

Money does not matter?

An auto-ethnography on fan comics and digital platforms as means of commercial exchange

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While fan studies often claim, that the interaction between fans is strictly a form of gift exchange (Jenkins, Henry. 2013), they tend to overlook the consequences of the platformization of the Internet (Helmond, Anne. 2015).

With new tools and the user-based infrastructures of platforms, they open up the possibilities for fans to build global networks and use those new tools to build own markets, at the side of offline markets like conventions, for derivative and transformative fan works. Those fan-made art, literature and comics are often hidden behind paywalls or are commission from fans for fans.

The auto-ethnographic study that was part of my Master Thesis, tried to figure and map out how fans are using websites like Tumblr, Patreon and Ko-Fi to become commercial actors themselves with their own art and comics. It uses the theories and views of fan studies, looking at comics as the object of study.

The findings show that the idea of gift exchange might not be wrong, but that money is used to build the bridge between fans and becoming commercial actors of their own. It would be false to claim that money is no topic between fans and it even shows just how deeply discussed the idea of having the right to make a living with fanart is rooted on those websites.

The idea that commercialization is something that fans want to be separated from, might not be up to date anymore and needs to be reconsidered. Money can build new markets that is not connected to the big companies and build a new form of exchange between fans. It can give fans a new form of autonomy that can be seen as a self-sustaining system, which gives those creators the chance to evolve their fan-favorite comics and other media on their own.

This change of fandom and how fans approach their favorite media and comics, goes hand in hand with a transformation of the web.

Biography:

Svenja Kaiser received her B.A. in Literature and Media Studies from the University of Siegen in 2016, and currently finishes her M.A. thesis in Media Studies at the same university. Since 2016, she is a student researcher and an ethnographer in the project “Media practices and copyright law” within the Collaborative Research Center “Media of Cooperation” at the University of Siegen. Her master thesis raises the question of how much fans have a commercial interest and how they are using the internet and the change to platforms to build a new market – fans for fans.