

## **Fandom-generated content: An approach to the concept of ‘fanadvertising’**

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### **Abstract:**

The most appropriate term to define the current communication environment seems to be “hybridization”. Thus, halfway between fandom and User Generated Content, there are productions created by fandom. In this process of construction, the consumer becomes not only a fictional content producer, but also an advertisement diffuser. The purpose of this forum discussion is to examine the new concept of ‘fanadvertising’.

**Keywords:** fanadvertising, consumption, television.

**Javier Lozano Delmar:** In our work ‘Fanadvertising y series de televisión’ (‘Fanadvertising and television series’) we tried for the first time to approach the concept of *fanadvertising* as an emergent form of advertising communication developed by the fan of a cultural product (Ramos, Lozano Delmar & Hernández-Santaolalla, 2012). In this case, our work was based on the analysis of several advertising campaigns of television series, the influence that the fandom had had on them, and its role in the communication process. Afterwards, we reflected on the advertising nature of some of these creations and, finally, the concept of *fanadvertising* was proposed to denominate those fan-created contents that contribute to reinforce and strengthen the image of a determined product and brand. Therefore, these creations can be considered advertising material.

We observed in this first work that the universe surrounding TV series is received and assumed by fans as their own. And they become active agents that recommend the consumption of this product to other receptors through creations whose only intention is sharing with the community of users a series of personal interests and favorite products. The fan turns into a preacher and an advertising agent at the same time, certifying the quality of the product and disseminating this message through Internet and social networks.

To make this clear, I would like to use an example that makes obvious this active role of fans in the communication process, their link to the fictional product, and their later contribution to the universe of the series through the creation of material that can work as advertising messages. I mean the Ultimate Lost Fan Promo Contest, which was created to advertise the final episode of the TV series *Lost* (ABC, 2004-2010). For this reason, the official web site of ABC hosted a trailer maker tool that allowed every spectator of the show to construct his/her own spot promoting the end of the series. Also, spectators were encouraged to make their own spot using any other means. The winner spot, 'Convergence' by Sam Balcomb (2010), was broadcasted on TV to advertise the final episode of the show. In this way, fans of the series generate advertising content to promote their favorite product.

**Víctor Hernández-Santaolalla:** The concept of *fanadvertising* proposed happens to be very interesting since every time we can enjoy more examples of creations made by the fandom of a particular TV series, film or, more extensively, any fictional story that, at the same time, can make other potential receptors consume this cultural product. Therefore, in the offered definition, I see three essential and excluding characteristics to differentiate what is *fanadvertising* and what is not. First, the final source or author of the content must be a fan or a group of fans who must use as a point of departure for their creation a so-called canonic text, this is, the original work (e.g. film, book, saga). This leads to a second compulsory trait of *fanadvertising*: the fan's need and desire of speaking about this canonic text in a positive way (usually).

And, finally, the fan creation must become a viral message so it can reach the average spectator through conventional channels. This last feature can even mean that the figure of the fan as a creator is lost in the process of spreading the message, since ultimately the publicity generated by *fanadvertising* is not for the source of this amateur creation but for the canonic text. Regarding this last point, I think that the intervention of Dr. Marina Ramos, expert in viral marketing and new advertising strategies, is much needed.

**Marina Ramos:** Indeed, in order to understand the concept of *fanadvertising* we must comprehend the role that the fan plays as an expert person that has influence within his/her field of action. Beyond the price, the brand, the design and even the advertising, one of the main reasons of purchase or consumption is the recommendation of friends and family members that we totally trust. For this reason, in the professional field of advertising communication, the personal and close influences that incite to buy some products and to reject others are analyzed. In this sense, fans of TV series or any other cultural product act like a friend that recommends you to buy a particular brand of car. This recommendation will have more power than any advertising action. At this point, we must talk about a new type of consumer, the 'prosumer', that helps to complete the concept of opinion leader. This term was coined by Toffler in his work *The Third Wave* (1980), where he made reference to a new agent of the 'global village' that not only works as a consumer but it can

also offer goods or services to the net. According to the study carried out by the advertising agency Euro RSCG, Prosumer Pulse 2005, 'the prosumer is a proactive person, avid of information and opinions, that actively shares his points of view and experiences with others' (2005). Prosumers are people with abilities of leadership and persuasion that live their condition as consumers in an active way. They wish to spread their message, identified with the message of the brand, because they feel it as something of their own. This capacity of communication is what differentiates the prosumer from the classic leader of opinion. For this reason, the fan feels the need to offer his/her point of view of the work. This is when their particular form of recommendation begins.

And we should not forget, on the other hand, than the prosumer not only makes positive remarks, but he/she is a more rigid and demanding client that will perceive mistakes as an offense to his/her fidelity. Without the identification of the prosumers or fans of a TV series, developing an advertising strategy in social networks would be impossible.

**Javier Lozano Delmar:** The results of the advertising campaign for the fifth season of *Mad Men* (AMC, 2007-) can be used as an example of the role of the prosumer and their need to offer their point of view about the work. To promote the new season, a series of blank ads only with the known silhouette of Don Draper falling from the sky were distributed in New York City's subway stations. The rest of the canvas was remixed from the public, completing the *Mad Men's* advertising with different variations (TAXI, 2012). Similarly, through Internet there were available digital versions of the advertising so many fans began to complete it and edit it using advanced digital design tools. In this case it is not very clear if AMC was controlling the distribution of these digital posters through Internet or, on the contrary, this was a spontaneous action of fans that expanded online the original campaign. In any case, it is obvious the desire of the fan/prosumer to provide something of his/her own to the product that he/she relates to.

**Víctor Hernández-Santaolalla:** Indeed, Dr. Lozano, I understand that this last example from the series *Mad Men* can bring some ambiguity because it is not clear if the initiative comes from the fandom or the network, which establishes some conditions for these creations. However, I think that, as I mentioned in my previous intervention, regarding the concept of *fanadvertising* that we are discussing, the important point is not whom the initiative comes from but that it is a fanmade product. We can use as an instance the contest that AMC launched under the name 'Hey Dish, Where's My AMC?' to protest against the suppression of its shows by DISH Network as a consequence of the lawsuit among both channels (Michele, 2012). In this case, the driving force of the contest was AMC since it suggested fans to create videos between 30 and 90 seconds reflecting their reaction if they were subscribers of Dish that have lost their favorite AMC shows. This is a clear example of *fanadvertising* since, once the fan creations are spread on the net through channels like YouTube, the figures of the author and the promoter of the idea get dissipated. Meanwhile,

the creation becomes viral as a pseudo anonymous content, which even can make it stronger since every fan can feel co-author of it.

In the line of this type of campaigns, if the promoted object was not an entertainment product, could we also speak of *fanadvertising*? I mean, can we use the term *fanadvertising* to make reference to commercial products? I can use as an example the contest 'Crash The SuperBowl' that the brand Doritos has been making since 2006 to create the spot that will be broadcasted in the intermission of the final of the Super Bowl, one of the most important sport and TV events of the year (Beardy, 2012). In the 2012/13 edition, this contest offers the incentive that the winner will collaborate with film director Michael Bay in the next film of *Transformers* (Pepsico, 2012). In these cases, it does not seem too evident that the user creates his/her own advertising because he/she feels a special sympathy towards the brand. But it is very likely that, in order to develop the planning and design of the spot, they will have to learn (and apprehend) the values of the brand, which is Doritos in this case. This would mean that the fan can make a creation moved by the sympathy that he/she feels towards determined values and contents and, at the same time, the process of creation reinforces this link. That being the case, the contests of fan creations would be another strategy to attract the target market.

**Marina Ramos:** From my point of view, and after having read carefully your discussion, I would like to wrap up by saying that *fanadvertising* is a term that makes sense especially when it is applied to entertainment products, like TV series or books. In fact, the promotional strategy would be pointless without the fan community. This is a community that has been created in a natural way because of the sympathy that their members feel towards a history and some characters. Therefore, only some brands could use advertising strategies similar to *fanadvertising*. I mean those brands that imitate the creative mechanisms of the entertainment products to create stories, to tell their positioning in a more attractive way, and to connect emotionally with the prosumers that we mentioned before. They would be the brands that Kevin Roberts calls lovemarks: Moleskine, Apple or Harley Davidson, for example.

**Javier Lozano Delmar:** Indeed, Dr. Ramos. I totally agree with your contribution. And, since the lovemark Apple has been mentioned, I would like to point out the recent example of what happened during the advertising campaign of the new mobile phone Samsung: Galaxy S III. The campaign used a comparison with one of Apple's products, the iPhone, in a series of posters whose claim said 'It Doesn't Take a Genius', scorning the qualities of the iPhone 5 in contrast to the Galaxy S III. We did not have to wait long for the answer of Apple's fans, who started to remix the original changing the claim or correcting some technical characteristics (Smith, 2012). These fanmade ads that remixed the original began to be distributed in a viral way through the Internet. In this case, the fans of Apple became the defenders of the brand and they were the first to reply to Samsung's advertisement.

**Marina Ramos:** I agree, Dr. Lozano. For this reason, precisely, neither all the entertainment products nor all the brand-products could use strategies of *fanadvertising* because what really matters is to have an important network of followers with creation capacities. Although we should not forget that the concept of *fanadvertising* is deeply related to the User Generated Content (UGC). This term 'refers to the systems of collaboration where the user is not limited to surf the information produced by others but he becomes producer himself' (Delgado & Jiménez, 2007: 945). However, the notion of *fanadvertising* goes one step beyond since it transforms the fan into the key element of the conception and creation of an advertising campaign.

**Víctor Hernández-Santaolalla:** Yes, the fan becomes an essential piece in the *fanadvertising* campaign but not only regarding its origin –conception and creation- but also in its objectives and results, since these campaigns aim to increase the fandom collective around a particular story.

## Conclusions

- *Fanadvertising* can be defined as those creations made by fans which may function as an advertising tool to promote the original text.
- The goal of advertising is no longer just luring the consumer but inviting him/her to be part of an experience.
- The fan (of a cultural/commercial product) is the key and centerpiece of the advertising campaign.
- The emergence of new digital viewer is transforming the design and construction of advertising campaigns for TV shows. TV channels encourage participation and content creation by fans. The fan is invited to generate material related to TV shows. Fans are transformed as the commercial ambassador of the TV show.
- *Fanadvertising* makes sense especially when it is applied to entertainment products, but it can be also applied to lovemarks that imitate the creative mechanisms of the entertainment products to create stories, to tell their positioning in a more attractive way, and to connect emotionally with the prosumers: Moleskine, Apple or Harley Davidson, for example.

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