

Fan Identity Construction and Identity Expression in Cyberspace: A Study Based on Virtual Communities

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Abstract:

The identity construction and performance have shifted profoundly over the period of the digital virtual communities. In view of this, the objectives of this research are as follows: To understand how fans construct and perform their identity in cyberspace; using fan communities as exemplars. It can be said that while fan identity was long linked to dedicated fan sites and Buffy could have been an ideal example for that, the new forms of fan communities, that came with the attract of platforms like Reddit, Tumblr or Twitter – among others – turned the notion of fans into a dynamic, constantly evolving process. This research adopts a concurrent mixed-methods model to explore the processes of becoming a fan and to engage in fandom. First, the research employs non-probability purposive qualitative in-depth interview method to assess the fans and gain an understanding of their perceptions and the fan community experiences. Second, the study also uses quantitative online surveys to assess the fan communities, and provide a statistical representation of the whole fan community. Specifically, the research examines how people create virtual communities as a way of constructing fan identity in relationship to self-values, feelings, and affiliations; and as a way of play, using aliases allowed by cyberspace. The work of identity in the present study reveals that to become fans, viewers participate in conversations, produce fan materials and culture, or align themselves with the views and values of the community. The research also emphasizes the importance of social media platforms as the places where identity can be performative, and features like avatars, usernames or shared content create significant tools for personal and fan identity.

1. Introduction

Availability and popular use of the internet and social networks in the recent few years have shifted traditional ways of consumption of material content and interaction with people. Virtual spaces have led to the development of what are known as fandoms: groups of people who come together to share a common interest in particular media products, personalities or interests. Two aspects are distinguished: the digital interaction and the construction of identity [1]. On the basis of it. In the context of fandom, identity is a state that is being constructed, reinforced, and negotiated within the boundaries of shared fan practice, interaction and tools that are available in computer-mediated communication environments. The forthcoming

discussion of fan identity construction means the process of defining oneself in the context of a specific fan's community or interest. And in cyberspace, this process is multiplied by the opportunity to communicate with members of the global community, create random products, and interact with like-minded individuals. Therefore, this research proposes the question about connection of fans' participation in virtual communities and formation of their identity. And in particular, it aims to answer questions about how cyberspace impacts these processes and how fans navigate these spaces. The primary objectives of this study are:

- To explore how fans construct their identities within virtual communities.
- To examine how fans express their identities through digital platforms.

- To investigate the role of anonymity and pseudonymity in fan identity expression.
- To analyze the impact of different online platforms on the process of identity construction and expression.
- To understand how online fan communities influence individuals' sense of belonging and self-perception.

These objectives will further shape the research process in relation to the dynamic nature of connections between virtual environments and identity; the study will shed light on the precise processes of fan identity construction in the context of the digital. Research Questions are:

- How do fans construct their identities within virtual communities?
- What role do virtual communities play in the expression of fan identity?
- How does the cyberspace environment influence identity construction and expression?

A huge variety of fans and the availability of the media have brought changes to such specific culture and the process of constructing a unique personality. Looking back into pre-internet times, fans are only able to unite in large groups, basement parties and or locally; today fans are able to interact with materials and other fans across worldwide. But this move to online platforms also presents new challenges in regards to the way fans create and perform their selves. Facilitating communication and interaction, virtual communities are specifically characterized by offering individuals the opportunities to anonymous and even employ pseudonyms, thus giving people the chances to try selves here they can try selves might not be afforded in an offline context [2]. It therefore poses questions about the reality of building an alter ego online, effects of online interactions on user perceptions, and role that Virtual Environment plays in the construction of fan identities.

Besides, various platforms have a different degree of interactivity and concerning them, fans may choose the way of identification accordingly. Such more focused sites as, for example, Tumblr or Reddit can create even stronger identity possibilities than Facebook or twitter that are created for a big and undistinguished audience. Such knowledge gaps can be filled by this study when asking questions regarding the role of various digital contexts in constructing the fan identity, as well as the consequences of fan identity construction for digital identity more generally.

There are several reasons why this type of research is pertinent for several reasons. First, this research brings a significant addition to the existing knowledge about identity and participation in online

communities focusing systematically on the fan communities, which are underrepresented in the Identity scholarship. This work deepens knowledge of how personal and social identities evolve in digitized realities as it details processes by which fans accomplish identity performance in cyberspace. Second, this work increases awareness about anonymity and pseudonymity in the processes of online identity creation. The present paper extends earlier research on the role of anonymity in online communication by examining it in the context of fan communities, which has not been previously explored in detail in prior literature, although people in fan communities use these tools to navigate their identities in a very particular fashion. Identifying the role that anonymity plays in shaping identity in these rooms could provide more generic insights into how culture is created and constructed during ephemeral interactions facilitated through technological gadgetry.

1.1 Literature Review

Becoming a fan is a complex process and has been studied from three perspectives, namely identity perspective, social identity perspective, and the participatory culture perspective. Identity theory deals with looks at how people narrate roles and individual interaction. In fan communities people hold positions related to the content they are fans of i.e fan of a particular TV show, a band, or a media product. They develop essential roles into the identity of the fans and the ways in which they relate to others.

Social identity theory builds on this by looking at how people's identity is affected by group behavioural. Loyal are sometimes ready to state that they belong to a separate club and based on this, they act and behave in a certain way. It is as important for the members of a group to feel that they belong to a particular group as it is for fans to see themselves in the way favored media depicts them [3]. Often this sense of the collective identity is likely to contribute to the concept of group cohesiveness in which fans often hold similar values, language and culture as that of their fan community.

There is little doubt that culture as participation is essential in the construction of the fan identity. In all its strands, random is not a mere watching or downloading process but a co-creative one in which fans freely contribute with comments, nano-fictions, art works, and more. Fan involvement positively reinforces the fan self as members of the community are not only consumers, but also producers of fan narratives. Fandom is also collective, thanks to digital technologies, and thus offers a deeper and a more engaging way of identity creation. Members

receive appreciation from other fans, and this only reaffirms the 'approval' they experience thus confirming their place in the fan community. Figure 1 is fan identity construction.

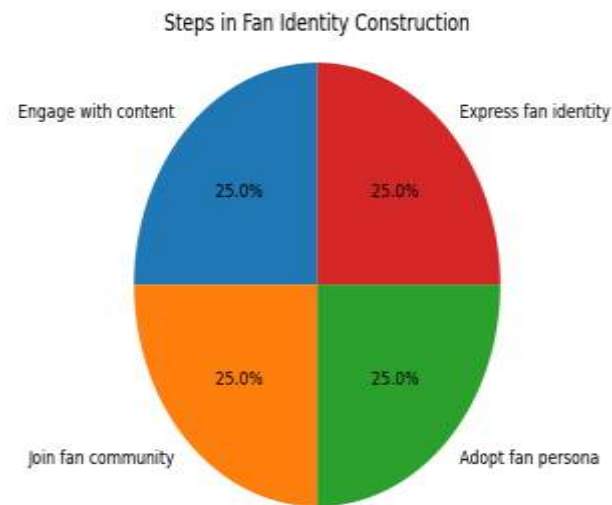


Figure 1. Fan Identity Construction

The specific formulation of virtual communities allows fans to express their identities different from possible offline. These communities give fans a virtual environment to interact with fans of similar interests hence creating a social identity. Some of them include: Online fan discussions, with fan-organized discussion boards, fan social networks, as well as dedicated fan websites; collective fan activity, etc. In virtual communities, existence and identity manifestation, becomes more or less performed. Therefore avatars, usernames and profile customizations that fans employ serve to indicate their membership to a specific fandom [4]. Of course, this form of identity expression is not just about coming out of the 'closet' and declaring oneself a fan, but also about building one particular type of self which is acceptable within the parameters of the fan community. For instance, fans indulge in using symbols, phrases, or images related to their favourite fan objects in their online profiles to show how well they understand the show. The actual interactions in such virtual communities give fans the chance to stage them, which means Performing identities. While using digital platforms is a sort of liberation from real-life constraints, it allows people to use pseudonyms and be different as they want bearing in mind their offline environment. This freedom can result in a truest form of fandom and dyed-in-the-wool fanaticism because the fan is out of his/her comfort zone by significant erasures of the social self. Since digital identity is performative and since the Internet offers a degree of anonymity,

fans are able to perpetually renegotiate that identity within the virtual community.

The fan identity is constructed and reinforced at the micro-level, the present study identifies fan communities as core of the practice. To be more specific, the experience of producing fan artefacts, or facilitating fan practices, be it through the organization of a fan event or participating in fan forums is positively related to identification with the fan community. This participatory engagement lets the fan place him or herself within the community, gain credit within the community and be recognized by other fans. The more a fan invests oneself, the more they are identified with this role and with the football team. Bridging with the concept of 'fan labour,' fan identity construction involves the commitment of resources such as time, energy and creativity for fan-associated production. This is usually voluntary labour but is equally as important to the sustained vibrancy and health of the fans' communities. It recreates the fan by making her or him feel that he or she is a valuable member of that community and by offering an audience that recognizes her or him as the authority on a particular area of media. It is also inclusive, and as such, fan communities help to create the sense that the content and culture of the fandom belongs to everyone. Consumers do not only receive media content but also create it and rework it through their participation. Such a cooperated reinterpretation of content enables fans to feel more involved with their fandom, as they are not only viewers or readers but co-producers of its development [5]. This kind of participation in creating the culture in which the fan is endorsing makes the fan feel special and more enhances his/her identity as a fan. Figure 2 shows participation in identity construction.

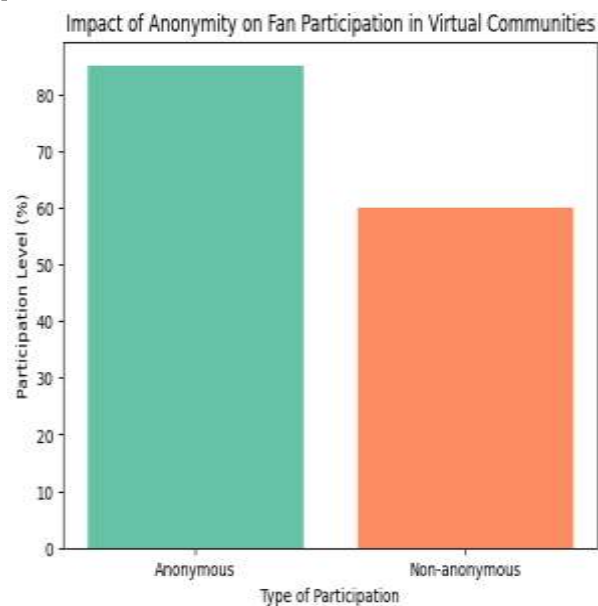


Figure 2. Participation in Identity Construction

One of the advantages of digital spaces is the high operational and identification mobility, which is possible only in cyberspace. Offline, individuals have less freedom in expression, in terms of the self, based on extra-social, extra-cultural and extra-physical factors, that hinder identity variance in online communities. Fan can be multi-identity or be different persona that depend on what platform they are using or the audience they are interacting with. For instance, some of the participants may provide a professional and refined image of a fan in an open social media website, but at the same time, they may post and share a drawer and more profound representation of a fan in a closed fan discussion board.

The shift of fan community in digital spaces also affects the fluidity of the fan identity, in relation to the structure of the platform. Popular sites like twitter, Instagram and Tumblr offer fans means to construct their own exceedingly individualized online identities. Hashtags and tagging as well as sharing content allows fans to be active within a wider community however at the same time is selective in showing your fan identity online. Hence, due to the availability of new and developing technologies in content creation as well as dissemination, fans have been able to try out different forms of imitation as well as identification as they are readily licked by other fans.

The division of cyber space into numerous subsidiary realms enables fans intersect the several dimensions of their identity in different domains. Often a fan, may be a part of multiple fan communities whose focus can be any topic or Media Franchise. These subcommunities give a fan a means to express multiple dimensions of their finish self, thus offering fans a way to build a more complex model of identity than is typically considered. The possibility to move from one fan community to another, and switch between different personas, is evidence of the constructivist nature of identity in virtual environments.

Fan activity is one of the important components when constructing and bargaining an identity. The twine is considered to be a product of this negotiation and is built upon interaction with the content as well as with other fan viewers [6]. In this context, participation can extend to activity within the content's domains such as writing their own fan fiction or fan art, engaging in discussion on fan related materials, and sharing fan related content. Both forms enable fans to perform dimensions of their selves to create an ongoing process of identity work. Because of the 'reply' factor, which allows fans to respond to content and/or to other fans, the construction and performance of identity in these settings change with experience and interaction.

Another strong element that plays a key role in creation of fan identities in cyberspace is the users' anonymity or possibility of using pseudonyms. One major benefit of participating in the fan community is having the potential to be anonymous and be almost invisible hence safe. This anonymity can be of immense importance in the social life of these fans because some of them can feel embarrassed or judged by society due to the things that they are fans of. Fans can write in anonymously which means they can write what they want and does not have to worry about getting into trouble or facing negative consequences for something they wanted to share.

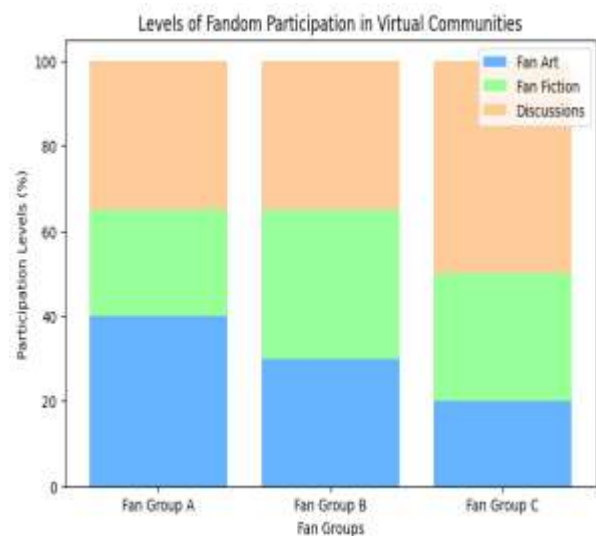


Figure 3. Online Fandom Participation

Closely related to avatar, pseudonymity is a way fans maintain a constant profile but an invented one pseudonymity. Being a pseudonym, it can be seen that it allows a fan to establish a certain identity within a specific community, and also, therefore, gain certain recognized status, interact with other fans, become an important part of the social capital. Based on the notion that followers can be anything but a fan, it is suggested that pseudonymity enables users to test the extremities of avatar representation more freely.

Closely connected with identity rapidity and the use of such pseudonym's fans may have more actual and therefore truthful discourse in the communities. Because there are no professional consequences of posting, you get people, who freely share their thoughts, opinions and experiences with others resulting in more profound Fan Relations. This openness leads to creating togetherness since fans freely become what they are without being locked out.

There are varying characteristics of different digital platforms and they create different affordance which determine how fan identity is built and lived. Many

popular social media like Twitter, Instagram, etc are more of open public communal platforms for short form communicating fans consuming brief messages in form of tweets articulate their identity using hashtags and placed pictures and text [7]. These platforms provide much visibility but channels of interaction could be restrained which gives rise to a celebratory model of fan ship. But at the same time, being public makes it possible for fans to address anybody, which means that a larger number of individuals will be aware of the fans' identity.

Fan specific sites, including Tumblr, Reddit, or AO3 (Archive of Our Own) allow fans more elaborate and extensive ways of expressing themselves. These platforms are usually a lot more specific and allow fans to deal with the material on a more personal level, being able to discuss, write, draw, etc something based upon or in relation to the item of their interest and not only that, but make friends with other like-minded fans. Another advantage of these platforms is that it is easier to present more genuine fan images since the fans, by and large, experience a sense of comfort when sharing personal thoughts and ideas.

Another way in which fan identity construction is impacted is by the algorithms employed by the social media platform to what is put in front of the fans. When using algorithms to serve content recommendation, this may strengthen specific parts of fan identity as the incorporated media serve to uphold restricted points of view, thus recreating echo chambers. Figure 3 is online fandom participation and figure 4 is digital platforms on fan identity.

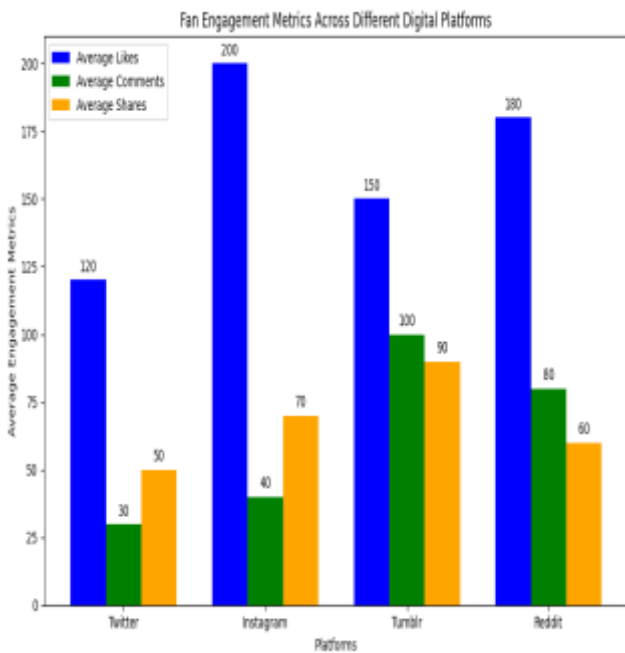


Figure 4. Digital Platforms on Fan Identity

With all these advantages of virtual communities for the construction of fan identity, there is not lack of difficulties [8]. Nostalgia Culture points out that the gatekeeping, bullying and other toxic behaviors are tendencies concealed by the anonymity of the online platforms. Fans who are not able to embrace their cultural practice standard of the particular fandom may be rejected or even verbally assaulted, which diminishes the fans' belongingness and can affect their identity formation in a negative way. This gatekeeping can produce a very clear separation of the fan community and certain ways of being a fan are acceptable while others are not.

However, the flexibility of the identity paradigms in cyberspace can cause fragmentation of fans, that can feel or have identity crises, and fully separated from their real-life identity. This may cause fans to be confused and questioning their real life self, hence disconnection between the life online persona and that of the life real persona.

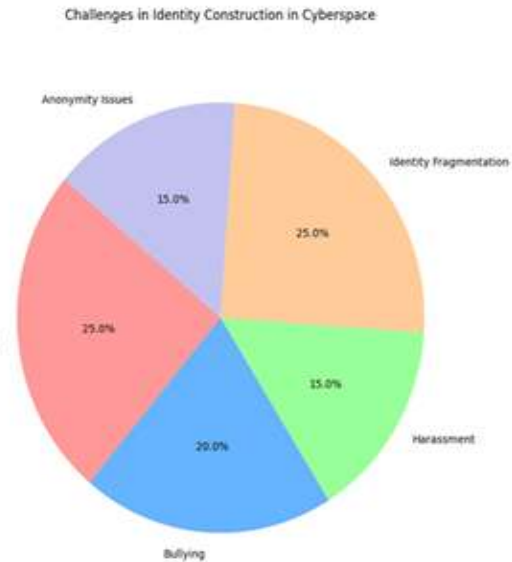


Figure 5. Identity Construction in Cyberspace

2. Material and Methods

2.1 Introduction

In this paper, the methodology section explains the research design and strategies used in studying fan identity construction and display in cyberspace with special reference to virtual communities [9]. This study adopted a secondary research approach analyse articles, theories, and findings on fan identity in new media. Secondary research therefore focuses on the analysis of existing research information, studies and theoretical models rather than conducting surveys and interviews. Through integrating information, the study offers an

improved account of how identities are built and performed in fan communities on the web.

2.2 Research Design

In this light, the research design utilized in this research study is qualitative secondary data analysis. The use of secondary research was informed by the fact that it would provide an understanding of the challenges experienced within virtual communities among fan identities. Given that this paper seeks to discuss existing theories and empirical evidence, secondary research is especially useful for the purpose of this study. Figure 5 is identity construction in cyberspace and figure 6 is research design.

Research Design Framework

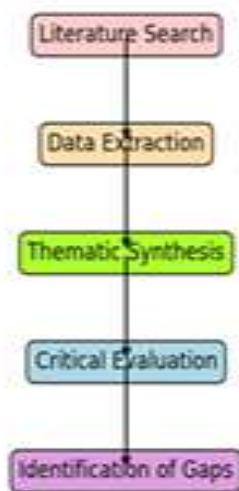


Figure 6. Research Design

2.3 Data Sources

Sources of data for this line of work included peer reviewed articles, books and proceedings of conferences, web articles and cases that centered on fan identification, virtual communities and cyberspace communication [10]. The criteria for sources selection were relevancy and credibility in addition to their utility in adding value to the construction and enactment of fan identity in the context of the current study.

The information in *New Media & society*, *Journal of Fan studies* and *Information society* peer-reviewed journal were very helpful. These journals offered quantitative results and qualitative analysis as the theoretical backdrop to the concept of a fan identity in digital spaces.

Henry Jenkins' *Textual Poachers* gave important theoretical background information about fandom and identity in this context, as did Susan C. Herring's

work on online communities [11]. These books provided thorough explorations of fan culture, culture and identity.

Some conference papers from the International Conference on Digital Culture and Technology and the Fan Studies Network Conference were useful in gathering information regarding trends and findings of fan identity studies in cyberspace.

Blogs and articles by experts in the profession together with researchers were also consulted online. These sources gave the latest trends as well as cases to do with fan identity construction in different virtual spaces.

2.4 Data Collection Process

This can include wither tabbing for relevant sources, a method that involve source selection followed by source evaluation reviewed, to have a good collection of information about fan identity construction and expression.

An extensive literature review was observed and the most relevant resources were used that include: JSTOR, Google Scholar and ResearchGate. Studies were searched for based on such keywords as "fan identity", "virtual communities", "identity construction in cyberspace", and "fan expression". The search was only restricted to two decades because the more recent research is likely to embrace most of the current theoretical frameworks and findings.

The selection criteria include the following:

- Relevance to fan identity construction and expression in virtual communities.
- Credibility of the authors and journals.
- Publication date, focusing on studies published between 2000 and 2023 to capture contemporary issues and trends in fandom.

Articles and books that primarily focused on non-digital forms of fandom or lacked relevance to identity construction were excluded from the review. After eligible sources were included, the key concepts and theoretical touchstones were screened and categorized [12]. A systematic approach was employed to categorize the literature based on topics such as:

- Theories of identity construction.
- Characteristics of virtual communities.
- Forms of identity expression within fandoms.
- The impact of digital technology on fan identity.

This categorization facilitated a coherent synthesis of the literature and helped identify gaps in existing research.

The thematic analysis involved critically reviewing and synthesizing the extracted information to identify recurring themes and patterns related to fan identity [13]. Key themes included:

- The role of anonymity and pseudonymity in identity expression.
- The influence of community dynamics on identity construction.
- The relationship between fandom and personal identity.
- The impact of social media platforms on fan interactions and identity performance.

This thematic framework guided the analysis and interpretation of the findings, providing a structured understanding of fan identity in cyberspace. Figure 7 is data collection flowchart.

Data Collection Process Flowchart

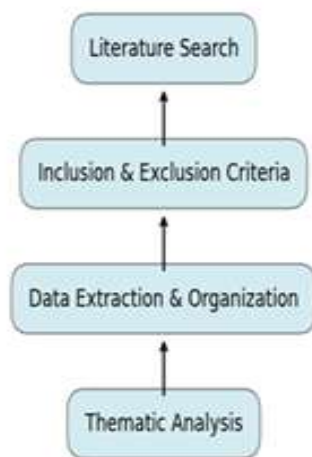


Figure 7. Data Collection Flowchart

2.5 Ethical Considerations

The ethical issues also apply in secondary research in which the researcher works with data that has been collected by others [14]. The study respected ethics by ensuring that all the work presented including data, information and ideas were appropriately accredited. Further, greater caution was exerted to examine the sources for contingency of Bias/Limitations of their reports. Involving respect for the context in which data was collected and the opinions with the authors themselves, the research stays as close as possible to academic standards.

2.6 Limitations of the Study

The study relied on the quality of existing research, which may vary significantly across sources [15]. Some studies may have methodological limitations or biases that affect the reliability of their findings. The findings from various studies may not be universally applicable due to contextual differences in fandoms, cultures, and online environments. The diversity of fan communities and their unique

characteristics may influence the generalizability of certain conclusions.

The rapid evolution of technology and online platforms means that findings can quickly become outdated. These limitations originate from the fact that the study uses published material to document changes in fan identity construction and expression. There was a rigorous search conducted in the databases, and yet there might be works missing regarding particular fan communities or fan interests [16]. These gaps could still provide a somewhat shallow look into the construction of fan identity within some of these domains.

2.7 Summary

The method explained in this paper details how the process of using secondary research to analyse construction of fan identity online was conducted [17]. The study also seeks to intend to in the synthesis of the findings regarding virtual communities, fan identity, theoretical frameworks, and trends found in previous research.

3. Results and Discussions

From the secondary research method of this study focusing on fan identity construction and identity expression based on cyberspace, it is evident that there is much nuanced interaction of elements that impact the participation of the identities in question in virtual communities [18]. This section provides a discussion on the findings and themes generated from the literature about the construction of fan identity, the way the fans express themselves and the use of anonymity in the fan practices, and the part played by the technology platforms. Figure 8 shows identity construction in virtual communities.

3.1 Identity Construction in Virtual Communities

Virtual community identity construction is therefore not a one-dimensional process, it is a process of use, interaction, and self-presentation [19]. According to the literature, fans develop their primary ways of constructing an identity through identifying with particular fandoms into the formation of their identity. While Jenkins (1992) posited that fans consume media, they also reconsider their identities in relation to the text and the culture that gravitate around it.

A fan identifies with the particular fandom through assertion of particular behaviors, interests, and value for which the fandom is known for. For instance, one takes an active place in the conversations, posting artwork or writing fiction based on a preferred fandom, one demonstrates devotion [20]. It creates

an environment of shared interest, where fans get acceptance from the other people that are into similar stuff. This, as Duffett (2013) established, precludes individuality while at the same time asserting group unity within new media coalitions.

Besides, secondary research suggests and emphasise that identity construction in virtual communities culturally and experientially mediated. Fandoms are different and who you like influences the expectations or norms you have to live with [21]. Members of varied philosophies bring an analgesic that aids the identity formation process as part of the fan community. The mixing of these two kinds of experiences within online spaces results in a richer understanding of how fan identities are constructed, where personal and communal fans are linked.

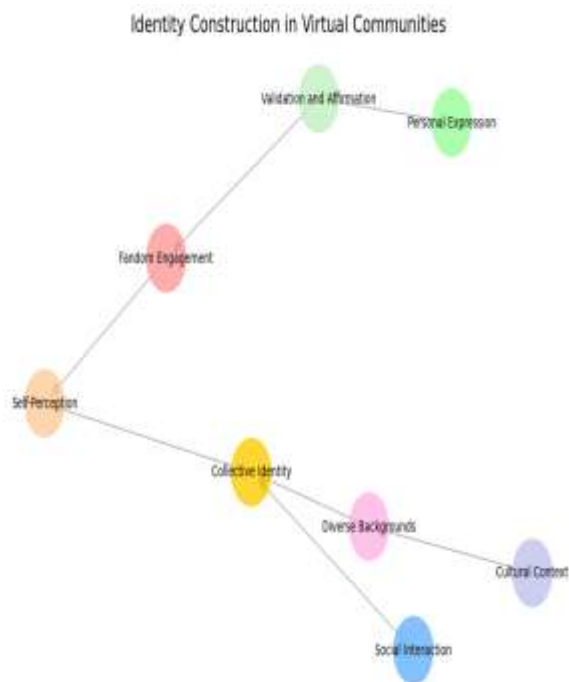


Figure 8. Identity Construction in Virtual Communities

3.2 Expression of Identity

As the research revealed, people embrace identity expression inside virtual communities due to the plurality of microelements influenced by virtual sites. It demonstrates that fans employ identity-work instruments, such as profile appearance, creating and sharing text and image content, and ways of interaction [22]. For example, avatars and usernames are typical primary identifiers at many online venues, ensuring that fans can control how they are seen by others. It is implied that the dynamics of fans' interaction may depend on the above types of digital representations, as they contain information about the person as a consumer and his or her personality. Figure 9 shows expression of identity.

As highlighted in the literature, the activity of content generating and sharing (featuring fan artworks, videos, memes) is a crucial way of identity signalling [23]. Through creation and sharing of such 'original' content, fans rebuild the solidity of their positioning in the context of a fandom whilst constructing their individual subject positions simultaneously. It is not only an endeavour that increases people's fulfilment in life but also helps them to become member of a group where others will consider, appreciate or even criticize their work. Furthermore, it reveals the indication that fans perform multi-husker of identity in these areas. This fluidity in identity show that different technologies enable people to move between aspects of their personas including personal, professional and fan personas to manipulate their self-presentation in the online environment [24]. It is not that one is a fan this way and another in a different way, thus, the constant changing of identity presentation proves that fans' identities are far from clear cut.

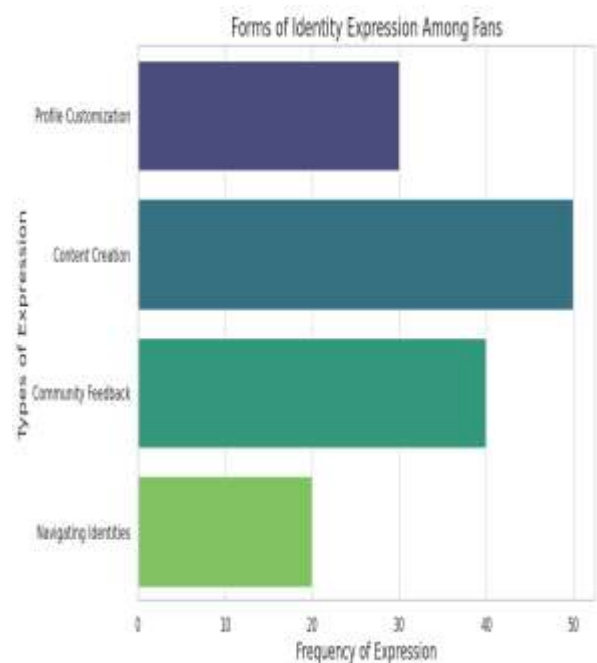


Figure 9. Expression of Identity

3.3 The Role of Anonymity and Pseudonymity

Since anonymity and pseudonymity are two of the strongest tenets of franchise random virtual communities, fans are able to expand and express identity free from the consequences of the real-world [25]. The literature shows that most fans want to remain anonymous since this gives them an opportunity to freely share their feelings. This tends to make conversation less formal and also more sincere because people have no faces to lose which

often makes them adhere to specific cultural standards.

This paper shows that anonymity creates a perception of security for fans when they interact about matters that can be considered uncomfortable or provocative. Readers pointed out that they do not feel as uneasy opening up about their experiences and next to no one wants to feel alone, which brings people together in the community [26]. The freedom that coming into one's own online identity provides is especially helpful to fans who might experience dissimulation in their meat-space lives, and be able to find an appreciative community within fandom.

Conversely, anonymity which encourages freedom of speech; has its drawbacks as well. This absence of accountability means that the worst possible behavior, including harassment or toxic interactions, may be witnessed in this community. A study preformed secondary research suggest that negative experience may hinder some members from participating or engaging in fandom activities hence the need for efficient moderation and /or community rules.

3.4 Impact of Online Platforms

The paper reveals that various social and media sites considerably shape who fans perceive themselves to be and how they communicate this about themselves. The findings suggest that each platform possesses niche affordance profiles that align with forms of interaction and self-presentation [27]. For instance, Sites like Tumblr or AO3 are built around elements like fan creations, creation and distribution of fan works, and sharing of fan cultures, which form a fundament of a fan. These platforms encourage originality and interaction that Traditional media assumes and enables fans diagnose the media and interact with one another.

In contrast, well-known social media sites such as Twitter, which is created for message posting and reading, and Facebook, usually the format of communication and circulation of messages differ and elicit a dissimilar sort of engagement [28]. More generally, on such platforms, it is not necessary to express a fan identity in the same complex and sophisticated way that a fan might do in more obviously fan-oriented forums. Such change in engagement pattern may impact the fans' attitude toward the construction of self and the relational understanding within the community.

Further, the algorithm that the social media employs play a role in influencing the construction of the fan identity through the interaction that is enabled and promotes the visibility of a particular content. In line with these studies, users could be suggested to watch content that only strengthens their opinions based on

a set of algorithms. This can then just affirm the parts of their identity that they already hold dear but can quarantine and control the kind of interaction within the fandom. Figure 10 shows role of anonymity and pseudonymity and figure 11 is impact of online platforms.

3.5 Discussion

The results of this study are in concordance with earlier work carried out on identity construction in cyberspaces [29]. Prior research has shown that the affordances of digital media include reach, flexibility, and anonymity, and they enable people to manage impressions. This control is achieved by employing tools notably avatars, plain pseudonyms, and usernames as symbols of self-created images. In the context of fan communities, these representations enable fans to be part of a certain media or subculture and while doing so they do not use their real-life personas. It has become standard practice to develop an online alter ego in the creation of a fan identity which is typically distinct from real life character. Figure 12 is discussion on the study.

For instance, the flexibility of having avatars and pseudonyms to use in the fan communities enable many a fan to try out aspects that they are otherwise unwilling to display in face-to-face interactions. For instance, a given fan may download their avatar from a preferred TV series or video game, thus declaring their loyalty to fellow fans and the show's producers, while fostering a preferred virtual identity at the same time. It is further confirmed by prior research that the skill of putting together an identity that corresponds to the given fandom is an important aspect of identity construction in these communities.

3.6 Social Dynamics and Groupthink in Fan Communities

The other key consideration that has been realised from the research work is social factors in the fan communities. Fans make up a cult that is closed and possesses an identity based on its suggested passion for a particular TV show [30]. This shared identity comes in handy in that it creates conformity where the population of a given community feels the obligation to go with the flow of the rest of the population due to reasons of membership into a given community. For instance, when certain perception of an object of media is dominant in a fan community, people holding different perception may not dare to express their view since they feel they will be expelled. On the one hand, fans within a specific fan community interact in such a way that they continue to affirm their status as fans; on the other hand, such

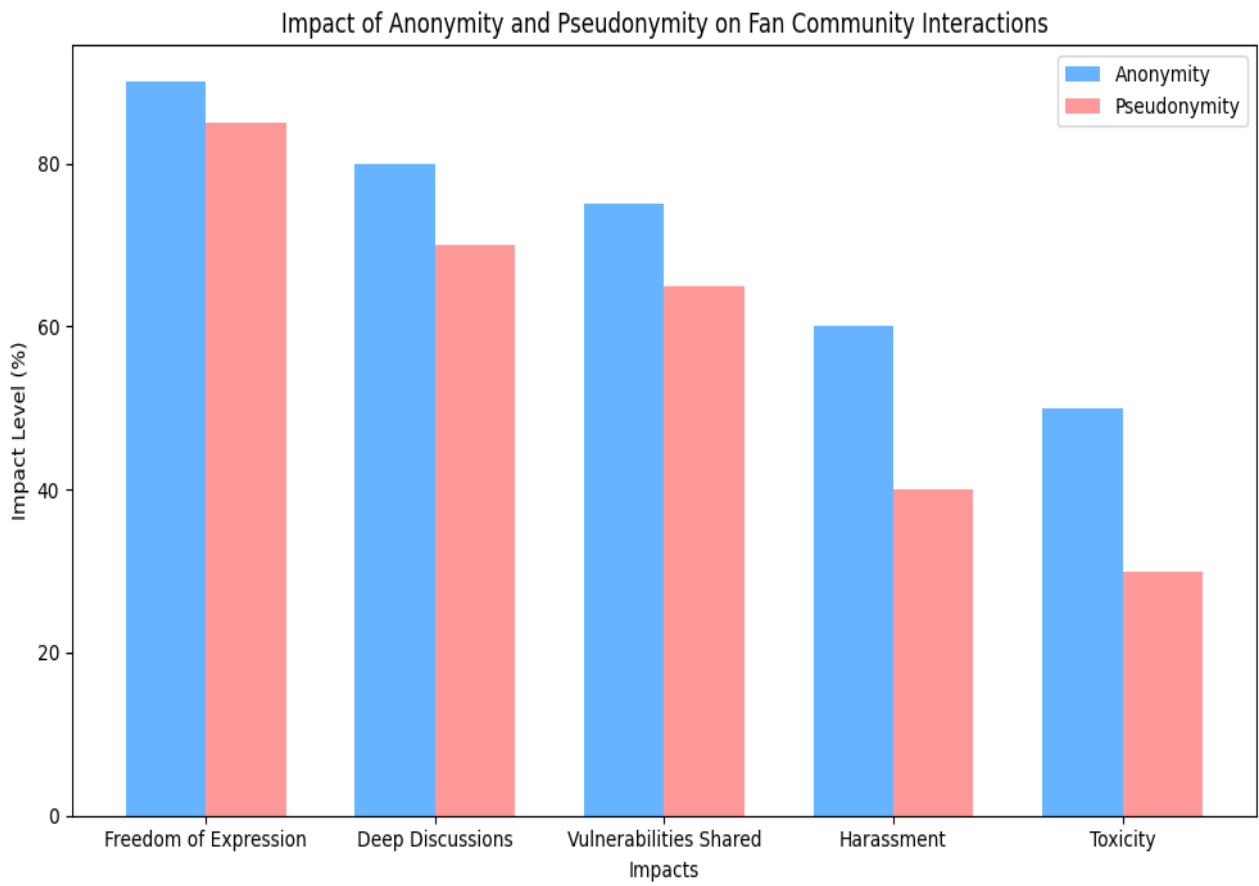


Figure 10. Role of Anonymity and Pseudonymity

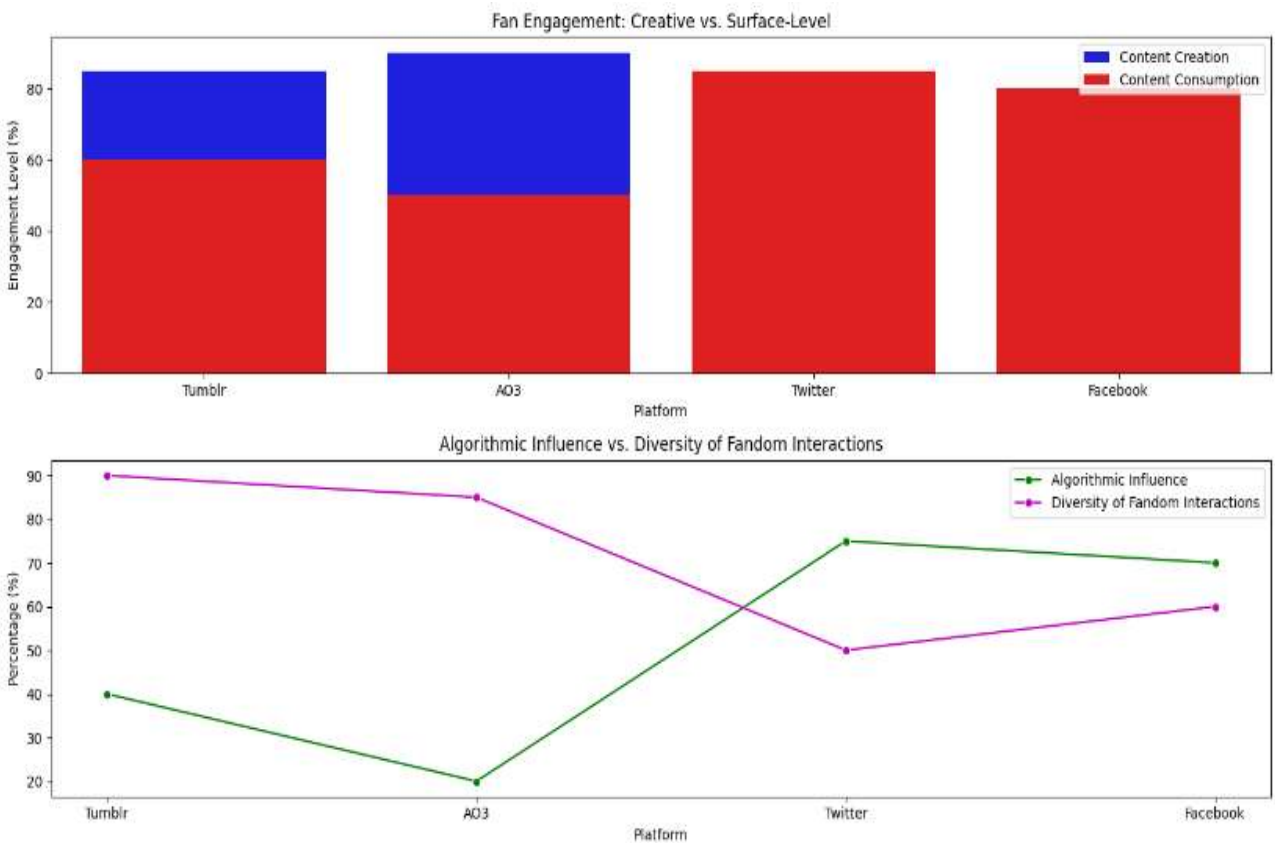


Figure 11. Impact of Online Platforms



Figure 12. Discussion on the Study

interaction may lead to conflict. Audience here, who may determine that their organisational self- image does not fit that of the organisation, will either assimilate or resist. Figure 13 is identity expression in virtual communities. Table 1 is forms of fan identity expression in virtual communities. Sometimes it grows into an opposing position that causes shunning of the community, and sometimes the fandom itself, as the person realizes that he/she cannot stay in the same boat with the supporters of the decision they do not agree with. To extend, this study shows that the intersection of individual and group identity is not straightforward and exists within virtual fan spaces.

4. Conclusions

One of the central ideas of this research is how much the supporting role virtual communities have assessed the identity of fans and how they share it [31].

Table 1. Forms of Fan Identity Expression in Virtual Communities

Form of Identity Expression	Description	Percentage (%)
Avatars/Pseudonyms	Fans use customized avatars and pseudonyms to construct and present their digital identities.	30%
Content Creation	Fans express their identities through fan fiction, artwork, and other media related to their fandom.	25%
Social Interaction	Engaging in discussions and social activities with other fans to validate and express identity.	20%
Groupthink	Fans participate in group dynamics where collective identity influences individual identity expression.	25%

Forms of Fan Identity Expression in Virtual Communities

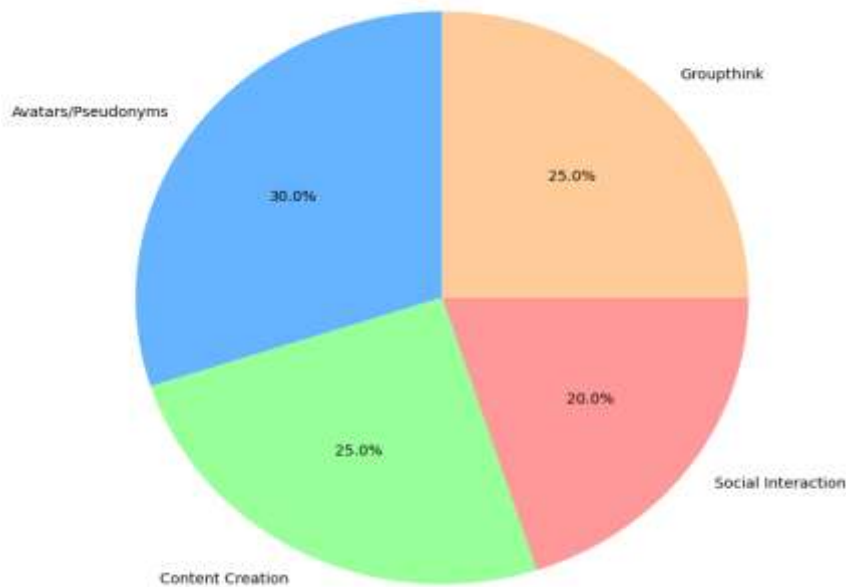


Figure 13. Identity Expression in Virtual Communities

With the development of new media forms, such an option has become organic in practice of finishing activity and the way fans construct their identities in the relation to the fandom. Another reason why fans are so loyal is because virtual communities are created for fans to find men and women like them and fit in. It, therefore, increases the reinforcement of the fans' identity coupled with the opportunity to control by whom and how they are being seen as by their members of the relevant fraternity. This work proves that these communicative virtual worlds provide the possibility for self-identity construction which could be more complicated in real-life settings.

4.1 Fan Identity Construction in Virtual Communities

Fan identity construction in virtual context is a process that involves interactions and participation in a sequence. They are incorporated into internal conflict, collaboration, where they offer feedback to other fans or where they are contributing to other forms of fan produced media, such as fan fiction, art work and videos all within the parameters of the fan community values and norms. Apart from it, it also contributes to the creation of stronger connection between the individual and the fandom as well as their identity.

Through secondary research, we have identified that the digital environment facilitates fan identity construction in several ways:

Interaction with Other Fans: Computer-mediated communication promotes interactions that have an impact on identity development in virtual community [32]. Such interactions may include discussions and disputes about various matters or cooperation within the framework of fan projects that contributes to forming of the fan's position within the community and personal identity development.

Content Creation and Sharing: Viewers are not only just waiting for programs to watch. This way media is openly produced and consumed by them, and is thus a fundamental aspect of media in their lives [33]. Despite whether fans are writing fictional stories or drawing artwork along with rewriting content or remixing it, these creative activities enable fans to extend aspects of their identity into the public domain.

4.2 Recommendations for Further Research

While this research provides significant insights into fan identity construction and expression in virtual communities, it also raises several areas for future study.

Investigate the Long-Term Impact of Online Identity Formation on Offline Behavior: Despite the general topic of this work being the formation of identity on line it was crucial to know how these identities translated to real life [34]. The future studies may examine the way the young people's fan's identity constructed in virtual communities affects their everyday practice and perception of self.

Explore the Differences in Identity Construction Across Various Fandom Types: It can therefore be hypothesized that various types of fandoms –musical fandoms, gaming fandoms, television-shows fandoms or sport fandoms, to name just a few– have unique subcultures the processes of which impact identity development in various ways. Research could look at the ways in which construction of identities in those two types of fandoms is different and how kinds of fandoms enable or promote more protean or risky identities.

Examine the Role of Algorithmic Content Recommendations in Shaping Fan Identity: Many websites and applications have in place various recommendation engines that depend on past activities [35]. Ideally, it would be useful to better understand how these particular recommendations work for creating the fan persona by reiterating some of the fan values or by introducing fans to certain types of content.

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- **Ethical approval:** The conducted research is not related to either human or animal use.
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