

Fan Cultures: On the Impossible Formation of Global and Transnational Fandoms

Piotr Siuda

Introduction

The article aims at a critical analysis of claims, dominant within fan studies, which suggest that global fandoms, which group individuals worldwide, as well as transnational communities, which gather persons from several countries, are emerging phenomena. Fanism in different parts of the globe is a diversified phenomenon, and I observe two main determinants of its nature based on the research findings presented in this article. The first one is the level of income of (the inhabitants of) a country that influences the scope of access to the new media. The second factor—context—is strongly connected with culture and determines the reactions to global pop-cultural narratives. The emergence of global and transnational fandoms is hardly probable.

In order to consider the subject of fans, it is necessary to define a fan. However, the available literature on fandom contains many ambiguous definitions that concisely specify fans. Furthermore, different theoreticians have highlighted various aspects of being a fan. A set of characteristics typical of the ideal fan (as specified by the literature) can be specified as follows: he or she is a consumer of popular culture and a person who is part of the audience of various media texts. Fans are involved in conspicuous consumption, which entails productivity (creating new amateur works based on what the fans are fascinated with; fans may create fan films, fan fiction or fan art, to name a few of their works), as well as membership in fandom (a community of fans) (cf. Jenkins, *Textual*; Sandvoss).

From the perspective of the culture industry, fans are participating prosumers¹ (cf. Ritzer/Jurgenson; Toffler) who facilitate prediction of consumption patterns and reception by a target group. Media and enter-

tainment companies value the significance of the collected data on the activity of fans. The co-creation-oriented fan is becoming increasingly important because marketing strategies are being developed with a view to employ fans (cf. Arvidsson). It is among fans that prosumption can be observed in its purest form. Thus, fans are the avant-garde of prosumption.

This may be shown by the increasingly frequent production of so-called transmedia storytelling (another term is media mix) (cf. Jenkins, *Convergence* 260), which occurs across multiple platforms, for example, films, TV series, games, books, and comic books. The key to the media mix narrative is that the particular productions it contains are not independent but interconnected. They are all significant since they reveal new information on the world depicted. The complete picture is obtained only after familiarization with every text. Thus, media companies begin operating in multiple areas and target the most faithful and active recipients who take the trouble to immerse themselves in a media mix. The narratives require entering a fictional world; they excite the desire to discover all its nooks and hidden areas, and in a way, to enter into it as though it were real. Media corporations frequently offer such a possibility by inspiring to engage into solving riddles resulting from the narration of a media mix (cf. Dena).

Individually, none of the fans have such knowledge or are able to comprehend everything a text shows to unravel the enigma. The essence of media mix is the use of the so-called collective intelligence (cf. Lévy), that is the communication, mutual exchange of information, and task delegation between several participants. Today, it is the Internet that promotes accumulation, storage, and circulation of an unprecedented magnitude of information. Virtual fandoms enable one to immerse oneself in a narrative thoroughly, and in this way, enrich one's own receptive experience.

Numerous descriptions of such cyberspace communities can be found in the literature on fandom. The earliest references in studies of fandom refer to newsgroups that are usually included within the USENET system, which today is archaic, unpopular, or forgotten due to the development of other net tools, including bulletin boards and various blog services (cf. Booth). The most popular of the latter is *Live Journal*, which enables every user to easily create and run their own electronic diary, and to enter one of the many groups that emerge around blogs. The Internet tools mentioned above are just a few of those that can be used by fans to create

communities; thus, their technological features enable fans to communicate with one another or exchange amateur fan fiction, fan art, or fan films.

Global and Transnational Fandoms

Have we witnessed the emergence of communities connecting fans from different parts of the world, as a result of the development of new communication technologies? In particular, this refers to communities of fans of particular texts, e.g., the worldwide community of Harry Potter fans. Some researchers (e.g. Darling-Wolf) assume that the answer to such a question is in the affirmative and that fan communities exist beyond social and cultural differences, and across time and space barriers. These researchers do not pay attention to what divides fans from one another, but to fans' identical interests and similar interpretations of popular cultural products. Fans who participate in such groups communicate with each other using the net, often without meeting each other in person. Fans' offline identity is rather unimportant as being a fan of a specific object (a film, TV show, comic book etc.) takes precedence. The Internet is the tool of choice for developing supra-local identifications.

The concept of the emergence of communities connecting fans from different parts of the world may have two variants: some researchers argue that we can observe global communities that include fans of a particular text from the whole wide world (cf. McLelland; Punathambekar). Others differ by suggesting the emergence of transnational (cosmopolitan) communities (cf. Jenkins, "Pop"), rather than global ones; these transnational communities comprise people from only certain parts of the globe, for example, those parts where the standard of living is high enough to enable one's engagement in consumption in a fanlike manner.

I propose that the emergence of global fandoms is hardly probable and that the thesis on the (large-scale) emergence of transnational communities should be rejected. The sole interest in a pop-culture phenomenon is insufficient for the constitution of both, because being a fan is marked by a definite local context. It is necessary to specify that I oppose fandom's perception as imagined communities that depend solely on a shared sense of belonging. Communities, in the broadest sociological sense, are based

on the similarity of conditions in which people happen to exist and live on a daily basis (cf. Putnam).²

Undoubtedly, global fandoms do emerge, if one assumes that community is equivalent to communication, which is accelerated by the Internet between people from all over the world. However, such a networked contact is insufficient to make a community out of people existing and living in different conditions. It has to be admitted that, to a large extent, I perceive 'community' as a purely theoretical construct whose aim it is to reveal differences between fans from all over the world. I would like to re-emphasize that the use of the concept of 'community' has resulted from a desire to address the dominant and, to my mind, unauthorized views of many researchers who overuse the term 'community.'³

Considering the global/transnational sense of community, one should not confuse it with global/transnational communication. A fan from one region may communicate with a fan from another region and may browse websites on the same topic; however, this does not equal community participation. Global and transnational groups, I am arguing, cannot be formed because of differences in fanism, which are determined by local economic, cultural, political, and historical factors.

Fans: Cosmopolitans and Locals⁴

For analyzing the emergence of global or transnational fandoms, it is crucial to refer to the sociological categories of cosmopolitans and locals. The former are portrayed as those who manifest the attitude "the world is ours" (Tomlinson 184). People who follow this slogan are able to overcome the barriers connected with statehood and enter the global path, to separate themselves from their culture and accept universal values and norms. In contrast, locals are individuals rooted in their region. However, these two types ought not to be perceived as completely distinct categories. It is definitely more convincing to conclude that there is a continuum of cosmopolitanism/localism (cf. Roudometof). Individuals belonging to either of these extremes are characterized by various levels of attachment to their country of origin. Locals are oriented towards 'stopping' the global culture, while cosmopolitans exhibit a tendency to seek and experience the novelties within it.

There are definitely fewer cosmopolitans than people 'opting for' localism (cf. Featherstone); this has been shown by Pippa Norris (2001), who based her study on indicators of self-identification with one's country. Although the promotion of cosmopolitanism is aided by means of communication that enable one to feel as a world citizen, it does not mean that locals do not use these communicative tools as well; locals do use these means, but in a different way than cosmopolitans who use them to shape and strengthen their global identity.

Mike Featherstone (2002) believes that cosmopolitanism is not caused by means of communication, and it certainly does not arise from the feeling of connectedness stimulated by the electronic network or satellite TV. Even if one uses the Internet, watches foreign TV channels, travels and contacts 'foreigners,' or has several passports, one can still be a person with local attitude.

The two attitudes discussed—cosmopolitanism and localism—may be applied to the analysis of global popular culture consumers, including fans. Cosmopolitan fans tend to receive pop-products in a way that is 'unpolluted' by local factors; they develop their own supra-local ways of perception and, in doing that, they often refer to the consumption of a text in its country of origin. For example, cosmopolitan fans of American products, belonging to various parts of the globe other than the USA, will be similar to the fans living in the US. Local fans are those who manifest reception marked by regional conditions. If we assume that global and transnational communities do not emerge, it has to be stated that there are more locals among fans. To further strengthen my point of view, interviews were conducted with scholars within the domain of fan studies (cf. Harrington/Bielby). The author has decided to use the knowledge, experience, and opinions of experts to classify the differentiating factors of fanism in various parts of the world.

Methodology

The survey among scholars was conducted through electronic mails because interviews in person were difficult to arrange due to the large geographical distances between the author and the respondents dispersed throughout the world. All questions addressed to the representatives of fan studies were open-ended. The aim was to obtain a detailed insight

into their opinions, which entailed the subsequent necessity to distinguish categories that would aid quantitative analysis.

The scholars included in the mailing list were given information about the author, the objective of the investigation, and the intended use of the collected data. The decision to circulate the questionnaires via e-mail, instead of creating a website as a platform for the survey, was deliberate. E-mailing may be considered more 'intimate,' inducing the respondents to give detailed and extensive answers, encouraging discussions as well as clarification of ambiguities. The idea proved relevant, as despite the detailed guidelines, in several cases the respondents wanted to receive additional information.

The registry of scientists, who were intended to be reached and invited to participate in the survey, was created using various sources. First of all, my intention was to reach the authors of articles on fans published in selected academic periodicals. All issues of these journals from 2000 to 2009 were examined. If the keywords of an article listed the terms: "fan," "fans," "fandom," "fan culture" (any of them being sufficient), the author of the article was included in the mailing list. To further supplement the registry, websites that serve scholars as platforms for networking were also searched.⁵ Both these sites enable the subscribers to label their research interests. Using the keywords connected with fans, by means of suitable search tools, the search criteria were narrowed to show the subscribers who could participate in the survey. The invitations were sent either through the site or e-mail. In total, the registry of fan studies representatives invited to participate in the survey listed 351 persons.

There were 61 responses though not all scholars replied at once. In the first round, on November 2, 2010, 18 invitations were sent as a pilot study to which six responses were received. As no serious problems emerged, the remaining academics were sent mails on November 16 the same year. Within the next two weeks, 34 responses were received, and among those who refused, there were many who noted lack of time at that moment and promised to respond in the future. Therefore, two letters of reminders were sent, three and six weeks following the first correspondence. Obviously, random sample selection was not employed. The questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions only, the purpose of which was to obtain detailed answers. This method allowed the respondents to fulfill the specific criteria of purposive sampling and facilitated detailed analysis.⁶

Results

The questions were answered by 61 scholars whose characteristics are presented in Table 1. The majority came from the USA. Naturally, the place of origin of the scientists might have been connected with the sample selected, which fails to be representative as the author's aim was to search for people speaking and using English in their publications.

Table 1. Characteristics of fan studies scholars who participated in the survey

		No. of people	Pct. of people
Nationality	American	27	44.3
	British	7	11.5
	Canadian	5	8.2
	Australian, Swedish, Italian	3	4.9
	Finnish, German	2	3.3
	Belgian, Chinese, French,	1	1.6
	Dutch, Spanish, Columbian,		
	Lithuanian, Norwegian, Polish, Turkish		
Gender	Female	37	60.6
	Male	24	39.3
Scientific domain	Social sciences	25	41
	Humanities	24	39.3
	Interdisciplinary	17	27.9
	Marketing	2	3.3
	Other	7	11.5
Language of publications	English	52	85.2
	French, Spanish	2	3.3
	Finnish, Catalanian, German, Swedish	1	1.6

The first question was "Do you think that media participatory practices of fans occur more often in some countries than others? If so, how can you

explain it?" The opinions were frequently so complex that particular answers contained both argumentation for differences (the participation is more frequent in some countries) and against them. Generally, the dominant view was that of differentiation—48 statements (78.7%) might be classified as such; 13 (21.3%) were negative; 4 respondents (6.5%) chose the "no-opinion" option.⁷ It is worth quoting an example of an answer to this question:⁸

For many years, fan cultures were isolated by language, geographic, and cultural barriers. The internet has broken down some of those obstacles—but only for those groups who are digitally connected and basically for those who can communicate in English as a secondary language. I have no illusion that this means we have connected all of the fan communities in the world, especially given histories of social isolation and cultural fragmentation surrounding fandom. We do not even know all of the fan communities in the United States, where racial segregation is a big factor in understanding the full range of different kinds of participatory culture. That said, it makes sense that some key variables would impact the growth of fan culture, including the conditions of cultural production, consumption and circulation in each country; the status of free expression and democratic participation; the level of censorship or constraint; access to the infrastructure and educational levels required for full participation, etc. (Male, American, Social sciences, Categories: Access to technology; Access to text; Culture; Affluence; Political system; Level and quality of education).

Table 2. Reasons for differences in participatory (prosumption) practices of fans from various countries

	No. of people	Pct. of people
Access to technology	31	50.8
This category includes responses which addressed: access to the Internet, including skills connected with surfing the net (e.g. if a person willing to receive a series knows how to download it) access to other technologies (computer, DVD, VCR, etc.)		
Access to text	19	31.1
The quality of access to texts; delays in delivering pop-products (e.g. films or series are available no sooner than a year after the premiere); people's media literacy (of genres, particular texts, etc.); linguistic issues (lack of translation causes lack of understanding, which is an obvious barrier to reception).		

Culture	15	24.6
Whether in a culture fan engagement is treated as deviation or not; level of consumerism in a society; level of accepting the Internet participation as a way of building one's identity.		
Affluence	13	21.3
Affluence of a country; level of economy development; financial profile of citizens.		
Leisure time	5	8.2
Amount of time which may be devoted to consumption and entertainment.		
Political system	5	8.2
Whether a country is democratic or not; the level of text censorship in a country; other restrictions limiting the freedom of speech.		
Law	1	1.6
Popularisation of the principle of fair use.		
Level and quality of education	1	1.6
Example (of a particular country, countries, region or pop-product)	31	50.8
Unspecified reasons	3	4.9
Casual responses like: 'yes,' 'yes, but I can't explain why,' etc.		

Table 3. Reasons for lack of differences in participatory (prosumption) practices of fans in different countries

	No. of people	Pct. of people
Overcoming barriers	10	16.4
Fan prosumption practices overcome barriers connected with access to technology and texts (one is a fan even despite no access to the Internet), affluence of a country and its citizens, weak democratisation, low level of education, people's lack of leisure time, etc.; willingness to participate and prosume is a universal characteristic.		

Global culture	5	8.2
Fan practices all over the world are the same since global culture is emerging (among other things, as a result of the development of the cutting-edge communication technologies).		
<hr/>		
Unspecified reasons	2	3.3
Casual responses like: 'no,' 'no, but I can't say why,' etc.		

On the basis of the quantitative analysis, it can be clearly pointed out that the majority of respondents opted for the thesis on the differences in the frequency of practices depending on the country. Such opinions were reflected in the answers to the second question, which was "Do you think that fans in different countries all respond to the same text in the same manner?" Similarly, to the first question, particular responses were answered in an affirmative manner (the reception is the same) and in the negative manner (the reception is different). Tables 4 and 5 show that the majority of scholars indicated differences (42 persons; 68.8%). Those who indicated them in their first answers expressed similar opinions answering the second question. Due to the nature of the second question, the justification changed though as the majority assumed the cultural context as the cause of the differences, and not the economic-technical factors. In both answers, a similar number of academics pointed at the political system of a country; quite a large number of respondents decided to describe examples of particular countries or regions. It has to be noted that in question two, there were 8 respondents (13.1%) who exceeded the scope of the question by stating that fans' reactions differ not only between countries, but also within them.

Table 4. Reasons why fans from different countries react to/receive a global pop-culture text differently

	No. of people	Pct. of people
Culture Fanism is a phenomenon determined by the characteristics of a culture (being a fan is a cultural activity); influence of people's everyday life and experiences gained; influence of language spoken; different levels of acceptance of fan practices in different cultures.	38	62.3
Glocalisation Adjusting a text to the citizens of a country influences reception; processes connected with pop-products distribution as determinants of meanings produced by consumers.	5	8.2
Political system, law Fanism is influenced by the openness of the media, free access to them, possibility to express oneself.	5	8.2
Socio-demographic characteristics In different countries, fans' characteristics (ethnicity, class, gender, age, education, etc.) determine the reception.	5	8.2
A country's affluence	4	6.5
Access to the Internet	1	1.6
Dissimilar reception example in a particular country or region	15	24.6
Unspecified reasons Casual responses like: 'they react differently but it is difficult to say why.'	10	16.4

Table 5. Reasons why fans from different countries react to a global pop-culture text in the same way

	No. of people	Pct. of people
Industry activities Similar texts, genres, memes (that is current fashions) are popularised all over the world, which causes fan practices to be similar; corporations 'prospect for' the same type of recipients everywhere—similarities are result of the so-called audience segmentation, of reducing the text to the lowest common denominator so that they can appeal to all.	12	19.7
Global culture Fan practices all over the world are the same since global culture is emerging (among other things, as a result of the development of the cutting-edge communication technologies).	9	4.7
Individuality Reception is not determined by a general culture context but individual experience connected with belonging to particular social groups and being characterised by particular socio-demographic characteristics which are of transnational nature.	9	4.7

Likewise, the opponents of differentiation were unanimous because almost all who answered question one by arguing that participatory practices occur everywhere at the same frequency expressed doubts if the reactions are different while answering question two. Generally, the answers to question two included 14 negative opinions, that is 22.9%, and 5 responses of "don't know," which is 8.2%. Especially unanimous were those who argued for the development of global culture as the one factor that counteracts dissimilarities—this cause was indicated most often in both questions.

Below is an example of an answer to question two:

Even as fan practices spread across borders, audience relationships with the texts they consume—and the way they congregate socially surrounding those texts—are of course shaped by the context of their lives. Here's an example: pro wrestler The Great Khali was moved to the top of the card in World

Wrestling Entertainment (a U.S. based media company with international reach). In the U.S., fans often lamented Khali's "push" to being world champion, saying that—while he was an extremely large athlete and thus a bit of a spectacle, he simply wasn't a very good wrestler. However, Indian fans of the WWE considered Khali a national hero, and several wrote about his winning the world title as a significant national accomplishment, a large Indian performer who vanquished U.S. wrestlers. In the U.S., Khali was a villain. In India, Khali was a hero. And the perspectives of those two groups of fans obviously were quite different (Male, American, Social sciences, Categories: Culture; Example).

Among the respondents, there were 27 Americans (44.3%) and 34 persons (55.7%) from outside the US. The latter group addressed the question "Do you think that fans from your country differ from the ones in the USA?" The neutral answer ("It is hard to relate to this issue") was given by 5 respondents (out of 34; 14.7%). It was argued that fans in the respondents' countries were the same as those in the USA by 9 (out of 34; 26.5%; all were female scholars representing the humanities). The opposing view was expressed by 19 academics (out of 34; 55.9%). It seems worthwhile to quote an example of a statement of the last type:

To some degree. To begin with, people from my country—on average—differ from the—again average—person in the US. Such general trends are also reflected in differences in fandom [...]. Example: I am German and involved with the Star Wars fandom. The similarities of the image of the Empire in Star Wars with Nazi Germany will lead to certain sensitivities in German fans that seem to be completely alien to non-German fans. I witnessed conflicts resulting from this, as something that is "just a game" to others touches on something almost sacred to at least some German fans. E.g. I know a fan who refused on principle to wear a black uniform, no matter if other fans mobbed him for his off-colour costume as a result (Female, German, Humanities).

Table 6. 'Do you think global fandom exists? If yes, how do you understand it?'

It exists		No. of people	Pct. of people
	Virtual community Internet communities grouping individuals regardless of socio-demographic characteristics but on the basis of interest in a pop-culture object; Internet groups gathering people from different countries; Internet communities overcoming any barriers (geographical, time-, or language-related ones, etc.)	27	44.3
	Text Global fandom as a result of global circulation of the same pop-products, that is in fact the development of global popular culture (there are texts with their global fan bases).	13	21.3
	Research Global fandom is a 'creation' of scholars, a consequence of a specific attitude, subconscious search of common characteristics.	1	1.6
	Unspecified response Casual responses like: 'yes,' 'yes but I can't say what it is,' etc.	2	3.3
It does not exist	Differentiation Globalism cannot be addressed—fanism is determined by localism: dissimilar experiences of individuals from different regions, lack of access to the Internet, poverty, lack of leisure time, etc.	16	26.2
	Comprehensiveness It is impossible to address global fandom—it is too broad and incomprehensive a concept.	7	11.5
Neutral response	E.g.: 'I don't know,' 'I don't have an opinion.'	2	3.3

The code categories for the answers to the question "Do you think that global fandom exists? How do you understand it?" are presented in Table 6. The term fandom is familiar to the representatives of fan studies. The standard definition states that fandom is simply a community of fans (cf. Jenkins, *Textual*). However, the above question was not preceded by explanations on global fandom; the questionnaire did not include any definition of this term. This was purposive because the intention was not to suggest any specific meaning, but to inspire the respondents to present their own ideas, since the assumption was that this would prove more beneficial in discovering the dominant perception. Global fandom failed to be an issue for discussion for 7 persons (11.5%) who considered it too incomprehensive and broad a concept. It was claimed by some respondents (13; 21.3%) that global fandom is a result of the circulation of texts and global pop-culture development. Most of the academics (27; 44.3%) defined global fandom as virtual communities, pointing out complete globalism (people from all countries participate in communities) or only trans-nationality (the participants are people from certain countries).

I would say global fandom is simply about fandom that brings together people around the world. Internet is extremely important in this regard. (Female, Finnish, Social sciences, Categories: Virtual community)

Apparently, a considerable number of scholars did not share my view that the emergence of global and transnational communities is hardly probable.⁹ One may reflect the extent to which such an opinion has resulted from the actual research conducted by the respondents, and from opinions that lie within supposition and speculation. The latter seems to have been exemplified by the specific contradiction—out of the 27 scholars who mentioned the sense of Internet community, 16 had previously indicated the worldwide differentiation of the fan practices (question one) and the discrepancy of reactions in various countries (question two). The respondents among whom such a relation was observed treated global communication as community.

Some of the respondents claimed that the differentiation of fan activities in the world is basically a result of economic factors, not necessarily the culture-related ones since the latter bear little significance. Such opinions are consistent with my position that truly global communities do not exist, but they are not in accordance with the thesis that the emergence of transnational communities is hardly probable. The underlying

assumption was that fans from various countries who participate in communities are cosmopolitans who overcome local influences and enter a group regardless of whether they could be able to find the basis for dialogue within identical interests.

It may be that I have problems with the notion of 'the global' because it does not take into account the many billions of people who are in various ways excluded. I would say that there are plenty examples of transnational or trans-cultural fandoms but that is as far as I would take it. I have studied fan fiction only (not fandoms or fans as such) and it is difficult to say where the fans are actually from (although their language mistakes sometimes indicate that they may not be English speakers). (Female, Swedish, Humanities, Categories: Virtual community)

Discussion

The results of the study allowed the organization of the ideas presented in the first section of the article. Although cosmopolitanism among fans may actually be observed, it is definitely much rarer than localism—all reasons for this conclusion which were named by the scholars fall within two general categories of factors: economic and contextual. The impact of the former is that global communities, which group worldwide fans of a global text, cannot be constructed in any literal sense. Such communities cannot emerge due to such obstacles as poverty or lack of free time, which influence, among other things, the degree of digital deprivation, including access to the Internet. The determinant of the latter refers to the cultural, historical, or political contexts, which are barrier to the formation of global, but also of transnational communities.

Regarding the factor of the first type, corporations from Western countries that introduce products to the world market fail to be concerned about the development of a loyal consumer base in every corner of the globe. New trends of participation fail to be popularized everywhere as their implementation is most clearly visible in the most affluent countries (cf. Kerr/Flynn).

There are numerous examples of how the distance from the economic core negatively influences the possibility of the emergence of fanism. The functioning of transmedia storytelling, referred to in the previous section

of this article, was described by Thomas Apperley (2008). In his article "Citizenship and Consumption," the author presents the situation of Venezuela. In the context of media mixes, the obstacle has not only become the lack of productions of this kind in the country itself, but also the fact that the industry of the West provides the peripheries (including Venezuela) with incomplete narratives. The recipient is deprived of access to them on many media platforms, whereas familiarizing oneself with all texts is necessary for active and complete participation in a world that is depicted and to be discovered via a pop product. Obviously, it is impossible to follow a media mix without access to the net.¹⁰ Another example of limitations is pirated copies of films on DVD, stripped off the special features which are necessary for fans to discover the "spices" served by the authors. Therefore, differences in living conditions influence discrepancies in reactions of the citizens of developing countries to the pop-culture narrative proposed by the industry. In Venezuela, it is hardly possible to observe participatory practices by the recipients as they are still only consumers, as opposed to their counterparts in the West, who are located somewhere at the intersection of consumption and production.

Considering the research conducted, it may be assumed that not only are global groups rare, but even the transnational ones are few, consisting of people from those parts of the globe where the standard of living is high enough to allow the involvement in the reception of world pop culture in a fan-like manner. The manner in which a text is consumed is also determined by the latter-mentioned factors, that is, the local cultural, social, historical, and political contexts.

Obviously, the general properties remain the same everywhere. Fans can be characterized by involvement, productivity, and a sense of community. The participatory practices are globalized. Despite that, each community consisting of engaged and productive fans has its own local nature that shapes people's experience. The respondents gave numerous examples of regional influences. On the basis of descriptions included in the literature one may indicate some additional factors.

For example, in China, fanism is promoted by the culture industry, although the political elite disapproves of it. On the one hand, fans are significant—they are involved in consumption and, in this way, they constitute the base for the developing market socialism. The communist party values the dimension of being a fan that relies on extensive purchasing. The question of productivity, primarily of its intangible manifestations such as the creation of subversive meanings and engaging oneself in

community activities is regarded quite differently. By the authorities such activities are viewed as a threat, as rejecting the traditional collectivistic values of loyalty to the party and subordinating every aspect of one's life to it. Global pop culture is treated as the spread of negative Western models, such as individualism or escapism (cf. Fung). There is also another aspect underlying the fear. Organized fandoms are perceived as a political threat, as loss of control over citizens that would potentially lead to politically dangerous activism. This is one of the reasons why fan practices cannot establish a legal basis in China—fans cannot establish associations, the nature of their activities is solely unofficial. The conditions in which fans find themselves are reflected in the nature of the highly politicized Chinese fanism (that is opposing the system), which is rare in democratic countries. The political dimension of Chinese fan activity was described by Anthony Fung (2009), who indicated the practices that may be understood as resistance to the ideology of the government.

The influence of local factors can also be observed in another Asian country—South Korea. Youna Kim (2005) illustrated the impact of texts coming from the USA on female Korean fans. Women's use of pop products is similar to that of American feminist fans because they aim at questioning the patriarchal social order by producing for example feminist fan fiction. Being a female fan is part of a struggle for social mobility (professional and social advancement) and the right to equality within all spheres of life. Global pop-culture consumption provides fuel for feminism by showing new alternative ways of life. However, Kim observes dissimilarities in the feminism of American and Korean women. The main issue is sexuality. Kim shows in how far the aspirations of Asian women differ from the ones of their American counterparts. They treat erotic freedom in a completely different way—women fans from the US demand social consent for more sexual freedom, while Koreans are horrified at the behavior of the texts' protagonists. Korean women's ideas of what is allowed within the realm of sex and what is not results from the influence of the Puritan moral rules that prohibit premarital sexual contact or any behavior that would be evidence of promiscuity. In the case of the Korean women fans, any type of fan fiction that would be promiscuous is out of question.

The specificity of Australian fandoms was described by Alan McKee (2009) who studied the biggest and longest functioning fan club in this country—fans of the British series *Doctor Who*. Interestingly, the fans themselves stress their dissimilarity from their counterparts in other

countries, indicating their different tastes; for example, according to Australians, fans from the US prefer pop products that are full of special effects, whereas they focus more on the characters and narration. Even when the question of how accurate this characterization is, is left aside, it has to be added that the British fans of *Dr Who* share a similar viewpoint, as proved by McKee (2001) in one of his articles.

McKee noticed that practices of broadcasters connected with censorship and scheduling play a significant role in the 'development' of the Australian fandom specificity. As a result of these activities, the Australian version of a program is actually different from the original one. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation has been making numerous cuts to delete the parts that must not be watched by persons under the age of 18. The censors have treated the program in a highly restricted way; the Australian *Dr Who* is certainly less violent, but at the same time, less coherent in its narration. The form of the reception is also determined by the times of airing. Although the impact of this factor has been reduced in the era when a text may be downloaded from the Internet, it may still exert an influence in shaping the consumption of a pop product and attracting fans. This is the case in Australia, where the series is aired in prime time, every day at 6:30 p.m. The re-broadcasts are also frequent; practically, the same material is aired several times a year at an identical time of the day. As a consequence, the fans do not think in terms of seasons, that is, subsequent periods when a series is shown, since it can be watched non-stop; seasons are not as significant as in the British Isles or in the USA.

Australia left aside, other factors may be indicated: for example, the higher popularity of certain genres and formats in a country, or the price at which narratives are sold. The linguistic adjustment of a product is also crucial. The cultural industry employees have to fulfill the audience's expectations as regards their preferences and habits; for example, some recipients may prefer subtitles and others dubbing. Overcoming the language barrier depends on the work by many specialists and is 'marked by' their local cultural identity as well as standards of work they follow. The process of linguistic adjustment may determine the emergence of a fan base around a narrative, as well as its shape (cf. Barra; Kuipers).

The listed examples provide evidence that transnational communities, either virtual or offline, are rare. The consumption of texts and their interpretation depend too highly on the elements that constitute the local color. The consideration of transnational communities is only possible at

the imaginary level. Fans from one region may be aware that there are persons in other parts of the globe sharing their interests (they may even experience a sense of connectedness with them). However, this is all they may experience. They fail to establish more visible (non virtual) groups manifesting mutual activities, cooperation, support, or permanence.

In the survey carried out, one of the female respondents, indicating the existence of transnational communities, wrote that "it is difficult to say where the fans are actually from (although their language mistakes sometimes indicate that they may not be English speakers)." Does this not prove the cosmopolitanism of attitudes of such communities' participants and their complete detachment from localism which reaches such a point that it is difficult to say which country they are from (cosmopolitans are usually unwilling to reveal their national identity)? In some fans, cosmopolitanism is visible, which allows to account for the fact that so many representatives of fan studies who took part in the survey stated that transnational communities exist. However, the situation is different from their perception of the matter, primarily due to quantitative reasons. The participation in the communities is not so frequent, or as international as being presented. We must remember that cosmopolitanism is something other than an increase in global communication.

The vast majority of cases provide evidence that identical interests are insufficient to connect people forming transnational communities, which is demonstrated visibly in the account by Ksenia Prassolova (2007) who studied the Russian fans of Harry Potter. They search the Internet and occasionally contact fans from abroad, but fail to create transnational communities since they self-identify as belonging to local groups. These groups function in a way completely different from American fandoms, for example; moreover, their tactics of searching for Western fan fiction and translating it into Russian, without the authors' consent, is a source of many conflicts between fans from the US and Russia. The very liberal grassroots 'communistic' attitude to copyrights is an identificatory marker of Russian fandoms. According to Prassolova, such an approach has resulted from the common 'Russian' belief that someone's artistic work is common property, which in turn has its basis in history. In Soviet times, it was common practice to translate books and publish them under the name of the translator¹¹. Similar practices have not completely disappeared from the media landscape today, which can be exemplified by the two parodies of *Harry Potter*, extremely similar to the original: *Porry Gatter* and *Tanya Grotter*.

Conclusions

The basic conclusion that can be drawn is that the observations indicate diverse fan cultures worldwide and not a single common one. Two main determinants of this diversity have been indicated: the first one is the level of income of (inhabitants of) a country that influences the scope of the inhabitants' access to the new media. The second factor—context—is strongly connected with culture and determines reactions to global pop-culture texts. Moreover, contextual factors such as the political system (law/legislature) of a country or its history are extremely important.

The emergence of global fandoms, grouping individuals from all over the world, as well as transnational communities connecting people from several countries, is hardly probable. Demonstrating the impossible formation of the two above-mentioned types of communities, the article adds a new perspective to fan studies; this is because it addresses a subject that is rarely discussed within this domain and indicates that the dominant views on global fandoms could be overstated. If global/transnational fandoms are addressed, fans from all over the world are shown in light of cosmopolitanism, i.e. fans from different countries are assigned attitudes of 'detachment from' local conditioning. Although some respondents stated that cosmopolitanism may emerge, it can only be observed very rarely.

Notes

¹ Prosumer is a portmanteau formed by contracting the word producer with the word consumer.

² Such a similarity determines the mutuality of interactions, co-operation, and durability of contact.

³ This point will be explained later on in the article.

⁴ It must be noted that I argue in the line of a clear right/wrong dichotomy. This is purposeful and serves to underline my point of view. One

ought to be aware that there is 'an additional side' to the research presented so far.

⁵ Academia.edu and ResearchGate.

⁶ Since the survey is neither random nor representative, presenting the results, the author employs only simple percentage statistics and tabular analysis—detailed statistical analysis was insignificant.

⁷ Table 2 contains the code categories for the reasons of more frequent occurrence of participatory practices in particular countries; Table 3 contains the code categories for statements on lack of differentiation.

⁸ The statements are original, the brackets contain as follows: gender, nationality, scientific field, and categories.

⁹ The scholars who do not share my view represent 'an additional side' to the research presented so far. I remind that I argue in the line of a clear right/wrong dichotomy.

¹⁰ The data of June 2010, obtained from <<http://www.internetworldstats.com/>> indicate that 34.2% of the population of the country has access to the Internet.

¹¹ This was for example the case with *Pinocchio* that in the Soviet Union was published under the title *Buratino* by Aleksey Tolstoy.

Works Cited

- Apperley, Thomas. "Citizenship and Consumption: Convergence Culture, Transmedia Narratives, and the Digital Divide." *Proceedings of IE2007: Australasian Conference on Interactive Entertainment*. RMIT University, 2008. Web. 27 Dec. 2012. <<http://monuni.academia.edu/ThomasApperley/Papers/358580>>.
- Arvidsson, Adam. "Brands: A Critical Perspective." *Journal of Consumer Culture* 5.2 (2005): 235-238. Print.
- Barra, Luca. "The Mediation Is the Message: Italian Regionalization of US TV Series as Co-Creational Work." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 12.5 (2009): 509-525. Print.
- Booth, Paul. *Digital Fandom: New Media Studies*. New York: Peter Lang, 2010. Print.

- Darling-Wolf, Fabienne. "Virtually Multicultural: Trans-Asian Identity and Gender in an International Fan Community of a Japanese Star." *New Media & Society* 6.4 (2004): 507-528. Print.
- Dena, Christy. "Emerging Participatory Culture Practices: Player-Created Tiers in Alternate Reality Games." *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 14.1 (2008): 41-57. Print.
- Featherstone, Mike. "Cosmopolis: An Introduction." *Theory, Culture, and Society* 19.1-2 (2002): 1-16. Print.
- Fung, Anthony. "Fandom, Youth and Consumption in China." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 12.3 (2009): 285-303. Print.
- Harrington, C. Lee, and Denise D. Bielby. "Global Fandom/Global Fan Studies." *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*. Ed. Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington. New York: New York UP, 2007. 179-197. Print.
- Internet World Stats. Usage and Population Statistics. Web. 27 Dec. 2012. <<http://www.internetworldstats.com>>.
- Jenkins, Henry. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1992. Print.
- . "Pop Cosmopolitanism: Mapping Cultural Flows in an Age of Media Convergence." *Globalization: Culture and Education in the New Millennium*. Ed. Marcelo Suarez-Orozco and Desiree B. Qin-Hilliard. Berkeley: U of California P, 2004. 114-140. Print.
- . *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: New York UP, 2006. Print.
- Kerr, Aphra, and Roddy Flynn. "Revisiting Globalisation Through the Movie and Digital Games Industries." *Convergence: The Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 9.1 (2003): 91-113. Print.
- Kim, Youna. "Experiencing Globalization: Global TV, Reflexivity and the Lives of Young Korean Women." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 8.4 (2005): 445-463. Print.
- Kuipers, Giseline. "Cultural Globalization as the Emergence of a Transnational Cultural Field: Transnational Television and National Media Landscapes in Four European Countries." *American Behavioral Scientist* 55.5 (2011): 541-557. Print.

- Lévy, Pierre. *Collective Intelligence: Mankind's Emerging World in Cyberspace*. Cambridge: Perseus Books, 1997. Print.
- McKee, Alan. "Which Is the Best Story? A Case Study in Value Judgments Outside the Academy." *Intensities: The Journal of Cult Media* 1 (2001): n.p. Web. 27 Dec. 2012. <<http://intensities.org/Essays/McKee.pdf>>.
- . "Is *Doctor Who* Australian?" *Media International Australia* 132 (2009): 54-66. Print.
- McLelland, Mark J. "The World of Yaoi: The Internet, Censorship and the Global 'Boys' Love.'" *The Australian Feminist Law Journal* 23 (2005): 61-77. Print.
- Norris, Pippa. "Global Governance and Cosmopolitan Citizens." *Governance in a Globalizing World*. Ed. John S. Nye and John N. Donahue. Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2001. 155-177. Print.
- Prassolova, Ksenia. "'Oh, Those Russians!': The (Not So) Mysterious Ways of Russian-Language Harry Potter Fandom." *Henryjenkins.org*. Henry Jenkins, 30 Jul. 2007. Web. 27 Dec. 2012. <http://henryjenkins.org/2007/07/oh_those_russians_the_not_so_m.html>.
- Punathambekar, Aswin. "Between Rowdies and Rasikas: Rethinking Fan Activity in Indian Film Culture." *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*. Ed. Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington. New York: New York UP, 2007. 198-209. Print.
- Putnam, Robert D. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000. Print.
- Ritzer, George, and Nathan Jurgenson. "Production, Consumption, Prosumption: The Nature of Capitalism in the Age of the Digital 'Prosumer.'" *Journal of Consumer Culture* 10.1 (2010): 13-36. Print.
- Roudometof, Vitor. "Transnationalism, Cosmopolitanism and Glocalization." *Current Sociology* 53.1 (2005): 113-135. Print.
- Sandvoss, Cornel. *Fans: The Mirror of Consumption*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005. Print.
- Toffler, Alvin. *The Third Wave*. New York: Bantam Books, 1980. Print.
- Tomlinson, John. *Globalization and Culture*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1999. Print.