

Fandom of “Fans” in Thai Society¹

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Abstract

This article on Fandom of “Fans” in Thai society indicates the importance of fan clubs of popular things in Thailand. According to explanation on fan club from several researches, it was found that fan clubs are not abnormal people as they are often defined. On the other hand, they are only a group of people with admiration, popularity, and passion towards the same thing. In addition, this article also summarizes fan studies in Thailand with various fans groups in order to discover dynamic characteristics of each group upon their identities (e.g., specific group colors). However, some behaviors and group cultures were found to be similar, for example, structure and assembly of fan clubs.

Keywords: Fandom, Mass Culture, Identity

Introduction

Every individual had any admiration specifically. Some people prefer dressing while others prefer gaming or studying. In the event that this kind of preference is repeated regularly, it becomes a kind of behavior. When people have strong passion towards anything, they may hunger for, crazy about, follow-up, be the gurus, or become “fans” of such thing and this kind of behavior can be seen in every region of the present world.

When personal spaces (e.g., communications) become the contents posted in public spaces, it is necessary to develop media, news, and information to be distributed to households leading to dissolution of communication technology and development under the Information Society concept. Consequently, media plays a role in life and it may be sometimes controlled by some powerful people who are able to direct media to present contents under the demanded direction of such powerful people. As a result, media development must be performed by paying attention on Decentralization of Information in order to spread news and information preventing powerful people from managing and forcing the direction of the media. Consequently, media plays a role in culture and determine the way of life of people until there is almost no difference between real life and performance in television. Messages communicated by media determine behaviors of human without realization as well as determine the way of life and time, for example, lifestyle in the morning of most people nowadays is turning on television and finding news on every channel with different presentation but with similar contents or melodrama at night time. We may not go out with family but we choose to watch the last episode of any melodrama or our favorite programs instead. Consequently, television is something responding to different lifestyles to be under the similar pattern, i.e., imitation behavior created by powerful people who can control media and force media to publish their messages to people. This digests spare time or relaxation of people to be in similar patterns, for example, watching travel programs makes audiences to perceive such attractions and may feel unnecessary to visit those places in real life.

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Accordingly, mass media is a kind of media helping to relieve stress in life of individual, especially “entertainment media” that has been followed by several people. In addition, if these people follow-up anything regularly, they may be called as “fan clubs”.

Definition of Fan clubs

J. Jenson (1992 referred in the research of Arjin Thongyu, 2012) indicated that researches and literatures on fandom, reputation, and influences of media in the early 20th decade mutually stated that “fans” are a group of people with suffering from psychological inadequacy. Consequently, “fans” are under the influences of media that are distributed as if crowd contagion. “Fans” often seek for contacting with reputed persons in order to compensate their life inadequacy caused by alienated and atomized conditions. Since they lack of social bond in modern life, fans develop their loyalty towards reputed persons or sport teams in order to be a part of success of such reputed persons. This was consistent with E. Cashmere (2006) stated that behaviors of “fans” in the past were interpreted as behaviors of escapism, compensation, wish-fulfillment, and fantasy. These are all psychological explanations (Kanjana Kaewthep, 2012).

The term “fans” is often used for supporting other words in order to express implication of popularity, admiration, and passion in some things, for example, music fans, book fans, movie fans, boxing fans, football fans, etc. (Manit Macharoen, 1976). In addition, this term also refer to a group of people devoting themselves, time, and resources to any reputed person in order to follow up their admired person or thing closely. They also pay attention on triviality such as birthday, favorite colors, etc. (Pattaranant Nunpakdee, 2007)

Abercrombie and Longhurst (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998: 122) stated that people often imagined the image of “fans” in the manner of admiration and passion in any celebrity or activity that is over than normal standard. In addition, works of mass media, especially “publications”, always reflect abnormality of “fans”.

Dividing the world of “fans” from that of “non-fans” is always performed by a group of people who call themselves as “fans” in order to show that other people are abnormal while they are normal or secured as mentioned by Jenson that fandom is a kind of deviant activities reassuring individual leading to self-aggrandizing stance. Those definitions support creation of specific values, for example, reason beyond emotion, educated person beyond uneducated person, high-class culture beyond popular technology, mainstream beyond marginal thing, etc. Jenson argued that considering “fans” as others may affect to understand how person interacts with media in contemporary society (Jenson 1992: 311). Consequently, reconstruction of the patterns of “fans” is a method to review new patterns of audiences. From such implication, what Jenson left is criticizing Behavioral Paradigm, especially, the concept of mass culture view considering on immediate and direct effects.

Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) also proposed three important things obtained from the study on characteristics of “fans” including: 1) fans’ activities are held with relation to stars or media images and representations. Although fans may have other activities, such as creating their own videos, those activities still relate to such stars and contents; 2) fans are classified as media heavy users, especially for their preferred performances or artists; and 3) fans participate in activities of different groups with relationship and contact with other fans based on flowing of context in different formats but under the same interest. Abercrombie and Longhurst studied on individual natures and his/her relationship with stars. Fans may try to seek for some spaces under them context of small and crowded house indicating that products of context and creation of media contents of fans demanding to build some spaces for themselves.

Although the meaning of “fans” may be negative, there is no fan club think that they are different from other people because there is a meaning referring admiring anything specially that could be said that every individual had different interests but “fandom” of anything or anyone has similar characteristics or uniqueness without any certainty. In addition, it is also adjusted upon context of such thing with dynamic characteristics depending on sample group or characteristics of fans.

Fan Studies in Thailand

The study on “fan club” in Thailand has been conducted for long period and in sufficient quantity to explain each group of fandom in Thailand and its characteristics. Accordingly, this article is the summary of “fan studies” of reputed people in Thailand and sport fans in order to compare whether they are similar or in any dynamic characteristics.

From the study on Fan club: Group process and Member Behavior (Pattaranant Nunpakdee, 2007) it was found that fan club is a group of people who admire the same artist and assemble to build the social space for expressing their identities. Fan club members are compared as the bargain for requesting appropriate action from people in society. The structure of the group is loosen with driving movement consisted of websites and group appointment with artists as their center. The elements enabling fan clubs to be in the same society are strong group structure, tight relationship among members, duties and roles before and after being members, and their groups’ norm must not be contrary to the major norm of the society. Their members often have some explicit behaviors, for example, observation and follow-up or financial support, gifts providing, implication (club’s dressing code) for expressing group’s identity with media broadcasting and reproduction, etc. Besides this identity, explanation on behaviors of another fan club group also has similar culture as found from the study on Jack’s Fan club: A Case Study of Methus Trirattanawareesin in Reality Show Academy Fantasia (Krit Lekreangsin, 2008) with the same identity of fan club groups. However, this research emphasized on studying the level of fan club conducted by using the concept of fandom and subculture of teenage. In addition, this research also studied on persons following-up works of Jack and encouraging him regularly. The results showed that Jack’s fan clubs were consisted of basic fan clubs who admired this artist, intermediate fan clubs who admired this artist and participated in responding to programs or using internet for being a part of his artist, and advance fan clubs who admired this artist, use internet as the media for contacting among group members and follow this artist to some work places. This research explained decision making to be fan clubs, levels of fan clubs, identity creation of fan clubs, and group relationship.

The study on Fan Club of a Pop Star, Bird Thongchai McIntyre (Supreeda Chorlamyai, 2006) found other additional characteristics. She found that fan club of older generations were often repressed because there were some people satirized and dislike this fan club group. This showed that fandom was not accepted in the past and they were considered as nonsense and crazy people. Consequently, this fan club group had to hide themselves from society. However, fan club has been accepted increasingly in the following period because Thai music business has been grown increasingly.

Fandom of this fan club group was consisted of 6 characteristics as follows:

1. They followed up works of this artist via mass media, personal media, and new media, in order to find updated information of “Bird”, for example, new album release. Besides updating information, they also felt mental intimacy with this artist. Moreover, they also followed up some persons who were able to provide work schedule of this artist, for example, personal manager or relatives.

2. They also collected some stuffs related to this artist and souvenirs, for example, posters, works, photos, and news, etc. The purpose of this collection was intrapersonal communication in order to remind themselves that “they were fan clubs of Bird”. This collection also represented identity of fan club.

3. They followed up artist to several places, for example, concerts, movie locations, charity activities, etc. There was the definition of Bird’s fan club as “a group of person who reached the location before Bird and back home after Bird”. This was a kind of communication in order to make artist recognize that they were his fan clubs.

4. They prepared some devices and equipment for seeing Bird’s concerts, for example, LED boards for presenting their group’s identity in order to make other persons recognize their taste.

5. They exchanged information among fans, for example, there would be a person in the group serving as the information source with information exchanging who would tell new information to others face to face and via online media.

6. They published and spread information on this artist for example, being Admin of Fanclub Page. In this case, there would be the group leaders presenting new information to members through saying.

Around 1927, there was a musical band that was popular and recognized broadly, i.e., Suntaraporn Band. Consequently, there were some audiences showing themselves as the “regular audiences” of this band. Besides following their songs, they also followed up performances of Suntaraporn Band in various venues. This kind of audiences may be similar with current fan clubs with the explicit assembly of relationship of persons admiring music and ballroom dance leading to the establishment of the Ballroom Dance Club, etc. (Kanjana Kaewthep, 2012). Supreeda also said that music fans or artist fans started to be intensive when the world’s music business and Thai music business became the cultural industry increasingly. Subsequently, there was the first explicit fan club group, i.e., fan clubs of Bird (Thongchai McIntyre) and other groups of fan clubs included with all groups of Thai artists and some Indy artists or some western artists. Finally, the stream of fan club in Thailand became more explicit when there were some reality shows making the explicit fan club groups in Thai society that could be identified by their identity expression in concerts through their group signals such as orange LED boards for showing which artist they preferred in order to support such artist until he/she became the winner of the program with higher votes from fan clubs.

Besides being fans of “reputed persons”, “sport fans” in Thailand were also popular with tight relationship. The study on Communication and the Construction of “Football Fan” Culture in Thai Society (Natsupong Suksode, 2005) was conducted to study on the role of communication in construction and inheritance of “football fan” culture in Thai society. Fandom of football fans utilized some spaces in daily life and the space of match day (for example, fans of Manchester United Team and Liverpool Team) and spaces of fan club activities. They utilized the spaces of their life along with activities related to loyalty given to their favorite teams. In addition, they also utilized some modern media in communicating among groups including internet or other types of mass media in order to perceive news and information and make an appointment to do some activities together. For activities of football fans with long-term relationship, they had no relationship in the form of fan club activities but they had stable and tight relationship instead.

The study on Communication and Perception on Identity of Football Fans of Foreign Football teams in Thai Society: Case Study of Liverpool Thailand Fanclub (Natnicha Phukoksung, 2004) was conducted to study on communication and perception of identity of Liverpool Thailand Fanclub by emphasizing on group process, group communication, and perception on identity of members and group symbol. The results showed that group was

established from assembly of fans who were crazy about this team and they were established as the club for being the center of communication and contact among group members. They contacted on another via postcards, posting news in newspapers, or via phone. The group identity was expression with pride of team's success through social operation, songs, sport cheering, assembly, and modern media, to feel unity of the group. Moreover, the symbol of fan club was red swan and red color or adapting the names of their favorite football players as their profile name or pseudonym for making some conversations via websites.

Conclusion and Suggestion

Fandom is being a group of persons who admire and have passion towards anything. In the event of being "others" for any group of person, division of fans from non-fans may be performed by any person called himself/herself as fan club in order to show that he/she is normal while others are abnormal. However, admiration towards anything is considered as relaxation helping to entertain life via media. Fandom in Thailand has such a long background from the past but it may not be explicit like current fan club due to inequality of social condition and it was not clear whether the sport fans or fans of entertainment culture that were firstly occurred in Thailand (Kanjana Kaewthep, 2012). This could be concluded that "fandom" has been along with Thai society for long period and it seems to be normal for some group of people. However, it may be denied by another group of people. As a result, it could not be concluded from the formal research and has never been explained under the point of view of "other persons".

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