



# The Contribution of Fandom to Value Generation and Innovation in the New Audiovisual Fiction Transmedia Ecosystem

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**Abstract.** This research focused on how social network activities enrich value generation dynamics and innovation in the new audiovisual fiction transmedia ecosystem. Through content analysis of five phenomena spurred by interactive digital platforms, which, with the support of fandom, were published and received film adaptations, it was found that social interactions and fan contributions through different formats and platforms enriched and expanded the scope of the original works. Factors like popularity and development of a fan community explain how a product of a non-professional creator on an interactive digital platform can quickly become an editorial and cinematographic project and integrate into the transmedia ecosystem of professional audiovisual fiction.

**Keywords:** Fandom · fan studies · transmedia storytelling · social network · innovation

## 1 Introduction and Literature Review

Professional processes related to cinematographic production have usually started with original creations by screenwriters or the adaptation of stories from fields such as the publishing industry [1]. However, with the consolidation of participation and spontaneous creations by fans in interactive and collaborative digital environments, works originating in fan collaboration have developed, some of which turned into books and films. These products changed the standardized dynamics of audiovisual stories' creation or adaptation.

In this context, this research analyzed the contribution of fan communities to value generation and to innovation in the new audiovisual fiction transmedia ecosystem. The results are relevant because they highlight the interaction and dissemination possibilities of social networks to quickly consolidate fandom communities that demand compelling works from the most traditional production ecosystems, that is, the publishing and audiovisual industries.

This research hypothesizes that fandom activity in social networks adds value to stories in a way that interactions and the specific contributions by fans enrich the dynamics and the innovation of the new fiction transmedia ecosystem until they popular stories

become visible in traditional industries. This phenomenon reveals the importance of fandom at three levels of value generation: (i) generation of fictional content that can attract followers and foster new fan communities; (ii) interaction, conversation, and dissemination of content to expand the reach of fictional content; and (iii) content creation analogous to the established audiovisual industry to boost content visibility and encourage the production of a cinematographic work based on fan-created content.

This new communication dynamic in the digital environment developed thanks to active user participation, their critical and collective vision as a fandom community, and their contribution to the relentless development of audiovisual content [2, p. 118]. Scolari and Piñón [3] highlighted the fundamental role of active audiences in the new transmedia ecosystem, as “the creation of user-generated content—from parodies to recaps, fake trailers or alternative endings—and the development of interactive spaces to host them, are two complementary elements that must be considered in any transmedia strategy” (p. 25). Thus, fandom is a key factor to make works visible and relevant. The relationship between canon content and fandom is key to transmedia narrative development.

Canon refers to the official narrative, or the corpus of a narrative world’s original products [4]. A transmedia narrative canon is constituted by production designed for the franchise that proposes an official narrative development and establishes the fictional world’s diegetic laws. Taking an audience perspective, Jenkins [5] defines canon as “the group of texts the fan community accepts as a legitimate part of the media franchise and, therefore, ‘binding’ in its speculations and elaborations” (p. 281).

The term fandom fuses the words fanatic and kingdom [6, p. 252], but is also associated with the neologism fanon. And although authors such as Escalas Ruiz [7] consider them synonymous because they often refer to the same reality, a crucial difference exists: Fandom is the realm of fans, which includes their relationships, attitudes, social practices, and spontaneous, artistic or professional creation. Fanon, on the other hand, is more specific and refers to creations, the products fans share and which transcend the transmedia world in which they participate. According to Busse and Hellekson [8, p. 9], fanon refers to “events created by the fan community within a fandom and which are propagated from text to text. Often, the fanon creates particular details or readings of a character, even if they are not endorsed by the canon” (p. 9). Coppa [9] found fanon typically presents “a vision of the canon so convincing that it is adopted by the rest of the fans” (p. 5).

Following Scolari [10], “if we add canon and fandom, we find narrative worlds that expand across multiple media and platforms with the collaboration of their fans” (p. 178). For this reason, transmedia narrative content must be deeper and generate complexity to guarantee audience interest and commitment, which will help content circulation [11].

Scolari and Piñón [3, p. 31] claimed in relation to the dissemination process that “the most disruptive experiences are not located in the canon but in the fandom. The textual production by fans shows that it is not possible to identify when and where a transmedia narrative world ends.” Precisely because of this creative and unpredictable work, a transmedia world cannot be considered a phenomenon properly delimited in time. It may keep growing as new contributions arrive.

The concept of engagement helps understand the content creation dynamics by fans. It “has emerged as a key term that encapsulates the type of audience experience that

audiovisual content seeks to achieve” [12, pp. 2–3]. The fan group, using transmedia producers’ terminology [13], is a type of audience that has developed high levels of participation and engagement. Thus, a directly proportional relationship is established between the level of participation developed by a group of fans and the degree of engagement generated toward the narrative of which it is part. This generates a growth cycle: the more participation, the more engagement; and the more engagement, the more participation.

But this relationship is not necessarily the result of fans’ constant affective and intellectual satisfaction; often participation results from disagreement with the official product [14, p. 81]. The fandom community considers it legitimate to demand products that respond to their interests, and if they do not find them in official content or canon, fans begin to generate this content. These dynamics are at the root of the relationships that are established in the new audiovisual fiction transmedia ecosystem.

## 2 Material and Methods

The study sample was selected through exploratory investigation of various narrative phenomena that corresponded to three stages. In a first stage, it was validated that there was narrative collaboration on a digital platform to allow reading the text. In most of the analyzed cases, this platform was Wattpad.

In the second stage, it was confirmed that the narrative collaboration was adapted into a physical book. In all analyzed cases, texts were turned into books, promoted by a publisher such as Penguin Random House, Alfaguara, or Planeta. These book adaptations maintained the essence of the source material even though some changes may have been made.

In the third and final stage, the realization of an audiovisual piece was verified. The piece must have been based on the text published on an interactive platform that works as repository and a book signed by a publisher. In the cases analyzed, Netflix is the producer and distributor with most such stories.

Afterwards, four criteria were considered to delimit the final sample: (i) the phenomenon complied with the three stages, (ii) the works achieved relevance and reach in social networks, (iii) the texts chosen for the research originated in Spanish, and (iv) the works were published between 2012 and 2022. This selection process yielded five fictional works, presented in Table 1.

To gauge the new value creation dynamics in the audiovisual digital ecosystem, different social networks were explored in which these five works of fiction were present with content, either disseminated through official or user accounts that belong to a particular fandom. Table 2 shows the social networks chosen for this study.

Also, content obtained via social networks came from different sources. On all social networks, official content by the original creators (canon) exists alongside unofficial content (fandom), mainly created by users whose products are recommended and discussed. Crucially, an intermediate category comprises a space shared by official and unofficial content in which both parties interact, generate conversation, and encourage increased activity.

Research was based on content analysis of each fictional phenomenon, and special attention was paid to social network dynamics. This qualitative analysis should confirm

**Table 1.** The study sample

Title of the novel	Initial content type	Book publisher	Producer/ Distributor
A través de mi ventana	Wattpad novel (2016)	Alfaguara (2019)	Netflix (2022)
Anónima	Wattpad novel (2019)	Planet (2019)	Netflix (2021)
Soltera Codiciada	Blog (2012)	Grijalbo/ Penguin Random House (2013)	Tondero/Netflix (2018)
Boulevard	Wattpad novel (2020)	Penguin Random House (2020)	Netflix (Tbd)
Perfectos Mentirosos	Wattpad novel (2021)	Penguin Random House (2020)	Netflix (Tbd)

**Table 2.** Social networks chosen for this study

	A través de mi vent.	Anón.	Soltera Cod.	Boul.	Perf. Ment.
Facebook	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
YouTube	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Twitter	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Instagram	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tiktok	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Twitch	Yes	No	No	No	No
Reddit	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Clubhouse	No	No	No	Yes	No
Tumblr	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Spotify	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pinterest	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Web/Blog	No	No	Yes	No	No

that fandom activity adds value to stories until they become audiovisual products. Hence, the content of each point of contact that was integrated into this new digital ecosystem of audiovisual productions is explored.

### 3 Results Analysis

#### 3.1 On Social Network Presence

The research confirmed that the five audiovisual creations under study originated in a text on a digital repository. Soltera Codiciada's (Coveted Bachelorette) story is based

on a blog created by the original author, María José Osorio. The other works are on Wattpad, some are still freely accessible, but others only show the initial chapters and require physical or digital purchase.

The volume of fandom content far exceeds the official content volume. Likewise, the unofficial content is far more discussed than the official one. But content types vary. Table 3 shows the variety of unofficial compared to official content in each stage.

**Table 3.** Official and unofficial content in each stage

	Platform	Content	Audiovisual Production
Official content	Wattpad novel Trilogy of texts Spin-off of another character	Book adapted from Wattpad Announcements of new book editions by authors via their social network accounts Publisher announcements of sequels of the novel	Teasers Trailers Announcements of upcoming production Film (Netflix) Interviews with lead author Interviews with actors (Netflix)
User-created content	Comments on different platforms Recommendation videos Recommendation and review podcasts Comparative videos involving other novels on the same topic Opinions/criticisms Fan art, edits Videos and comments on desirable cast for the novel Book trailers	Storytime telling the experience of reading the book Opinion videos Review videos Recommendation videos Reaction videos to certain chapters Comparative videos: Wattpad vs physical book Book trailers Audiobook Interview with the author Playlists to accompany the reading of the book Fan art Groups or communities Fan pages Character edits Edits using phrases from the book	Storytime telling the experience of watching the film Opinion videos Summary videos Recommendation videos Reaction videos Comparative video: Wattpad vs physical book vs film Interview with the author, actors, and directors Playlist, music to listen to after watching the movie Fan art Groups or communities Fan pages Character edits Edits with phrases from the film

All analyzed cases involved dynamic social network presence. They generated activity on Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, Tumblr, Spotify, and Pinterest. The relevance of fan activity in starting conversation and create content related to the works was evident. The fan-made content used various multimedia formats and developed alternative, creative scenarios.

### 3.2 On Novel Popularity

A través de mi ventana (Through my Window) was by far the most successful novel on Wattpad, reaching 355 million readings on the platform, making it its most read Spanish-language novel. It was followed by Perfectos Mentirosos (Perfect Liars) with 133 million, Boulevard with 82.1 million, and Anónima (Anonymous) with 254,000 readings.

This popularity triggered widespread conversation and fan activity across social networks. In addition to official accounts, fans are also present on multiple social networks, which creates limitless opportunities for interaction, discussion, or content creation.

Popularity then becomes a success indicator, followed by natural fandom activity on social networks. Interestingly, social network dynamics boost content reach and impact, as this data is fueling new activity.

### 3.3 Copyright

A lot of adapted content replicates original content without authorization. Most commonly, adapted content can be found in audiobooks or summary videos, which are prevalent especially on Spotify and YouTube. Although official content accounts also publish material reworked into audiobooks, fans are publishing their own content via personal or fandom accounts, enriching the ecosystem.

On the tensions between copyright and fan creations, Carreño Villada [15] wrote that “in virtual communities, the economy is based on sharing, the economy of gift, so the new narrative forms have to be directed toward bidirectional interconnection with the user” (p. 81). This is why the Creative Commons licensing model has gained importance. It allows remixing and reworking original content, because such activity guarantees the growth of the fandom and a work’s popularity.

### 3.4 On the Power of Fandom

Fans play a key role in driving the production of a book or film. Their social network activity is a source of value creation for fictional works. The more discussion, interaction, and content a work inspires, the more value it acquires for fans and amplifies its reach into other communities.

Book trailers are a particular type of content. Fans mount a trailer utilizing phrases from a novel or self-made audios and images from movies, utilizing actors they would like to be part of the cast. These videos often feature the start-up logo and jingle of Netflix or other services, which creates the impression that it is an official product. Such content attracts hundreds of thousands of views on YouTube.

Another important observation is that user-created content often triggers more interaction than official content, as is the case with Anónima. A trailer uploaded to YouTube quickly generated 435,000 views and 17,000 likes, while an opinion video by user Danna Alquati on the same platform received 1 million views and 119,000 likes.

### 3.5 On Transmedia Fandom Work

Given the evident presence of social network activity and of fan-made content creation, this research found that official accounts usually replicate the same content across platforms. Fans, however, create content in line with the particularities of their preferred social networks. The latter is genuine transmedia content, while the former is ordinary multimedia content.

For example, prosumer @juls\_book\_addiction published on TikTok her experience of reading the book *Perfectos Mentirosos* and on Instagram, a link to a Spotify playlist with songs she remembered while reading the book. Also on Instagram, she related the book's strengths and weaknesses. This user has created a transmedia ecosystem with content corresponding to a specific platform.

Entire groups emerged specializing in fan-created content. Although the dynamics are linked across social networks, content creation also involved some specialization. Hence, there is no coherent and singular culture or community of fans. Rather, the concept of a network of networks is more appropriate, in which each platform is more or less accommodating to certain activities [16, p. 860].

## 4 Reflections and Conclusions

The research confirmed the existence of a dynamic in which fan activity is key. Fans start with the canon, but then create products of such quality that they facilitate new fandom activities. Fandom produces a fanon which encourages perpetual creation of more fandom. These dynamics enrich the entire creative and innovation process until the stories become attractive for the publishing and audiovisual industries.

Social networks function as fundamental catalysts for these dynamics. Specifically, 11 social networks and one interactive platform enable ample spaces for fan dynamics. These social networks provide environments for interaction and dissemination; the greater participation in fandom activities on these networks, the more positive these content types will be perceived.

The results confirm the hypothesis. Fandom activity on various social networks adds value to stories; interactions and specific contributions enrich the dynamics and the innovation of the new transmedia ecosystem, and even lead to popular content being turned into books or films. It was confirmed that fans generated fictional content that attracted followers and fostered new fan communities, while interaction, conversation and dissemination of content expanded the reach of fan-created content. Content analogous to that created by the audiovisual industry boosts visibility and promotes the production of cinematographic work based on fan-created content.

## 5 Research Limitation

The research focused on Spanish-language fiction. While this enabled knowledge creation about Hispanic works, it also opens possibilities for comparing these dynamics with those in other languages.

On the other hand, a lot of content was found that criticizes texts, books, and films. Such criticism is not necessarily negative, as it also generates conversation and, hence, promotes debate on certain works. Exploring in detail the impact criticism or negative comments have on this dynamic is a line of future research.

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