

## **The Identity Fragmentation of Youths as Fans of Global Popular Culture**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In the age of the digital society, online fandom communities are becoming popular groups of young urban cultural enthusiasts in cyberspace. The aim of this study is to examine the cultural identity of these groups from the perspective of Cultural Studies. It used virtual ethnography as a methodology to examine the online fandom community “*The Mortal Instruments Indonesia*”. In addition to the analysis of conversational texts, it also employed offline interviews of 43 participants and two focus group discussions. The study found that the identity constructed by urban youths as part of digital fandoms was fragmented into two subculture groups. The first was a group of fans consuming the popular culture in which they were interested with a deep emotional attachment, and developing fiction comprised of settings, storylines, and imaginary characters from it; the second was a group of fans categorized as the critics of the texts of popular culture who had an adequate level of media literacy for this purpose. Additionally, they were multi fandoms who were also fans of other popular cultures. This study proves that the youths’ interest in global popular culture is not only due to the purpose of pleasure, but also because of their role as active prosumers, producers who create both cultural texts and paratexts which descend from their creativity.

*Keywords:* Cultural identity, multi fandom, popular culture, prosumer, subculture, youth

### **INTRODUCTION**

This study investigated the cultural identity of groups developed by urban youths who became fans of popular culture in the cyberspace community from the perspective of Cultural Studies. Up to now, many studies on the identity of youth subcultures and fandoms have been completed, but

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they have merely focused on one type of popular culture, such as musical or cultural icons (celebrities), have just examined the behaviour and social lives of fans in the real world, and have often used the perspective of deviant behaviours (Haenfler, 2013).

From the literature review, there have been only a few studies on cultural identity conducted by experts. Firstly, most of the existing studies tend to understand the subculture of young people in a negative sense (Barone, 2016; Bobakova et al., 2015; Howe et al., 2015). Studies conducted by Bobakova et al. (2015), for example, found that the youth subcultures in Rome (a group of fans of Hip Hop, Skinhead, Punk, and Metal) tended to affect lifestyle and led to negative behaviours, such as drug abuse, skipping school, fighting, getting drunk, low academic achievement, and early sexual contact.

Secondly, studies on fandoms in the context of the development of social media and the internet merely see the impact of the internet's development on fan behaviours; they do not really study the fans' production activities. In other words, although there have been studies centralizing on online fandom, they have tended to focus on the impact of the Internet on fans, and addiction behaviours, art activities, literacy, and online interactions. They have not focused on the participatory culture of online fandom (Denison, 2011; Guschwan, 2016; Lee, 2011; Perkins, 2012; Williams & Ho, 2016).

This article is different from the previous studies because it is related to two things. Firstly, it specifically examined fandoms

among young people who belonged to a group of 'digital natives', i.e. those who were accustomed to using information technology and the internet to search for information and interact with fellow members of the cyberspace community. Secondly, the study did not analyse the youth subculture from the perspective of deviant behaviours that had been the focus of many researchers. Instead, it specifically sought to understand the reality of subcultures and interactivity of young people who became fans of popular culture from the perspective of Cultural Studies.

From the beginning, researchers recognized that in order to understand subcultures and their preoccupation with information technology and the Internet, it would not be adequate to delve into them from a positivistic approach, or simply to examine them from the perspective of deviant behaviours. Rather, it would undoubtedly be more appropriate to study the subject from theories and concepts drawn from the latest Cultural Studies approach - an interdisciplinary project of science, combining the British cultural approach, the Frankfurt School, Postmodern Theory, and other critical approaches (Bassett, 2006; Hall, 2005).

The use of the Cultural Studies perspective for investigating the phenomenon of digital natives is more relevant to post-industrial conditions because, as Ritzer and Smart (2001) stated, we now live in a culture of images which is getting more prolific, a place where multimedia technology changes every dimension of life, ranging from

economics to personal identity. Therefore, to understand all these changes, fresh, critical strategies are highly necessary. They are needed to read the narration and to interpret the combination of sights and sounds, and words and images that produce the space, forms and experiences of new cultures. The purpose of this study is to examine the development and formation of urban youth subculture identities in popular digital fandom culture. Moreover, this is on platforms facilitated by the advancement of social media networking and the growth in media convergence. This investigation focuses on fandom subcultures in virtual communities that have the ease of accessing some converged popular culture products, and thus have refined their cultural activities. Studies on fans who are members of online communities have grown in the last fifteen years (Bennett, 2004; Bury, 2003; Chamberlin, 2007; Crowe & Bradford, 2007; Duffett, 2013; Linden & Linden, 2017). However, the focus of this study is to examine interactivity, identity fragmentation and activity cultural youth who are members of the popular online community of global culture enthusiasts.

## METHODS

The problem of the study is what kind of cultural identity has been developed by urban youths in virtual communities. The method used during the data collection process was virtual ethnography, a new instrument in the study of social science. This is an adaptation and development of customized ethnographic studies to examine

virtual societies or cyberspace communities (Frömming et al., 2017; Garcia et al., 2009; Hine, 2000, 2015; Kozinets, 2010).

In this study, the site used by the researchers was <http://www.mortalinstrumentsindo.com>. It is a virtual space for fans of a novel by Cassandra Clare, who has issued a total of six titles; one of which is *The City of Bones*, a famous, award-winning novel and New York Times Best Seller with a film adaptation. The group of youth fandoms at *The Mortal Instruments* was deliberately chosen because this online community still existed and was dynamic; additionally, it was because the interactions that had been developed were not only amongst the fellow members of fandom, but also with the author, Cassandra Clare. The results of an early assessment showed that the members of the online fandom of *The Mortal Instruments* were always active in developing online interactions on social media (twitter, Facebook, and blogs). These were activities such as, holding a contest to guess the location of paragraphs of certain passages in Clare's novel, and making imaginary objects about its characters. The most important aspect was that this site was part of a media convergence that allowed fans to access a variety of popular culture texts simultaneously. During an offline interview, the researchers questioned a number of eligible key informants. These were urban youths who were members of *The Mortal Instruments*. The interviews were carried out through appointments or when conventions were held. At conventions, fans of popular culture meet

each other in the offline world to conduct activities together, such as discussions, book reviews, attending the latest exhibitions of popular culture products, carnivals, and so forth. Each convention is routinely held every year. However, even in one year, there could be several events held in various cities, such as Jakarta, Surabaya, Bandung, Bali and others.

Throughout the data collection process, the researcher was assisted by an assistant, one of her students, who is also a devoted enthusiast of popular culture. The assistant was selected because she was one of the young fans of *The Mortal Instruments* and other global popular cultures. The assistant's knowledge was taken into consideration as she could develop her understanding and consolidate herself in online activities with other fellow fans. Any comments, criticisms, suggestions, and posts could be obtained and analysed using virtual ethnography.

As a research methodology, virtual ethnography emphasizes the importance of the data exploration process which is completed by ethnographers in an online habitat through developing online social interaction (Hallett & Barber, 2014). Participant observation in virtual worlds must take place to obtain natural data in the form of digital texts (chatlogs, screenshots, video, and audio) about cultural practices in virtual communities (Boellstorff et al., 2012). In this study, the primary data were collected from conversations among *The Mortal Instruments* fans who joined the online fandom group called *TMIndo*. The conversation texts were collected from 2013

to 2016. The materials selected and analysed were those related to the expression of youth cultural identity, as part of the digital fandom of global popular culture.

For the offline interviews (Boellstorff et al., 2012), this study consulted 43 informants as follows: 10 sources were interviewed at the gathering event in Jakarta, 12 were consulted during the Cozplay convention in Jakarta, as well as 6 at the Indonesian Reader Festival in Jakarta, and 15 at the Goodreads Indonesia meeting in Surabaya. As well as this data was collected from in-depth interviews and further consultations with 7 participants, and finally there was an FGD (Focus Group Discussion) involving a number of young people that fell into the category of popular culture fandoms. In this study, the FGD was conducted twice; each of which was attended by 5 and 6 urban youths who were all fans of *The Mortal Instruments*.

Data analysis was performed through an analysis of dialogues and texts produced by fans of *The Mortal Instruments* in Indonesia while also comparing findings obtained from a variety of previous studies on youth subculture and fandom.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Identity is associated with similarities and differences both personally and socially, as well as in other forms of representation (Barker, 2012). Fine and Kleinman (1979) stated that subculture was bound to the identity of individuals that composed it, which was not a radical idea. The identification of subculture always includes

assigning a person to a specific position in the community, and where people can see themselves as members of the subculture (Gelder, 2005). Therefore, in this context, the identification should be understood as a dialectical process; each of which has an implication for the construction and reconstruction (Harris & Alexander, 1998).

Identity is the essence that can be signified by tastes, beliefs, and lifestyle that are developed in daily life (Barker, 2012). The Cultural identity developed by urban youths is not a single and homogeneous one. In the era of postmodern society, the cultural identity that develops and is developed by urban youths continues to proceed, involved in continuous negotiations and spinning identity formation that is not always singular. Cultural identity is not something that is given, and, then, settles down, but it tends to be fragmented in various forms (Hall, 1990).

Even though the subjects of this study were both fans of global popular culture products of *The Mortal Instruments*, subcultures and social identities between the one group of fans and another one develops differently. Stevenson (2002) suggested that cultural texts that were open to be consumed and whose meanings were open to be produced would usually attract a lot of fans that had an attachment and also different interpretations. The cultural texts, according to Stevenson, are generally polysemic in that they produce different meanings and forms of representation and identity. In other words, even though urban youths belong to a group or are fans of the

same popular culture product, the way they interpret cultural texts and how identity is constructed are not always the same. Cultural backgrounds, levels of media literacy, and the subjectivity of each fan will determine how they develop their cultural identity. Fans, in the perspective of cultural studies, are members of an interpretive community that are able to define themselves and their roles differently than members of other groups (Harris & Alexander, 1998).

In daily life, the key characteristic that often marks a fan is the development of addictive behaviour to want to continue consuming the global popular culture in which he/she is interested as if it were social opium. During leisure time, fans open their laptops or computers to view the sites of their favourite popular culture products, simply digesting conversations and other information arising among the groups of fans of *The Mortal Instruments*. Enjoying leisure time, feeling emotions, and developing concern about not missing the latest information, causes urban youths to become addicted to global popular culture. Some informants said that as long as they had sufficient spare time, they would generally spend it opening their favourite site, enjoying it, and, producing other cultural texts, then circulating them to other fans.

For fans of *The Mortal Instruments*, Cassandra Clare's novel is the original text that has become the cultural resource from which many new texts can be generated. It means that a fan who is not satisfied with just being a consumer can develop

a reinterpretation, to represent, and, then reproduce what she or he enjoys doing in the form of companion or alternative texts which she or he shares with other members.

Besides sharing pictures or posters, the fans' productive activities include uploading movie clips, creating attractive cover designs, mixing and matching a variety of images they obtained from a number of sources, and then making an interesting compilation or collage to attract other fans' attention. At this point, the fans are not only passive consumers who spend their spare time enjoying their favourite popular culture, but also producers of their own cultural texts.

Before the release of *The Mortal Instruments: City of Bones* movie, for example, a number of fans enthusiastically discussed who acted in the film and whether the cast deserved the roles or not. Some of them often made posters to be distributed to other members of the fandom. The posters were made to fulfil the fans' wishes and this was shown in the way they understood the cultural texts that they consumed, reproduced, and recirculated to other fans.

Besides images or posters, other forms of paratext often uploaded to *The Mortal Instruments* fan forum were movie trailers or other information that could attract the attention of fans. According to a variety of sources active fans and enthusiasts are not only passive consumers but they are also producers, or what is sometimes known as prosumers (Fuchs, 2014; Ritzer, 2015; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010; Sugihartati, 2017). Amongst fans, trailers often attracted attention because they had the opportunity to

watch some scenes from the movie or other things from their favourite global popular culture.

The study found that among the fans of *The Mortal Instruments*, reading the novel completely, being carried away by the atmosphere created by the author, trying to understand every character in the story, and then discussing it with other members of the digital fandom in cyberspace was part of their way to enjoy and consume the products of cultural industries (Rutherford, 1990). Yet, as the study found, not only did the fans consume the novels, films, or industrial products of global popular culture, the digital fandom also created cultural texts, produced meanings of cultural texts that had been consumed, and then generated paratexts to share with other fans (Gray, 2010).

Among the digital fandoms, according to Fiske (2010), fans' productivity often moves faster in producing texts than completing, expanding, and reproducing the originals. However, whatever paratexts forms are created by a fan, what is produced actually does not show a significant difference from the original text. The productivity of paratexts by fans is generally a combination and reuse of the products of capitalist culture in the "shape of the way it is" –as if it were a bricolage whose types are not really different from the original texts.

For the fans of *The Mortal Instruments*, the study found that there were at least two groups of fandoms that built and developed their cultural identity differently. The first group were members of fans of *The Mortal Instruments* that consumed popular



culture in which they were interested with a deep emotional attachment, and then which led up to entering into the world of fiction, empathy, and unconscious simulacra in setting, storyline, and the imaginary characters offered by Cassandra Clare. Instead of being critical of the popular culture, young people who were drawn towards a simulated version of reality, were often affected by the narcotic impacts of popular culture that they love. Consequently, those young people tend to eliminate their critical attitude and resistance towards the effect of capitalism forces behind the spread of global popular culture (Turner, 1991).

The texts of popular culture which replicated themselves in the form of paratexts often made fans more and more interested in the fictional world created by Cassandra Clare. Through chatting, a number of informants who were being studied, showed how they were engaged in the story and characters who they idolized. For example, a fan who liked a character that was experiencing bad luck later in the story, would feel sadness, or otherwise, get upset because they felt dissatisfied with the storyline where this occurred. One fan, GR, expressed how she felt confused between sad and happy with the ending of the story of *Clockwork Princess*, one of the novels by Cassandra Clare.

*GR: I feel so upset with the ending of Clockwork Princess but because the story is awesome, sooo, I think Will, Tessa, and Jem deserved the ending. But it's weird that Tessa had*

*equally strong feelings for Will and Jem. Little bit disappointed with the ending. Well, Jem had waited way too long, and he deserved his happiness. Sweet moment, because Tessa had already been so faithful to Will until the end. Will, love u so much. Jem, you make me tremble!*

The posting above illustrates that after the fans of *The Mortal Instruments* finished reading *the Clockwork Princess*, they generally felt overwhelmed and sad. The content of the story that was able to move the readers and the unhappy fate of one of the characters were often the main reasons for fans to grieve. RF and DP, for example, stated that the figure of Tessa did not deserve to be hated.

*DP: I can't and don't hate Tessa either ... I just hope she did not end up with Jem ... but love conquers all.*

*DB: I cried my eyes out while translating it. #weepy*

Being carried away by the story and imagining that they were the fictional characters of Cassandra Clare's work were the traits that gave fans the simulacra. They believed that when they read a novel, they did not do it merely to use their free time, or because there was no other work to do. Reading, getting drowned in the hyper reality, and having empathy with the fate of the characters of the book, is the first uncritical characteristic of a fan of popular culture.

For urban youths, who had been the victims of the hegemony of capitalist power or the culture industry that produced popular culture, the cultural texts that they consumed were often viewed as a symbol felt as being able to fill their soul that was empty of dreams, or produced a simulacra world. In this context, a popular culture like *The Mortal Instruments* may have been part of a hyper reality where facts and images are not easily distinguished anymore. Popular culture today in everyday life is embedded in film, television programs, novels, fast food restaurants, style, music, and so forth, which blurs the boundary between the truly meaningful and sheer entertainment (Storey, 1999). The presence of popular culture usually generates the following symptoms; firstly, the emergence of neomania, namely an unstoppable thirst for new consumption objects and new forms of entertainment that is implanted to the modern soul (psyche) through images, messages, and all types of media; secondly, juvenilisation, namely a human's common tendency to always feel young and attractive, both physically and socially, like the actors and characters they see on television, in advertising, and in films at the cinema (Danesi, 2002).

The second group found in this study were classified as critical fans. They had a background knowledge of media and critical digital literacy, but they were also part of multi fandoms. Fans who are critical of the content of cultural texts are usually identified by their ability to maintain a distance from the story and their favourite characters. At certain moments, they could post comments

and be carried away by the story of *The Mortal Instruments*, but for certain things, they were usually critical of the content of cultural texts and did not take the storyline or its logic for granted. In other words, within certain limits, they are fans of *The Mortal Instruments*, but they are also fond of other types of popular culture. Therefore, they are actually considered multi fandoms. It means that these types of fans are not fully powerless and controlled by the capitalists. On the contrary, they have their own voice and control over what they want and desire, which makes them multimembership, being involved in numerous online communities (Hills, 2015).

Generally, fans who are critical of the story content have adequate media and critical digital literacy to access, produce, and circulate paratexts. The definition of media literacy here in general is the ability to access, analyse, evaluate, and create messages in various forms. The four components - namely access, analysis, evaluation, and content creation - together form the basis of media literacy skills. Each component supports the others as part of a nonlinear activity, a dynamic learning process. This includes: the creation of content that leads to the analysis of what is produced by others and analysing and evaluating the content to provide the opportunity for extending access to internet use (Livingstone, 2004). Meanwhile, critical digital literacy is an ability where fans access information in the virtual world and simultaneously create distance from their favourite popular culture.



A critical fan of a popular cultural text does not usually take what is written by authors for granted. Also, a fan who is used to accessing a multimodal text will undoubtedly be critical of the content of cultural texts that are consumed solely for pleasure and not take them for granted. When certain parts of a story told by an author, are considered less fit, they usually did not hesitate to ask questions and occasionally gave criticism. The study found that there were a number of informants who tried to interpret their favourite narrative story's relationship with the real world and then questioned the possibilities of the story.

*AD: ... by the way, how could Cassie say that Magnus's age is 800 years old, that he was born in Batavia, and that his the father is Dutch if the Europeans began to come to OostIndische around the 1500s (Portuguese and Spanish) and the VOC was formed in early 1600s ? If indeed Magnus is 800 years old, and the year of the warlock is equal to one in humans, then, Magnus was born during the period of the Majapahit Kingdom, or even the Singasari Kingdom ...*

Trying to put a fictitious background into the story is away fans think realistically. Another fan then tried to answer AD's criticism and questions.

*MV: Cassie probably forgets something since there are too many things to remember from those thick books.*

*InstrumenMortal store: Cassie had once said that Magnus was kidding. Actually Magnus was born in 1640. Check the interview with Magnus.*

*HS: In the City of Glass, it is clearly mentioned that Magnus is about 800 years old, and when Clary first created the portal for Idris, he just fell in the Linn Lake. Clary was dying in a hallucination, and, at that moment, he saw a tombstone in which his name was written and the year was 2007.*

*AD: There may be a different way of calculating the Warlock's age from the way human's ages are calculated. If you use the way you calculate the human's age, Magnus is 800 years old and was born in the period of the Singasari/Majapahit kingdom, and there were no Dutch people in Indonesia.*

On the contrary to fandom which is more fanatical towards one popular culture product (Brennan, & Large, 2014; Rahman et al., 2012), and even tends to oppose other fandoms (Harman, & Jones, 2013; Godwin, 2015; Lachney, 2015), this study found that fandom was often not confined to one vessel and a single penchant. Young people who are members of the online fandom of The Mortal Instruments are not a homogeneous group. They are essentially heterogeneous, sometimes even particularistic, with different levels of fondness, and passions united by the very

loosely bonded ties through which popular culture is drawn together in a fluid group.

One of the traits of critical fans of *The Mortal Instruments* is that they generally do not take the story and characters for granted; they also discuss the content and some even try to criticize parts that are considered improper.

The uncritical fans of popular culture often construct their interest and social identity through imitating appearance and creating simulacra. What they consume, how the mode of identity is developed, and how they enjoy popular culture often cannot avoid the process of commodification. However, in the era of postmodern society, where the tastes and flavours of fans become more critical, social identity can be understood if it becomes very fluid (Sarup, 1996; Serafini, 2014, 2015).

In the postmodern era, identity seems to be dependent on the difference between consuming activities on one side, and other activities that are often contradictory: for example, to share with others, to oppose to the tendency to blend or merge, to be hostile, to reconcile, and to be an ever-changing combination. Identifying and mapping the problem of fans' identity (*The Mortal Instruments*) in a postmodern society, therefore, according to Dunn (1998) will require a linkage analysis that shows the tension between power and pleasure of consumption, as well as the search for social connectedness. In the commodified society, consumption and social relationality constantly compete with each other as a source of personality and personal meaning;

each of which in turn reinforces and damages the other. The dilemma is often experienced by groups of digital fandoms of *The Mortal Instruments* when they respond to and develop their social identity.

When answering the question of how the cultural identity of a group of fans in the postmodern era is constructed, Hall (1990, 1992) asserted that the self that was not centered or a postmodern subject was a subject with identities that continued to shift, split, and even have a plural identity. In the postmodern era, people do not only have a single identity, but several identities that are sometimes contradictory, dragged into various directions so that the process of cultural identification of a person or group always shifts (Hall, 1996). The fans of *The Mortal Instruments*, though not all, are often very fluid, with an avocation made up of various popular cultures that are fragmented. For example, even though FA claimed to be a fan of *The Mortal Instruments*, she was also a fan of *Harry Potter* by JK Rowling. FA is an example of a multi fandoms.

It is different from Fiske's findings which indicate that fans are always characterized by discrimination and draw clear boundaries from other groups of fans of popular culture (Fiske, 2010). The study found that the fans were an entity that was heterogeneous, and that some fans were not always fans of a single popular culture (Kress, 2010). The study found that there were some fans of *The Mortal Instruments* who also became fans of other popular cultural products (multi fandoms).

The study found that the majority of the critical fans were multi fandoms, i.e. they became fans of a number of popular cultures. This was in contrast to fans who had the simulacra and were often fanatical about a single popular culture. Some of the FGD participants and critical fans, during the offline interview, expressed how they spent time, saved money, and enthusiastically attended the events to watch things together, or events to meet other fans in Jakarta, Bandung, or other cities to celebrate their admiration for popular culture products. Although the events did not merely expose the popular culture that they admired (in this case *The Mortal Instruments*), the most important thing was the multi fandom fans could meet other fans, such as fans of films about Marvel's heroes, and so forth. In the real world, multi fandom fans are usually not shy about expressing their status as fans of various products of global popular culture, because they face and meet fans who mostly are also multi fandoms at various events. It is different if they meet online fans on the website of *The Mortal Instruments*, who are fanatical about a single culture industry product.

From the interview, it was revealed that watching the show together in Jakarta or Bandung was usually initiated by fellow fans of a popular culture. According to some informants, this kind of event was never held overseas, and was claimed to be a typical activity for fans in Indonesia. Events in the offline world, such as watching together, according to some informants, are usually very fun, exciting, and have been a chance for other fans of the popular culture for

catching up with old friends, and meeting new ones, as well as getting updates and information about various popular cultures produced by cultural industries.

One thing that distinguishes how virtual and real identities are developed, by both critical fans and the ones having simulacra, is the level of gradation. When developing interactivity in the digital community fandom, they generally tend to be more expressive due to the open space in the virtual world, as a medium for fans to release all their emotions without having to be limited by time and place. Fans having simulacra can express their emotion and passion for their popular culture in the conversation forum. Meanwhile, the critical fans can also express their dissatisfaction and creativity through cultural texts that they produce and share on online fan sites. Thomas (2006, 2007) argued that online communities were sites for enthusiasts' cultural production activities. A fan's body in the virtual world is the self that is produced and passed through words and pictures in the practice of membership of a virtual community. Through cultural texts, as well as other things, the fans will be able to represent their real world identity associated with the body, including their gender, race, age, ethnicity, and even personality. They can also produce an identity called the semiotics of identity, an online identity that is constructed from the elements of semiotics. This means that how a fan constructs his virtual identity will largely depend on his ability to manage digital texts and adequate digital literacy skills.

## CONCLUSION

The urban enthusiasts of global popular culture are generally prosumers, who not only become passive consumers merely enjoying cultural texts as part of their pleasure, they also become part of a group of fans that are active as producers, who create both cultural texts and paratexts as the result of their creativity, as part of the net generation.

The main characteristic that marks the mode of giving meaning that is developed by the fans towards the texts of popular culture, such as *The Mortal Instruments*, besides attracting the consumed cultural texts that are closer to the fans' realm of life experience, is understanding cultural texts in relation to other cultural texts. This is a process of understanding the relationship between the texts or intertextualities. Fans of global popular culture generally also enjoy a cultural text not as a solitary process. The fans often create and circulate or recirculate meanings as materials for developing conversations with members of other digital fandoms, and simultaneously extending the experienced moments of consuming and producing cultural texts.

The identity developed by the urban youths as digital fandoms is divided in two subculture groups. (1) A group of fans that consume popular culture that they like with a deep emotional attachment. This is under the illusion platform built by the economic power of global entertainment, which often pushes them into the world of fiction, empathy, and unconscious simulacra in setting, storyline, and imaginary characters

offered by products of popular culture. (2) A group of fans that is categorized as critical of the text content of popular culture. They have an adequate level of media literacy, and are actually multi fandoms who are also fans of cultural industrial products or other popular cultures.

## Implication and Suggestion

In the middle of an increasingly globalized mass culture, what is currently occurring is the emergence of unexpected fluidity, mobility and identity (Dunn, 1998). Whatever the social identity is that develops and grows among fans, including the most demanding fans of all, it in fact cannot be separated from the role of capitalism that constantly rebuilds, reshapes, re-innovates and re-constructs itself in order to harvest more profit. In regards to future studies, some of the issues that need to be looked at further are: (1) the dialectic process between the cultural identity of fans and the influence of popular culture offered by the cultural industry's strength, and (2) the comparison of cultural identity developed by online fandom against other global popular cultures, such as movies, novels, music, and many more.

## Limitations

Studying young people of global online fandom members in the age of Web 2.0 media convergence, is not always straightforward and requires effort. There are some obstacles that are often encountered. Firstly, because this study investigated a digital fandom community, the difficulties

often encountered by researchers who try to collect data in a participatory way are how to balance out the role as a researcher and one as a participant in the community. When acting as one of the active fans in the *Mortal Instruments* fan community, researchers often have to resist the urge to ask a lot of questions that might compromise the neutrality aspect of data collection process.

Secondly, since the main data analysed in this study are conversational texts in the cyberspace community, the researcher's chance to engage in a process of extracting data that is both dialogical and in-depth becomes very limited. This is due to the fact that the development of data found in the rolling fields is wholly dependent on the purpose, and the construction of digital fandom members themselves - which are not necessarily related to the research objectives that have been formulated.

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