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Anglo-American Fan Studies and Their Impact on the Development of Popular Culture in the Twenty-First Century

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The aim of the article is to reveal the main stages of the research of fans in fan studies discourse and analyse the evolution of fan culture development that took place in the 21st century. Results. The article demonstrates that a separate scientific direction is dedicated to the study of fan communities in the Anglo-American academic environment — fan studies, which went through three distinct periods in their development: deviation, resistance (20th century), and mainstream (21st century). In the cultural aspect, the concepts of “fanatic/fanaticism” and “fan/fandom” are distinguished. It is shown that Anglo-American fan studies define fan culture as an expressive lifestyle of fans of a certain cultural phenomenon or of a bearer of a certain cultural tradition, and in the last two decades, the fan studies direction, where fan culture is connected with fandom, has been intensively developing. It is stated that fandom is a self-organised community built around shared pleasure from a certain product of cultural industries in the digital media environment, and a fan is considered as a person who invests his time, energy, and money in interaction with a media product that is the object of his interests. *The scientific novelty* consists in determining the methodological status of the concept of “fan culture”, revealing the role of fan communities in the creation of popular culture in the 21st century. *Conclusions.* Fans began to play an active role in the processes of cultural creation, thanks to their creative work, there was a transition from passive consumption of mass culture products to active production of works of popular culture. Fan culture as a special community and environment of joint creative work among fans of literary works, television series, comics, and computer games, blurs the difference between consumption and production, becoming a vivid phenomenon of popular culture.

Keywords: fan studies; Anglo-American fan studies; fan culture; fandom; fans; fanfiction; participation culture; popular culture

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Introduction

Well-known critics of industrial society, representatives of the Frankfurt Scientific School, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno in their work *The Dialectics of Enlighten-*

ment formulated the understanding of mass culture (which is currently criticised by many contemporary researchers) that it, being by its very nature a “cultural industry”, does not take into account the opinion of the audience, but is used by a passive mass who seek only entertainment and thoughtless consumption. But since the 1980s, when, due to a change in the sociocultural paradigm, the postmodern scientific discourse shifted attention to the idea of the convergence of elite and mass cultures, the theory of popular culture began to be developed as a new paradigm of cultural development that has a separate meaning.

Unlike mass culture, popular culture is focused on creating a form that meets the needs of a person and is able not only to actualise the traditional meanings of culture, updating them but also to adapt to understanding complex scientific worldview paradigms of modern existence (Boiko, 2015). Popular culture contains a value universum that is in demand in today’s information and intellectual age. The significant potential of popular culture, in particular television, was discovered by scientists of British and American cultural studies, and its active research began. It was found that the consumer of a cultural product is not a frivolous listener or viewer, but independently determines what to listen to or watch and is able to understand when he is being manipulated. So, the representative of the American direction of cultural studies, John Fiske, one of the first researchers of the TV phenomenon, refused to consider consumers of popular culture as exclusively passive consumers. He argued that they are active subjects who are able to distinguish the quality of popular cultural products and consume them reflexively (Fiske, 1987). Moreover, consumers themselves choose the products offered by cultural industries and creatively improve or transform them. It can be argued that some of those who are active but at the same time creative consumers of mass culture are fans. The study of their cultural practices has led to the emergence of an interdisciplinary direction *Fan Studies*, which examines, in particular, the issues of cultural consumption and production; the comparison of subculture and dominant culture; the identity, ethics, and gender of fans; the mutual influence of fan culture and mass/popular culture, and so on.

Recent research and publications analysis. Despite the active growth of fan communities in the world over the past decades, in the academic environment, fan culture has not been the object of in-depth research for a long time, often the lack of research interest in fans was explained by their alleged cultural marginality. In this regard, until recently, most of the theoretical works in this area were written by the representatives of fan communities themselves — acafans (according to Henry Jenkins, people belonging to both the academic environment and the world of fans). In the early 1990s, the main part of the theoretical work on the understanding of the activities of fan communities and the fan subculture was formed, which gave a new impetus to the scientific direction — fan studies. The issues of fan practices, the development of fandoms, fans, and fan culture were considered by foreign researchers — John Fiske (1987, 1992) Henry Jenkins (1992, 2006a, 2006b, 2019), Matthew Hills (2002, 2017), Katherine Larsen and Lynn Zubernis (2012), Adrienne Evans and Mafalda Stasi (2014). Piotr Siuda periodised fan studios and outlined their main features (Siuda, 2010). In 2020, an international scientific journal dedicated to research on cultural transformation timed a separate issue of the analysis of fan studio methodology (Largent et al., 2020). In the Ukrainian academic space, the issues of fan culture are just beginning to be explored. Until recent-

ly, the term “fan” was used with negative connotations, and fan cultural practices are still not in the focus of attention of Ukrainian scholars and are on the periphery of cultural research. So far, there have only been studies in the field of journalism and social communications dedicated to highlighting the role of fan communities in the media space. Thus, Tetiana Krainikova, Eduard Krainikov, and Tetiana Yezhyzhanska (2021) defined online fanaticism as the dominant model of media behaviour of Ukrainian youth. Oksana Hudoshnyk and Valeriia Yarovkina (2021) studied fan behaviour from a “media-centric” point of view.

Aim of the article

The aim of the article is to reveal the main stages of the research of fans in fan studies discourse, to analyse the evolution of fan culture development that took place in the 21st century. The following issues need to be addressed to reveal the topic: to demonstrate the main stages of fan research in the discourse of fan studies, to clarify the definition of “fan culture”, and to highlight the main cultural practices of Ukrainian fan communities.

Main research material

An important condition for cultural research of fan culture is to distinguish between the concepts of “fanatic/fanaticism” and “fan/fandom”. Thus, in sociological, political, and religious discourse, the phenomenon of passionate admiration was often considered from the point of view of fanaticism, that is, a destructive attachment to a particular subject (Pavlenko, 2008). As noted by the researchers of the media behaviour of Ukrainian youth, fanaticism is “a lexeme that describes a wide range of phenomena and correlates not with the word “fanatic” but “fan” (Krainikova et al., 2021, p. 35). That is, fanaticism has the connotation of obsessive, reckless, or religiously devoted, it is a phenomenon of excessive obsession with the object of one’s interests. A fan is understood as a person who invests his time, energy, and own funds in interaction with the object of his interests.

“Fandom — passionate attachment, enthusiasm for a certain object (sports team, rock star, book series, etc.), ultimate devotion of the corresponding audience. Enthusiastic like-minded people, worshipping a person, group or cause, usually unite in certain communities, for example, in fan clubs, observe rituals, coordinate their actions” (Krainikova, 2019).

Fans have gained a deep knowledge of the product they admire because of its constant consumption. A fan is:

Someone who, for example, reads a favourite text not once, twice, or three times, but several dozen times or more, obtaining pleasure from something that does not seem extraordinary to others (i.e., they could be fans of certain details or particular characters in a story). A fan also strives to intensify his/her pleasure by creating amateur productions; he/she is often not only a consumer but also an author of texts based on the original. (Siuda, 2010, p. 87)

Thus, a fan is a devoted admirer of a certain cultural phenomenon who invests his time and resources in it and enjoys it. Fans are special recipients of popular culture, above all, a unique audience of various media that creatively consumes their content.

The interdisciplinary direction of fan studies is the result of research on fan activity in the Anglo-American academic environment. The Polish culturologist Piotr Siuda identified its three main research waves, set their chronological limits, and gave characteristics to each of them (Siuda, 2010). He called the first one a wave of deviation, the second — a wave of resistance, and the third — a mainstream wave, noting that the last two do not have a clear demarcation and can intersect. The wave of deviation began in the United States during the discussion of football fans' behaviour (the 20s-30s of the 20th century) and was the longest, lasting until the early 1990s. It was characterised as the deviant behaviour of good citizens who have a seemingly unhealthy passion for the subject of their interests. In the 50s and 70s, there was an increase in negative reviews about fans in connection with Elvis Presley's fans, when isolated facts about some fans of the "king of rock and roll" were made public, who collected strange, from a layman's point of view, things of their idol, for example, T-shirts with sweat or his nails, etc.

The year 1992 is believed to be the beginning of the second period of fan studies, which Piotr Siuda called the resistance wave, as this was then its key works were created. In this period, researchers no longer considered fans either pathological personalities or victims of manipulation by cultural industries but paid attention to that side of their activities, which reveals the essence of fans as active and creative people who are not subject to the selfish intentions of producers and as members of communities that resist producers who forcibly impose products of mass culture on consumers. It should be noted that the beginning of the second wave was partly a result of the fact that many researchers representing this movement were also active fans and members of various fan communities. Engaged in academic activities as much as in their fan communities, these researchers believed that fans should be allowed to speak for themselves. Henry Jenkins, the author of many works on the study of fan communities, was a fan of *Star Trek*, *Tulloch*, and *Doctor Who*. He also proposed the term "aca-fan", which is someone who writes both as an academic and as a fan (Siuda, 2010, p. 93). Even in fan studios, the boundaries between theory and practice are increasingly blurring. Previously, researchers had theorised what fans did and why they did it, yet fan voices were often absent from the discussion, and this theory seemed to bear less and less resemblance to what fans were actually doing online, at fan gatherings, and on fan pilgrimages. Researchers described an increase in fan-producer interaction, but often without access to producers themselves. All this is changing, not only are fans interacting with producers, but academics are as well (Larsen & Zubernis, 2012).

The third wave is tentatively called the "mainstream wave" by Piotr Siuda, that is, the main, mass, popular trend of interest in fan culture. He connects its beginning with 2006 because it was then that Henry Jenkins' work, *Convergence culture*, was published, in which the author analyses in detail the cultural practices of fans in new media working with the global Internet and compares them with the old ones, where users consume content passively (primarily TV). This wave was notable for the fact that the producers no longer forced fans to take certain actions and did not pressure them to implement their proposals. Today, producers listen to the audience's opinion,

recognise fans as mainstream, and regard them as their priority audience. Now the interests of fans, as active consumers of mass culture, are valued and considered as markers of the entire consumer audience.

Based on the periodisation of Piotr Siuda, we will analyse the evolution, formation, and development of fan culture from the point of view of its impact on the creation of popular culture. We understand popular culture as a type of culture that is created in daily life practices by consumers of cultural products by giving these products their own senses and meanings (Hurova, 2022).

The idea that fans are not passive consumers, but consume mass culture meaningfully, was defended by representatives of the Birmingham Centre for Cultural Research, which is known in our country as a research direction of cultural studies. The early works by representatives of this direction on the analysis of subcultural groups focused on their ability to deny and question the prevailing ideologies (e.g., resistance through ritual, resistance through style), as Dick Hebdige (1979) argued. The shift from passive consumption to active use of media texts in the analysis of popular culture was largely influenced by the work of Stuart Hall, whose 1980 essay examined the role of an active audience in the consumption of media texts. This approach undoubtedly contradicted previous concepts that criticised pop culture. Tony Jefferson, Paul Willis, and John Clarke also disagreed with the concept of consumers as passive recipients, because the audience is conscious and uses the media for their purposes. They resist the official ideology and rethink the content broadcast by industry producers (Hall & Jefferson, 2006).

Among the works in which fans are analysed as members of communities that have created their own culture, the following can be distinguished: *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth* by Camille Bacon-Smith (1991), *The Adoring Audience* by Lisa Lewis (1992), and the work by John Fiske (1992).

In his scholarly work *Textual Poachers. Televisions Fans and Participatory Culture*, Henry Jenkins explores the culture of the fan television community. The author shows that it was created from the content offered in official media, when fans modified this content the way they wanted: creating fan art, inventing amateur costumes of their favourite TV characters, collecting and exchanging the corresponding wrappers. Thanks to this, fans became active participants in the (over)production of cultural goods and contributed to the development of popular culture (Jenkins, 1992).

The analysis of video games, popular cinema, television, comics, and new media literacy allowed Henry Jenkins to formulate the concept of “participatory culture”, which is important for the theory of popular culture. A participatory culture means that all interested users can participate in the production and distribution of content based on iconic works of mass culture. A participatory culture is a culture “in which fans and other consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content” (Jenkins, 2006b, p. 118). Summarising the challenges of the third wave and drawing on the work of Henry Jenkins of this period, we can distinguish the leading idea of participatory culture: the world is moving away from a state where one only produces, and the majority only consumes; meanings are co-created in new media.

Until recently, there was no definition of fan culture in the Ukrainian scientific discourse, and those that have already appeared are far from providing an exhaustive description. Thus, Tetiana Krainikova connected fan culture with a cult (worship),

while not noting its essential features that would help distinguish fan culture from others: “Following the cult is formed into *fan culture*, which is an indicator of local and/or national moods” (Krainikova, 2019).

Anglo-American fan studies use the definition proposed by Henry Jenkins: “Fan culture is a culture of fans and admirers that exists at the expense of informal economic means, based on borrowings from commercial culture” (Jenkins, 2006b, p. 43). The researcher also identified five dimensions of fan media culture. First of all, it involves creating a common worldview: viewers, many times watching their favourite programmes, increasingly master the narratives of their favourite shows or TV shows. Secondly, fan culture encourages a certain activity of the viewer, because fans are “viewers who enter into a dialogue with television directors and producers who defend their right to form their own point of view and express their opinion on the production of their favourite programmes” (Jenkins, 1992, p. 284). Third, fans are a unique community that offers an interpretive cultural function. Being interested in the internal consistency of certain components of the proposed media content or the features of text detail, fans are inventive and subjective critics of certain episodes. Fourth, fan culture is also a specific tradition of cultural production: fans, whether artists, musicians, writers, or video makers, create works that reflect the peculiar interests of the fan community. Henry Jenkins (1992) sees this as a positive phenomenon: “Their works use the source material of commercial culture, but use it as a basis for creating modern popular culture” (p. 285). And fifth, fans proclaim an alternative society, which Jenkins considered a “utopian community” at the beginning of his research career.

However, the contemporary Anglo-American discourse is currently faced with the issue of being able to provide a stable and adequate definition of fan culture, at a time when it is constantly changing (Evans & Stasi, 2014). Matthew Hills (2017) noted that attempts to define fan culture lead to a potentially fatal error because they assume that by fixing individual elements, the object of study can be clearly distinguished. Instead, the author suggests using the broad concept of “fan worlds”, which will allow us to rethink fan culture as a phenomenon of the world that is indefinite within its limits, which manifests itself through the continuous “formation of a network of networks”. The researcher believes that it is worth moving away from exclusively empirical research within the fan community, taking as a basis the fact that this cultural space has unclear boundaries, is open, and is not isolated from other parts of society. This interpretation expresses the postmodern essence of culture proposed by G. Deleuze and F. Guattari with its rhizome symbol, all points of which are interconnected and, at the same time, have a connection with the environment. “Moving from fan culture to fan world means considering how contemporary fandom is reflexively mobilised using the principle of counterfactuality” (Hills, 2017, p. 876).

In the last two decades, the direction of fan studies, where fan culture is connected with fandom, has been intensively developing (Click & Scott, 2018; Gray et al., 2017; Li, 2020). A fandom is a self-organised community built around a shared enjoyment of an aspect of popular culture, such as a book, movie, TV show, band, sports team, etc., during which there is an exchange of impressions, assessments, emotions, understanding, that is, giving cultural products their own meanings, during which a new meaning is created. M. Hills (2017) defines fandom not as a monolithic single culture, but as “a network of networks, or a loose affiliation of sub-subcultures, all specialising

in different modes of fan activity” (p. 860). One of the reasons is that a person can be a member of not one, but several different fandoms.

J. Fiske (1992), analysing the influence of fandoms on the development of popular culture, distinguishes three levels of fandom productivity: the level of semiotic productivity, where the consumption of mass culture entails “the making of meanings of social identity and of social experience from the semiotic resources of the cultural commodity” (p. 37); the second is the level of enunciative productivity, which assumes that the values formed at the first level, “are shared within a face-to-face or oral culture”, which takes a public form. This level involves sharing experience, assimilating, and developing a particular subcultural style; the third is the level of textual productivity — “fans produce and circulate among themselves texts which are often crafted with production values as high as any in the official culture” (Fiske, 1992, p. 39).

Therefore, fandom brings together fans of mass culture products who, by consuming TV series, movies, comics, books, creative work of celebrities in any field (actors, singers, athletes), games (of any type), fans of various media products, produce works of popular culture. Thus, fans create amateur films based on popular films or best-selling books. Fan art, which is the creation by fans of a certain work of illustrations, drawings, collages, handmade, etc., originated in the visual arts. As a kind of performance, cosplay (from English “costume play”) emerged, the essence of which is to wear a costume to represent a favourite character during fan meetings.

The satisfaction of fan interests, which is carried out with the help of new technologies, has led to the appearance of digital age fandoms, and media fandoms. Opportunities for active participation were provided to fans by the Web 2.0 network service, which appeared in the 2000s and turned the Internet space into a place of exchange of works, a forum, a market for ideas, viewpoints, or content (Hurova, 2020). The main changes are the visual expression of fan culture. The global network is a new, extremely effective channel for the distribution of amateur cultural products. Amateurs have been making home videos for several decades, and now these films are becoming known to many (Jenkins, 2006b). Thus, fans have become the pioneers of new technologies and are now the most active segment of the media audience, which refuses passive consumption and defends its right to be a full-fledged participant in cultural events.

Compared to “pre-digital” communities, media fandoms are larger and their manifestations are more diverse and vivid, and they do not require geographical localisation. Members of such communities, as a rule, belong to the digital generation (digital natives), for whom mastering new technologies is not a problem, and the presence of any gadget, the Internet, and available software allows a fan to feel involved in a global fan community regardless of the direct (offline) contact with like-minded people. Fans of fashion products of mass culture have unlimited opportunities to discuss subtext, carefully analyse individual dialogues or episodes, record their own audio tracks and share all this online. Thanks to the possibilities of the World Wide Web, one’s own cultural product is involved in the process of co-creation. M. McLuhan’s term “global village” aptly illustrates the phenomenon of fan culture in the internet space.

One of the most famous types of online creative work is fanfiction, a term derived from the English language. The original meaning of this term is “prose reproduction of plots and characters borrowed from the mass media” (Jenkins, 2006a, p. 49). Now,

fanfiction is an amateur work based on popular original works of literature, cinematic art (movies, TV series, anime, etc.), comics (in particular — manga), as well as video games written by fans for fans within a certain fandom. In the Ukrainian internet space, there is a special fanfiction site in Ukrainian (<https://fanfic.com.ua/forum/>) with about 25,000 registered members who have posted more than 8,500 fanfictions and more than 6,500 comments. Among them, there are fandoms of world-famous TV series, for example, the fanfiction *School of Witchcraft and Wizardry in Ukraine* based on the novel about Harry Potter (J. K. Rowling), as well as a recognised among young people fandom of the first Ukrainian teenage television series *School(#School)/2018* (directed by Iryna Lytvynenko, Serhii Tolkushkin, and Serhii Umanets), etc. Each site has a special hierarchy of values and perception stereotypes and the product of online creative work is not a single text of one of thousands of authors but an endless chain of remarks generated by a certain text. The dissolution of a single work in the textual environment clearly demonstrates the situation described by R. Barthes as “the death of the author” and “the birth of a co-author”.

Another example of fans’ amateur creative work is the production of game modifications (“mods”), which modify the design tools of computer games to create their amateur versions. Mods (short for “modification”) are additions written by interested players that give the computer game new features or expand the plot. For example, a large number of mods have been written for the S.T.A.L.K.E.R. game series developed by the Ukrainian company GSC Game World (Serhii Hryhorovych, CEO), which takes place in the virtual exclusion zone of the former Chernobyl nuclear power plant. Some modifications of S.T.A.L.K.E.R. bring completely new storylines to the game, with new tasks and hours of gameplay, new locations, and other changes. The game series has spawned many other related products, including a GSC-licensed clothing line, comic books, an official magazine, and a series of books that complement and develop the game’s storyline. The series included both stories and novels by professional authors, as well as stories by ordinary game fans, and novice writers who were selected for publication in various competitions. A special website was opened for the book series — *S.T.A.L.K.E.R. Literary portal*.

Fans creatively modify cultural products offered by popular culture and distribute them. They are united by a sense of satisfaction from the opportunity to create their product no worse than a professional, a sense of self-importance in the process of communication, as well as a sense of involvement with producers of mass culture products (directors, film actors, show stars). For this, they are willing to invest their time and acquired skills in creating their own cultural product. The corresponding term “gift economy” appeared as a model for describing free cooperation, creative production, and distribution of fan products. In this case, it is an example of a participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006a, 2006b, 2019).

Conclusions

Fan studies, a separate direction focused on the study of fan communities in the Anglo-American academic environment, has three distinct development periods: deviation, resistance, and mainstream. Fans — are dedicated admirers of a particular cul-

tural phenomenon who invest their time and resources in it and enjoy it, which distinguishes them from fanatics who are intrusively, recklessly, or excessively obsessed with the object of their interest. Fans are members of communities that have created their fan culture in the process of consuming mass media products. Anglo-American fan studies define fan culture as an expressive lifestyle of fans of a certain cultural phenomenon or of a bearer of a certain cultural tradition, and in the last two decades, the fan studies direction, where fan culture is connected with fandom, has been intensively developing. A fandom is a self-organised community built around shared pleasure from a certain product of mass culture, during which the interpretation and creation of own meanings take place, and therefore a new meaning is created. Fan culture as a special community and environment of joint creative work among fans of literary works, television series, comics, and computer games, blurs the difference between consumption and production, becoming a vivid phenomenon of popular culture. Fans began to play an active role in the processes of cultural creation, thanks to their creative work, there was a transition from passive consumption of mass culture products to active production of works of popular culture.

Prospects for further research on the topic may be related to the analysis of fan practices (fan art, fanvid) in the media environment, as well as to the participatory culture.

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Англо-американські фан-студії та їх вплив на розвиток популярної культури у XXI столітті

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Мета статті — розкрити основні етапи дослідження фанатів у дискурсі фан-студій (Fan Studies), проаналізувати еволюцію розвитку фанатської культури, яка відбулась у XXI ст. *Результати дослідження.* Встановлено, що вивченню фанатських спільнот в англо-американському академічному середовищі присвячено окремий науковий напрям — фанатські студії (Fan Studies), які пройшли у своєму розвитку три виразні періоди: девіації, опору (XX ст.) та мейнстриму (XXI ст.). У культурологічному аспекті здійснено розмежування понять «фанатик/фанатизм» та «фанат/фанатство». Показано, що в англо-американських фанатських студіях фанатська культура визначається як виразний спосіб життя шанувальників певного культурного феномену чи носія певної культурної традиції, а в останні два десятиріччя інтенсивно розвивається той напрям Fan Studies, де фанатська культура пов'язується з фандомом. Визначено, що фандом — це самоорганізована спільнота, побудована навколо отримання сумісного задоволення від певного продукту культурних індустрій в умовах цифрового медіасередовища, а фанат — це людина, яка вкладає свій час, енергію, кошти у взаємодію з медіапродуктом, що є об'єктом його зацікавлень. *Наукова новизна* полягає у визначенні методологічного статусу поняття «фанатська культура», розкритті ролі фанатських спільнот у творенні популярної культури у XXI ст. *Висновки.* Фанати стали відігравати активну роль у процесах культуротворення. Саме завдяки їхній творчості відбувся перехід від пасивного споживання продуктів маскульту до активного виробництва творів популярної культури. Фанатська культура, як особлива спільнота та середовище сумісної творчості серед шанувальників літературних творів, телесеріалів, коміксів і комп'ютерних ігор, долає розбіжності між споживанням і виробництвом, стає яскравим феноменом сучасної популярної культури.

Ключові слова: фан-студії (Fan Studies); англо-американські фанатські студії; фанатська культура (фан-культура); фандом; фанати; фанфік; культура співучасті; популярна культура

