The Filipino "Stan" Phenomenon and Henry Jenkins' Participatory Culture: The Case of Generations X and Z

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Abstract – *In recent years, the online world is soaked in 'stan culture', wherein fandoms collaboratively express their idolization for a certain artist, group, other famous personalities or crafted content. The study focuses on the stan phenomenon as a Participatory Culture, a concept created by Henry Jenkins and his colleagues, within Generation X and Generation Z of Filipino stans only. Participatory Culture is a concept wherein various people share ideas, creations, expressions and information within a community through means of socialization in various mediums available. Participatory Culture is also used as the conceptual framework of this study and is comprised of four functions, namely fan affiliations, expressions of fandom, collaborative problem solving, and network circulations. The data gathering was conducted through one-on-one interviews with 10 Generation X participants and another 10 for Generation Z and the study utilized Braun and Clarke's Thematic Analysis [14] in order to examine and dissect the recurring patterns from the data gathered. In conclusion, though the term 'stan culture' is relatively new, it has been steadily occurring with the aid of technology and its advancements throughout the years (i.e. social networking sites). Stan culture has been manifested differently per generation, specifically in Generation X and Generation Z in accordance to the scope of this study, a big factor of which being the availability of mediums and the personal preferences of who or what they idolized, their expression in idolization, and the collaboration within their own communities, which settles the difference in manifestations of this phenomenon.*

Keywords – *fandoms, generation x, generation z, participatory culture, stan culture*

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been widespread use of the term "*stan*" that in 2017, it was officially entered into the lexicon of the Oxford English Dictionary [1]. *Stan* is a slang term that was said to have originated from the song by American rapper Eminem in the early 2000s, known as *Stan*. *Stans* were portrayed as crazy fans who would do anything to be acknowledged by their idols, even resulting in violence and harm [2]. *Stan* culture has its good nature wherein the fandoms band together to support each other, as well as respecting one another, avoiding possessiveness, and the like. Members of these *stans* are able to affiliate, network and collaborate themselves with each other to express their admiration towards a certain artist or band, but it also has a toxic environment - mainly from those who instill negativity towards others.

This study involves the comparison between Generation X and Z with regard to *Stan* Culture. The people referred to as 'Generation X' in this study are those who were born from 1965 to 1981, while the 'Generation Z' are those who were born between 1997 to 2019 [3].

Stan Culture: The Concept of Stan

The term *stan* originated as a namesake of an Eminem song, which mainly depicted the story of a violent fan named Stan. Because of the dark nature of the song, the term *stan* became a negative description for people who intensely follow and obsess over their idols. However, according to Lacasa et al. [4], *stans* can be considered as people who have a positive emotional relationship with something or someone famous, such as a celebrity, through expressing their admiration by recognizing the celebrity's style or creativity within the framework of popular culture. They are often involved in specific communities, commonly called as *fandom*, which gives rise to certain practices and social roles [5]. One can easily observe and identify common behaviors, actions,

and expressions of those parts of one. Focusing on the aforementioned generations, *Stan* culture is a form of fandom culture that resulted from the rise of social media, wherein *stans* regularly follow and greatly look up to their idols, to the point of even having a sense of "protectionism" towards them [6].

Jenkins' Participatory Culture

Jenkins [7] defined Participatory Culture as "cultures that grow from interest-based interactions and establish norms for contributions and communication."

According to Gee [8], there is a concept of an "*affinity space,*" where people or members of a group that have similar interests gather to collaborate, learn, and share ideas. Lave & Wenger [9] said that the learning model for participatory cultures was established from original practices of apprenticeships and situated learning, wherein members are taught and trained through a lengthy process of discussions, productions, critique, and improvement of work for them to develop into experts. According to Halverson, R., Kallio, Hackett, & Halverson, E. [10], "*affiliations express the interest-driven aspect of participatory cultures.*" Members join groups that have the same interests and preferences as them, which can also expose them to new hobbies. People can also belong in multiple participatory cultures.

In relation to *stan* culture, Jenkins' Participatory Culture is a social phenomenon wherein artistic expression is considered a significant source of knowledge for those with little to no knowledge of a certain concept or aspect. There are four (4) forms of participatory culture, namely the *fan affiliations, expressions of fandoms, collaborative problem solving,* and *network circulations.* For *fan affiliations,* fandoms allow individuals to join with no special reservations or requirements [11]. Fandoms still offer social benefits as feelings of solidarity and belongingness, and also develop social status, authority, respect, influence, and self-esteem/confidence [12]. In this study, fans are often seen loyal to their idols and their fandom, wherein they get a sense of identity, belongingness, and companionship.

For *expressions of fandoms*, the members participate in a continuous series of creating, representing, and sharing ideas [10]. These are the instances when fans express their admiration towards their idols. This is also concerned with the form or way of how fans express their feelings towards their idols, such as producing new creative outputs, and even the type of language they use to talk to one another.

Next, *collaborative problem solving* is involved with knowledge-building and giving answers to unsolved questions or problems within the group's context. Fans collaborate with one another in order to create fan pages, wherein fans can share their thoughts and add their own insights, which bring out the knowledge-building aspect of participatory culture [10].

Lastly, interactions are made, and information is shared with networks in *networks circulations*. Those from other groups can also access information from one group, which can widen the reach of information and even attract new members to the community [10]. This can also be a way to disseminate information to one another, such as updates and news regarding their idols.

Filipino *Stan* as a ParticipatoryCulture

Since the 1970's, fandoms have been present in the Philippine community, with the rise of actresses Nora Aunor (*Noranians*) and Vilma Santos (*Vilmanians*) [13]. The Xers grew up with Nora Aunor and it initiated the star-fan relationships in the industry. It is quite evident that the *stan* culture is already firmly ingrained in the Philippine pop culture. This phenomenon in the Philippines also reached international artists as well, according to Trinidad [13] these being *K-Po*p artists, and western artists. In the local context, Original *Pinoy* Music has also prevailed greatly, making relatable music to be able to connect with their fans, and even love teams also garnered a huge amount of following. Furthermore, the rise of other social media platforms, such as *Youtube* and Instagram, opened up opportunities for other forms of artists or content creators to emerge and develop. Now, fandoms are not exclusive for artists and singers anymore, since internet sensations, vloggers, and *Youtub*ers have already gained their own share of personal followings and fans [13].

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aims to describe and compare the Filipino *stan* culture between Generation X and Generation Z using Jenkins' participatory culture. It aims to describe fan affiliations, expressions of fandom, and collaborative problem solving and network circulation among these groups. The study also aims to add to the scarce body of knowledge regarding this new social phenomenon to shed more light on what it truly is and debunk misconceptions and false information regarding the topic.

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MATERIALS AND METHODS
Research Design

This study used a qualitative case study research design, describing Participatory Culture, a concept developed by Jenkins back in 2007 [7], among Generation X and Generation Z Filipinos with their "*Stan* Culture." Furthermore, four (4) key functions/forms under the Participatory Culture are described, namely *fan affiliations*, *expressions of fandom*, *collaborative problem solving*, and *network circulation*, and its influence on the *stan* culture phenomenon in both generations of Filipinos.

Participants

The target population of this study involved *Stans* of both Generation X and Generation Z Filipinos. This study involved 20 samples, ten (10) of which from Generation X and ten (10) from Generation Z as well. This study utilized a non-probability sampling technique and informants were chosen through a purposive-convenience sampling. The criteria for the selection of informants for the group interviews of both the Generation X *stans* and Generation Z *stans* are as follows:
1. Must be a Filipino citizen;
2. Must be part of any *fandom* or a fan of any artist, group, band and other famous personalities;
3. Must be under the age bracket of Generation X and Generation Z.

Instrumentation

This study used semi-structured interview questions. The said instrument is composed of open-ended questions to utilize the knowledge of the informants regarding their practice of Participatory Culture and the prevalence of the Filipino *stan* culture phenomenon in accordance with the generation bracket of the said informants. The semi-structured interview questions were divided into five sections which are *personal background, fan affiliations, expressions of fandom, collaborative problem solving and network circulation.*

Data Collection Procedure

The researchers used two (2) research methods in gathering information from our participants. First, an online pre-survey were sent to people belonging in the age criteria of the study (Generation X and Generation Z) that asked if they are a fan of a certain artist or group, with a brief introduction of the researchers and the objective of the study.

Secondly, a face-to-face interview with the twenty (20) chosen informants were conducted to go in-depth in gathering the data and have a more detailed account of their experiences as a fan.

Ethical Considerations

An informed consent form was given to all informants that partake in the data gathering process of this research prior to the interviews. A parent's consent form along with the informed consent form was given to the Generation Z informants.

Both forms contained full disclosure of the nature and objectives of the research being conducted and as well as the right of the interviewees to proceed or withdraw from the interview process. The researchers also asked for consent regarding the voice recording of the interview proper solely for documentation purposes only. All information given to the researchers as of then was kept confidential.

Data Analysis

The researchers adopted Braun and Clarke's Thematic Analysis, which was developed back in 2006 [14], in dissecting the data collected from the transcription of all interviews. In this case, the main focus of the data gathering and the study is to find out the presence of Participatory Culture in the Filipino *stan* culture of Generations X and Z.

As the interview questions only focus on such aspects of *stan* culture according to the four (4) key functions/forms of Jenkins' Participatory Culture—*fan affiliations*, *expressions of fandom*, *collaborative problem solving*, and *network circulation*, the data that were gathered from the interviews may not refer and look upon other perspectives and concepts that define the Filipino *stan* culture. Moreover, only two generations were accounted for, and thus disregarding the experiences of other age groups.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Fan Affiliations: Personal vs. Relational

Leaning more to local artists like Sharon Cuneta, Lani Misalucha, Kyla, and even local athletes such as the University of the Philippines (UP) Basketball Team, having only traditional means of media such as newspapers, televisions and radios to discover and stay in touch with the aforementioned artists, the Generation X informants were rather personally affiliated to those they idolize. Another distinction for personal affiliation

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is who the informants consider as their fan group. One Generation X informant stated,

> *"Sometimes they [fan groups] are friends or they became friends because they like the same artist, and they want to show their support together, or like our family and other families, they watch a game together to support their favorite basketball players."*

Generation X fans enclose their fandom within their families, circle of friends, and colleagues only. As so called the 'latchkey generation', the Generation X tend to be more personal in their expressions. Rooting back from their youth, their independence was shaped by their formation, often left alone as they got home from school and spending time by themselves, hence, affecting other aspects of their lives such as their affiliations with their peers [15].

On the other hand, the Generation Z informants idolized international artists more. The common idolized artists were One Direction, LANY, LAUV, and K-Pop artists like Bangtan Sonyeondan (BTS), NCT, and Seventeen (SVT). The Generation Z informants were notably relational affiliated fans, yearning for connection from the artists they idolized. According to one Generation Z informant,

> *"From all the stress that I am experiencing, I consider them as my safe place for the moment."*

Furthermore, the Generation Z informants were not only relationally affiliated towards their idols but also towards their fan groups. One female informant stated,

> *"Through being a fan of these groups, I got a group of friends - what bonded us together was being a fan of these groups; we ended up getting to know each other more, so like through the groups, I got a family."*

As the use of social media has heightened especially for the youth, those part of fan groups often build a certain reputation and identity based on their personal lives—experiences deviated from the internet world, and as well as forming inevitable relationships that stem from the common ground of being a fan of a certain artist [16].

Expressions of Fandom: Standard vs. Creative Expressions

Both Generation X and Generation Z informants actively express their fandom towards their idols. The main difference between their ways of expression is the mode of medium and level of creativity. Generation X informants mostly rely on very common and standardized ways of expression, such as through word of mouth and simply talking about their fandom with their close circle, and even sharing to their children, and also relying on traditional forms of media. Several Gen X informants stated:

> *"Usually just in small talks. Chika-chika (small talks), recess maybe, every now and then."*
> *"I just watch them [on TV] if not, I only listen to them."*

In terms of making creative outputs, the majority of Gen Xers admitted that they do not participate in it due to lack of time and resources (Internet and social media), but some are knowledgeable of what these are and sometimes acquire them as a sign of support.

In contrast to the Gen Xers, the Generation Z were more creative and artistic in their way of expressing their idolization towards their idols. The most common ways of creative expressions for the Generation Z were singing, drawing, and creating fan arts or fan fiction. According to one Gen Z informant,

> *"I draw a lot, so I draw characters or set designs, and also for musical theatre, I sing, I make covers, and I post them on those fandom groups (that I was talking about a while ago)."*

Another Gen Z informant stated that,

> *"I write (fan fics). As of now, I wrote like social media AUs (alternate universe)."*

Even those who aren't personally making creative outputs still view various fan creations on sites such as *AO3 (Archive of Our Own),Tumblr*(for fan art), and *Wattpad*(for fan fiction).

The Generation Z are more inclined to make creative outputs online, since they grew up in its presence and thus, this gives them the platform to integrate both their creativity and technology in expressing themselves [17].

Collaborative Problem Solving: Traditional vs. Contemporary Media

According to most of the Generation X informants of the study, they would often rely on the information given by TV shows or movies to be able to build-up their knowledge on their fandoms and their idols, since the internet was not yet present during their time as the youth, and these are the easiest-to-access media their generation was exposed to, mainly because, according to Shah [18], these said media have the sole purpose of having the power to reach broad and targeted audiences, depending on the reach of the channels selected. One of the participants stated that

"*It's really the only way we can source the information about [them]. It's really limited. Whatever the TV says, that's all we would know.*" Another informant stated, "*Before the availability of the internet, we have no choice but to watch the movie, to watch the series, as much as you can, as many as you can for you to encounter other characters and learn more about [them].*"

As for the Gen Z informants the most common answer given by the interviewees were focusing mainly on contemporary media, or solely social media. According to WP Engine and The Center for Generational Kinetics [19], Generation Z has never known a world without the existence of the internet. The Gen Z's connection to the digital world is undeniably omnipresent to them, it is as if the entirety of the digital experience is their human experience. Some who are fans of *K-Pop* or Korean pop rely greatly on *Youtube* or sites that give the fans basic information regarding their idols, known as *k-profiles*. One of the interviewees (female) mentioned,

"*Initially when starting to learn a group, I was looking at* k-profiles *websites, and then eventually, I watch [their] variety shows, reality shows, just to get to know [them] better.*"

Another informant had remarked,
"*I think it was called* All K-pop *or* Mnet*; as well as* YouTube*; Mostly on* Google*, of course, just search on* Google*, and the dominant search results are those websites [for information gathering].*"
As for those who are fans of western artists, similar answers were given.

Network and Circulations: Word of Mouth vs. Social Media

There is a stark difference when comparing how information was circulated. With Generation X, social media was not present during their time so the way that they would disseminate information was through word of mouth. They would mostly talk to their peers, who are fellow fans, and inform them about any recent updates when it comes to their idols.

However, with Generation Z, social media is very present in society and it is used when disseminating information amongst each other with regards to their idols, which allows them to reach a wider scope of people. When asked if he was able to reach a wider scope of people when he expresses his fandom, one male informant from Gen Z stated that

"*I would say so. Of course, singing, you post a cover on your Instagram story, and everybody, you know, likes the song, and they want to find out more about what film it's from.*"

The Internet was first introduced in the Philippines on March 29, 1994, when the Philippine Network Foundation obtained the country's first public permanent connection to the Internet [20]. This explains why the mode of communication of Generation Z is through word of mouth while Generation Z is through social media.
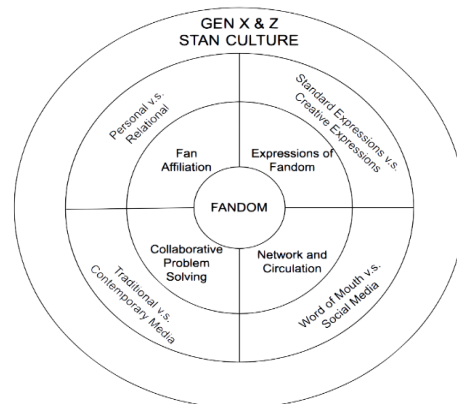

Figure 1.*Stan* as Participatory Culture Framework

Summary of Results

Figure 1 presents a summary of themes based on the experiences of Generations X and Z with *stan* phenomenon as a Participatory Culture. The figure shows the difference between the two generations with regards to the four forms of Participatory Culture, namely Fan Affiliations (Personal vs. Relational),

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Expressions of Fandoms (Standard vs. Creative), Collaborative Problem Solving (Traditional vs. Contemporary Media), and Network Circulations (Word of Mouth vs. Social Media).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

To conclude, it is observable that both Generation X and Z are distinct from another when it comes to fan affiliation, expressions of fandom, collaborative problem solving and network circulation.

For fan affiliation, the Generation X are rather personal with their affiliations for who they idolize and with fellow fans. They only limit their fandom within their family and circle of friends, considering these people as their "fan group". On the other hand, the Generation Z deem connection from those they idolize and with their fellow fans, making it a relational affiliation. They associate their idols and fan groups as people who they can relate to emotionally, therefore, empowering them as a fan.

Moving onto expressions of fandom, both generations express themselves, the Generation X have more standardized expressions, using traditional media and word of mouth. On the other hand, the Generation Z express themselves more creatively through making fan arts, fan fictions, and artistic outputs. Generation X also use more generalized expressions and terms regarding their fandoms, while Generation Z have more personalized and unique expressions that are only used and understood within their own fandom.

As for collaborative problem solving of both generations, due to the absence of the internet back then, the Generation X were only able to access information and build their knowledge regarding their fandom and idols through traditional media (e.g. television, radio, newspapers, etc.). Meanwhile, the Generation Z can easily access and share information through the internet mainly on social media platforms and websites.

When it comes to their network circulation within the fandom, Generation X shares information through word of mouth, fans usually do not interact with their fellow fans who are outside of their peers. On the other hand, Generation Z are able to interact with their fellow fans from all over the world with the use of social media.

These results are in line with Jenkins' Participatory Culture, wherein it is very evident that people, regardless of age, are inclined to bond and group with one another, especially if they share something in common.

Since this study only focuses on two generations, namely the Generation X and Z, future research can be conducted that will include other generations as well. Future studies can also make use of other conceptual frameworks and theories, since the topic of *stan* culture is truly versatile and social interactions are ever changing, especially today.

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