

If we think of the early days of media fandom, we can conjure images of Star Trek fans with [CLICK] Spock ears or green body make-up scattered around meeting in small conventions and confusing the “regular” people (the public) they encountered when moving to and from those spaces. Fans existed on the outskirts of society and were kept there by society, corporations, and members of the group themselves. In 1986, *Saturday Night Live* aired a now infamous skit generally called “Get a Life” (Jenkins 2013), in which William Shatner [CLICK] yells at his “fans” at a fake convention to stop following him around and to go out and “get a life.” While the skit was supposed to be a parody, it has widely been understood to represent Shatner’s actual feelings regarding fan interactions and can certainly be read as a reminder of the positionality of fans and their practices as “not normal” or, in Michael Warner’s terminology, members of the “counterpublic.” The skit and other popular culture representations of the “geek” or fanboy and fangirl confirm the outsider status of those in the counterpublic, reminding us that [CLICK] “ordinary people are presumed to not want to be mistaken for the kind of person who would participate in this kind of talk or be present in this kind of scene” (86).

That was the past, but I would like to suggest that corporations, in particular, have repositioned the fan, moving them from the outskirts of society to the centre in order to refocus their marketing campaigns on engaged and committed consumers. [CLICK] In doing so, they have made fans in general a public – while also turning the public into fans. Now, I’m not suggesting that all types of fan or fan practices have been accepted into the fold [CLICK] – furries are obviously still the butt of every joke and teen kpop fangirls are still denigrated and disregarded publicly by the majority (despite their buying power), but a large section of media fandom has been reconfigured as the main audience for mainstream television and film. [CLICK] We see marketing campaigns explicitly referencing fans, either without differentiating between sports fans and media fans or directly referencing media fans. [CLICK] Creatives, executives, and producers are speaking directly to fans on social media. Many have come to equate “the audience” with the fandom – which is a fair assumption when engaging online given the members of the audience who seek them out online ARE active members of the fandom – but by equating the two, these “powers that be” or people in control of the content and direction of the marketing and future of that content are indicating that the audience members they choose to address are the most engaged – the fans. They are hoping to normalize fan-like behaviour.

[CLICK] One of the ways that corporations have worked to refocus fans at the centre of their business and, in the process, remake them as a public, is through paratextual content in the form of mostly digital and often transmedia marketing. Here I’m using the concept of the film paratext suggested by Jonathan Gray (from Gerard Genette’s concept of the literary paratext) where this material is not always traditional advertising (though it can serve that purpose). Essentially, this is extratextual content connected to a film that may be meant to advertise the film but does not necessarily consist of movie posters or trailers. With the campaign for *The Hunger Games*, in particular, Lionsgate is not necessarily looking to bring in a mass audience,

but an engaged one – a group of people who will buy into the apps, watch the YouTube videos, go to the Hunger Games Experience, and buy every new edition of the films. But the online marketing actually started with fans themselves.

[CLICK] In 2011 a fan site started up offering a place for fans to login and interact with story elements as a member of Panem – the nation that is the setting for the Hunger Games. Nicola Balkind tells us that Lionsgate followed the *Panem October* site with one of their own – [CLICK] *The Capitol* and began competing with the fan-run site. Eventually, the fan site was forced to shut down over a cease & desist order issued by Lionsgate and fans migrated over to the “official” website.

[CLICK] They developed, over the life of the franchise, websites intended to both advertise the films and engage fans linked to their YouTube channel, multiple apps and social media accounts, the Hunger Games Experience (currently at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas), the Lionsgate Entertainment Theme Park in China and the Hunger Games rides at Motiongate in Dubai, Hunger Games Concert and other experiential marketing sites. The websites are *The Hunger Games Explorer*, *Capitol Couture*, and *Revolution* which led to *District 13*.

In the lead up marketing for *Catching Fire*, the second film, [CLICK] Lionsgate released a brand new website – *Capitol Couture*. This website is intended to act as a magazine-style site offering fans new material with a focus on fashion and make-up and in the style of the overly extravagant Capitol itself. This site blurs the lines between reality and fiction [CLICK] by placing information about real-life designers, for example, side by side with information about Cinna – a designer from within the film’s story. The site provides entertainment for those interested in the films – both narratively and in terms of the meta text (the real life designers were all involved in costume designs for the film, for example). It is like one big easter egg for fans of the series, while also providing content not in any of the canon texts (the books or the films). This is the beginning of the transmedia advertising Lionsgate produced for the film.

[CLICK] As the story progressed with the release of the films, the *Capitol Couture* website also progressed so that the final issue indicates a new direction for the “magazine” in relation to the film’s story. [CLICK] This issue includes covert interviews with the leaders of the revolution in District 13, rather than tips on how to get Effie’s particular style.

[CLICK] Finally, the *Revolution* site was set up as a response to the *Capitol*. All of the content surrounding these sites was updated on a timeline roughly in time with the release of the films allowing the story of the films to play out “in real life” on the digital screen. [CLICK] Again we see a very visually-enticing spectacle, but we see even fewer story elements. Users can sign up for updates and follow the revolution on twitter. Beyond that, however, fans have very little to actually do on the site. [CLICK] Fans were also encouraged to add their names to the “Pillars of Panem,” thereby signing on to join the revolution. They were also challenged to share trailers and other video content with their own social media networks in a competition for number one fan.

Abigail de Kosnick, working from Tiziana Terranova's work on the early days of the internet, discusses the ways in which this kind of sharing and fan-made content acts as – mostly unintended – advertising for the producer.

[CLICK] Content created by fans for other fans does the work of advertising as a by-product as does content created and shared by fans for and with non-fans or casual viewers. This involves solicited material for producer-run contests as well as unsolicited content that is then shared by creators/actors/etc. with their massive social media networks. It also involves sharing trailers with friends and family on twitter and facebook or creating react videos on youtube to trailers, for example. While some of that content may come with some sort of reimbursement such as film-related swag or a shout-out on a huge social media account, much of it is entirely uncompensated.

[CLICK] I should mention here that fans are (often) complicit and/or aware in these scenarios. They are individuals and autonomous, but they often see this as work with the “reward” of further (and perhaps better) content they support vs the content they don't – backlash when they are “betrayed” for their intense loyalty is harsh! This is often a much more nuanced conversation than one group consistently having more power than the other.

[CLICK] Lionsgate's promotion of *The Hunger Games* here uses paratextual material that extends the film story while awaiting new installments in the series. The real power of such a campaign, however, lies in the free labor provided by fans in sharing content with a wider audience. What remains to be seen is whether this direction will be profitable and if corporations can sustain and contain a top-down creation of fandom when conflict arises between producer and audience. In the meantime, remembering that Lionsgate is a special case due to their position as a mini-major studio and that the interest in employing a dedicated fan audience is not a new concept in any form of content distribution, I still think we can see that the desire to consider the fan as the driver and indicator of sales and general audience purchasing trends is something with which the film industry is currently experimenting.

The content of this marketing campaign by Lionsgate was intended for a fan audience and an audience made up of young fangirls (or the concept of a young fangirl in any case). These fans are knowledgeable, savvy, and active. They don't need Lionsgate (or someone like me standing in front of the room explaining everything) to tell them which material is canon, which is “real,” and which is new. [CLICK] So who are “fans” and what ARE their practices? You've probably all seen the images in popular culture — many of which I referenced earlier. Some place fans as very much outside of regular society even as corporations like Marvel and Disney are working very hard to make everyone a fan to some extent. [CLICK] Fans engage with content that they enjoy by consuming it voraciously through constant rewatchings, discussions with other fans, and often in-depth analysis that fan scholar Paul Booth has called the new Media Studies. Fans also seek out information about the content they enjoy and they can create new content based on it including, but certainly not limited to, fan art, fanfic (stories written in the world or using the characters of the product they enjoy), cosplay (costume play or homemade costumes connected to their favourite products and characters, often with some twist on them), filk

(music based on their favourite product), meta (analysis of the product itself), fandom wank (in-fandom drama), fanvids (videos featuring the product), websites, spoof twitter accounts, etc. [CLICK] In fact, Early fandom often starts with the toys we are given to us by our parents. Think about your first Barbie or superhero figurine. When children play with these toys, they don't always follow the prescribed stories provided by the manufacturer — I know my Barbies didn't always drive their motor home ... sometimes they drove GI Joe's Jeep while Joe was stuck in the camper with the kids! And Luke Skywalker sometimes showed up to ask Skipper out for a date instead of always fighting Darth Vader. These early reimaginings of well-known narratives and character roles are early examples of fanfiction. [CLICK] Katherine Larsen & Lynne Zubernis talk about fans as having three different categories of activeness. These sites are made for this middle, analytic group in that they seek out more information than casual fans, but they are often engaging in semi-public spaces populated almost entirely by fans. Obviously, Lionsgate is interested in all fans regardless of engagement, but my research into the spaces and material they have created for this film so far suggests that they are most interested in this middle of the road group more than others. These fans seek out new information regarding their interests and they share that information widely — most importantly, they share it OUTSIDE of fandom alone, whereas more engaged and productive fans are very clearly sharing their fanart, vids, and fic for other fans who understand both the original material AND fandom as a whole.

[CLICK] Visitors to the sites have been encouraged to identify with the overindulgent members of the Capitol. Making use of the voice of the Capitol here is very interesting because, of course, the Capitol represents the antagonists of the film series. [CLICK] When Cover Girl came out with a line of make-up that allowed users to recreate the look of the Districts, but from a decidedly Capitol perspective, fans displayed their frustration and the lack of understanding they felt the marketing team had of the story itself. The interest in tie-in marketing with beauty products is not new in Hollywood so the fact that Lionsgate has partnered with Cover Girl is not surprising, but the use of the marketing — particularly in light of the content of the films themselves — is somewhat strange. [CLICK] Fans showed their frustration online in the same spaces Lionsgate had created for them to share (approved) fanart and through the (again, approved) tags on tumblr and twitter. The fans openly criticized both the studio and their licensing partner in the very spaces and ways that they were using to communicate with them. This critical analysis and retaliation showed first that fans are not necessarily as easy to control as corporations may sometimes think, and that they are, perhaps, acting as the new digital media scholars that Paul Booth (2010) has suggested.

[CLICK] I would suggest that corporations have worked hard to incorporate fans into the public/general audience in order to encourage an audience of engaged consumers, but also to control fan practices. Warner suggests that “[c]ounterpublics are spaces of circulation in which it is hoped that the poesis of scene making will be transformative, not replicative merely” (88), and this is the type of content that fan studies has, and continues to, celebrate for the past thirty years. Corporations, however, are increasingly hiring community managers and instigating fanart advertising campaigns, in part, to control the type of content that is widely distributed among large media fandoms online. [CLICK] At the same time, the corporate reconfiguration of fans from a counterpublic to a public has financial benefits for them and

ensures more people are willing and able to engage with content as a fan, which could lead to more accountability from those same corporations in the form of better marketing or better representation in our media.

Resources:

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Sample Fanworks:

- Fanvid – Music Video (Avengers): <https://youtu.be/kzLY9ghXUGQ>
- Fanvid – Crackvid (Avengers – watch for strong language in this one): <https://youtu.be/nVsx2yw1r38>
- Fanvid – Slash (Avengers, "Stony" = Steve/Tony): <https://youtu.be/7Mby7vkbBGQ>
- Fanvid – High-end Parody (The Hillywood Show, Sherlock): <https://youtu.be/ArdWL2uKf7k>
- Fanfiction: <https://www.fanfiction.net> or <https://archiveofourown.org>
- Fanart: <https://www.deviantart.com/deviations/visual-art/fan-art/digital-art>