



Selected Papers of #AoIR2025:
The 26th Annual Conference of the
Association of Internet Researchers
Niterói, Brazil / 15 – 18 Oct 2025

FANDOMS AND LEARNING: THE ROLE OF ACA-FANS IN FORMAL EDUCATION

Fernanda Castilho
Fatec and Federal University of São Carlos

Enoe Lopes Pontes
Federal University of Bahia

This article examines the role of fandoms and aca-fan communities within the contexts of formal and informal education. Drawing on the notion of lifelong learning (Jarvis, 2004), we investigate how fan practices—including content production, community organization, critical engagement, and the circulation of knowledge—can contribute to academic, technical, and professional learning processes. Based on these premises, we formulate the central question of this research: **can participation in fandoms support formal learning?** Our objective is to understand how fan practices, particularly among aca-fans, are transformed into academic and professional repertoires.

We argue that fandoms constitute informal learning ecosystems that, when mobilized by individuals who act as researchers and educators, become constitutive elements of academic trajectories. To explore this hypothesis, following this phase of literature review, we intend to design and administer questionnaires to determine whether fan practices are recognized by participants themselves as sources of diverse competencies that shape scientific writing, the development of theoretical repertoires, and pedagogical work.

From this initial stage, we intend to form focus groups (Fontana; Frey, 2005) that will refine our understanding of classroom practices, examining the deeper, more relational reflections of university professors and their work with students. In this context, it is important to highlight the growth of fan studies over the past decades, driven by the expansion of digital culture, the democratization of content-production technologies, and the increasing visibility of fan practices in the public sphere (Greco;Pontes, 2024).

The popularization of social media and collaborative platforms has facilitated the consolidation of participatory communities that function as spaces of creativity, sociability, political mobilization, and knowledge circulation. In this scenario, scholars argue that fans assume an active role within the media ecosystem, becoming co-authors, curators, and cultural agents (Bacon-Smith, 1992; Jenkins, 1992; 2006;

Suggested Citation (APA): Castilho, F. & Pontes, E. L. (2025, October). *Fandoms And Learning: The Role Of Aca-Fans In Formal Education*. Paper presented at AoIR2025: The 26th Annual Conference of the Association of Internet Researchers. Niterói, Brazil: AoIR. Retrieved from <http://spir.aoir.org>.

2016; Einwächter, 2013; Amaral, 2015; Greco, 2019). Fan engagement extends beyond consumption to encompass multiple forms of cultural production, ranging from fanfiction and fanart to critical analyses, videos, podcasts, collaborative subtitling, and mobilizations in defense of works and artists, (Jenkins, 1992; Amaral, 2015; 2023).

Within this universe emerges the figure of the aca-fan, an individual who simultaneously occupies the positions of fan and researcher. The term, coined by Jenkins (1992), refers to scholars who not only study media products but also participate actively in the communities associated with these objects. This dual identity entails a particular mode of knowledge production in which affect, cultural repertoires, and prior experiences are integrated into investigative practices. In Brazil, studies such as those by Lopes et al. (2017) identify a significant increase in this profile, especially in fields such as communication, education, literary studies, the arts, and the social sciences.

At the same time, the perspective of lifelong learning (Jarvis, 2004) broadens the understanding of learning by recognizing that it occurs continuously throughout life and in diverse contexts. Fandoms, in this sense, may be understood as informal learning spaces in which individuals develop technical, communicational, collaborative, and analytical competencies. When articulated with academic trajectories, such competencies can substantially influence scientific production and teaching practice.

Fan Studies

Fan studies have become a consolidated interdisciplinary field since the 1990s, with foundational authors such as Jenkins (1992), Bacon-Smith (1992), and Fiske (1992). These works inaugurated a critical understanding of fans, breaking with stigmas that associated them with obsession, immaturity, or deviant behavior. Instead, they recognized fans as creative, interpretive, and politically engaged subjects. The concept of participatory culture, developed by Jenkins (2006) and expanded by Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2014), emphasizes that fan communities actively contribute to the processes of creating, circulating, and appropriating media content.

More recent research has broadened this scope, including investigations into fan activism, social-justice practices, collaborative production, and the use of fictional narratives for political mobilization (Jenkins et al., 2016; 2020). In the Brazilian context, Amaral et al. (2023; 2024) and other researchers have examined how digital pop culture intersects with identities, political participation, and sociability practices.

In the field of education, media and learning studies demonstrate that the consumption and production of cultural content have long played a relevant role in shaping individuals—especially in Brazil, where television and telenovelas have influenced cultural debates, social behaviors, and pedagogical dynamics (Baccega, 2002). More recent research on the concept of the “teacher-fan” (Castilho et al., 2024) indicates that teachers’ cultural repertoires are integrated into classroom practices, contributing to pedagogical mediations that value the diversity of students’ languages and interests.

Within this broader landscape, research on aca-fans represents an intersection among fan studies, communication and education, digital culture, and academic formation. However, significant gaps remain, especially regarding the analysis of learning processes derived from fan practices and their influence on scientific production and higher education teaching.

Fandom and Learning Possibilities

The theoretical review allows us to identify three main dimensions that articulate fan practices and formal learning: **the technical, the communicational, and the collaborative**. The technical dimension comprises competencies developed through content-production processes such as video editing, image creation, fictional writing, subtitling, and audiovisual remixing. These skills, often acquired in autodidactic ways within fandoms, become valuable resources for scientific production and for teaching activities that require mastery of digital tools (Booth; Howell, 2018).

The communicational dimension refers to argumentation skills, critical reading, and discourse analysis, developed in interactions typical of fandom spaces, such as debates, reviews, meta-analyses, and interpretive exchanges. Fans frequently construct in-depth analyses of fictional narratives, characters, and narrative universes, developing competencies that can be readily transferred to academic contexts. (Bacon-Smith, 1992; Jenkins, 1992; Einwächter, 2013; Amaral; Driessen, 2024)

The collaborative dimension concerns participation in organized communities in which fans learn to manage collective projects, mediate conflicts, negotiate meanings, and coordinate actions. (Einwächter, 2013; Greco; Pontes, 2024) These practices are essential in scientific work, especially in group research projects, university outreach initiatives, and pedagogical activities that require sustained interaction.

Taken together, these three dimensions demonstrate that the boundary between informal and formal learning is permeable. The experiences of aca-fans reveal that affective and cultural practices can produce tangible effects on professional, technical, and academic development. Thus, fandoms emerge as legitimate environments for knowledge production, even when not formally recognized by educational institutions.

References

- Amaral, A., Souza, R., & Monteiro, C. (2015). De Westeros no #VemPraRua à shippagem do beijo gay na TV brasileira. *Galáxia*, 29, 39–52.
- Amaral, A., Blanco, B., Govari, C., Cordova, J., Tabasnik, R., Caetano, S., ... & Becko, L. T. (2023). CULTPOP: estratégias e experiências para a popularização da ciência e da cultura pop. *Comunicação & Educação*, 28(1), 165-184.
- Amaral, A., & Driessen, S. (2024). Fan Engagement, Identities, and Representation in Pop Culture. *Brazilian Creative Industries Journal*, 4(1), 2-12.

- Baccega, M. A. (2002). *Televisão e escola: aproximações e distanciamentos*. In Trabalho apresentado no XXV Congresso Brasileiro de Ciências da Comunicação Intercom, Bahia, Salvador.
- Booth, P., & Lee, R. (2021). Fan studies pedagogies [Editorial]. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 35.
- Bacon-Smith, C. (1992). *Enterprising women: Television fandom and the creation of popular myth*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Castilho Santana, F., Greco, C., & Prados, R. (2024). Pedagogias da cultura pop: o professor-fã. *Perspectivas em Diálogo: Revista de Educação e Sociedade*, 11(27), 36-52.
- Einwächter, S. G., & Simon, F. M. (2017). How digital remix and fan culture helped the LEGO comeback. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 25.
<https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2017.1047>
- Fiske, J. (1990). *Understanding popular culture*. Routledge.
- Fiske, J. (1992). The cultural economy of fandom. In L. A. Lewis (Org.), *The adoring audience*. Routledge.
- Fontana, A., & Frey, J. H. (2005). The interview. *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*, 3(1), 695-727.
- Greco, C. (2019). *Virou cult! Telenovela, nostalgia e fãs (1ª ed.)*. Jogo de Palavras; Provocare.
- Greco, C., & Pontes, E. L. (2023). Fãs: Consolidação de um campo e aceno às perspectivas de crítica social. In *Meios e audiências (Vol. IV, pp. 347–374)*. Sulina.
- Jarvis, P. (2004). *Adult education and lifelong learning: Theory and practice*. Routledge.
- Jenkins, H. (1992). *Textual Poachers*. Routledge.
- Jenkins, H. (2006). *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers*. NYU Press.
- Jenkins, H.; Ford, S.; Green, J. (2014). *Spreadable Media*. Aleph.
- Jenkins, H. et al. (2016). *By Any Media Necessary*. NYU Press.
- Jenkins, H.; Lazaro, G. P.; Shresthova, S. (2020). *Popular Culture and the Civic Imagination*. NYU Press.
- Lopes, M. I. V., Greco, C., Castilho, F., Lemos, L. P., Pereira, T., Lima, M., ... & Ortega, D. (2017). *Sujeito acadêmico e seu objeto de afeto: aca-fãs de ficção televisiva no Brasil*.