What Is Fanfiction?" *The Conversation*, The Conversation, 19 Sept. 2018, [theconversation.com/explainer-what-is-fanfiction-48150](http://theconversation.com/explainer-what-is-fanfiction-48150).
- Sara K. Howe. "Teams, Tears, and Testimonials: A Rhetorical Reading of the *Twilight* Time Capsule." *Reception: Texts, Readers, Audiences, History*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2013, pp. 61–75. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/reception.5.1.0061](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/reception.5.1.0061).