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Prosumption in the Pop Industry

AN ANALYSIS OF POLISH ENTERTAINMENT COMPANIES



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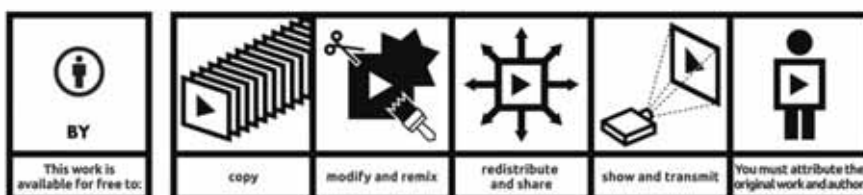
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SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH REPORT
“PROSUMPTION IN THE POP INDUSTRY:
AN ANALYSIS OF POLISH ENTERTAINMENT COMPANIES”

This article is a summary of the assumptions and findings of the research project on the Polish popular (pop) culture producers' approach towards marketing. This project entitled *Prosumption in the Pop Industry: An Analysis of Polish Entertainment Companies* examines whether 1) the pop culture provides an opportunity to companies to involve the consumer in the creative process in Poland and (2) the acquirer is becoming a prosumer and is actively participating in promoting and producing a media brand. Prosumption is a portmanteau formed by contracting the word producer with the word consumer. The term was coined by Alvin Toffler (1980). Toffler's prosumers were consumers who were predicted to become active to help improve or design various goods and services.

This project has been conducted by the Local Knowledge Foundation (Fundacja Wiedza Lokalna) and is financed by the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. It was allocated funding under an “Observatory of Culture” program, and the research activities were conducted between March and December 2013. The author and coordinator of this project is Piotr Siuda; the research team comprised Radosław Bomba, Magdalena Kamińska, Grzegorz D. Stunża, Anna Szylar, Marek Troszyński, and Tomasz Żaglewski.

In this project, we have considered pop culture as an industry where the producers of pop culture texts are an important part of the capitalistic system as they generate content, akin to the production of consumption goods. The aim is not art creation but profit; the business objective of the pop culture industry is the production of cultural goods that will attract consumers and therefore garner advertisers' support, and eventually translate into material profits.

Currently, we are witnessing the emergence of the phenomenon of prosumption in the pop culture industry (see Beer, Burrows 2010; Ritzer, Jurgenson 2010; Siuda 2012). The orientation of enterprises towards specific methods of production, distribution, and marketing of pop culture is of importance. That is, the stimulation and engagement of recipients (see Deuze 2009) is aimed at gaining access to a mass of people who will willingly work for a media brand for free. Prosumption is expected to make

it easier for companies to determine what consumers are demanding, and how to constantly improve their products. Several researchers indicate that prosumption allows for predicting consumption patterns by estimating whether a text will catch on with the target group in the future (see Ritzer, Jurgenson 2010).

The overall aim of this project is to examine the Polish pop culture industry from the standpoint of the implementation of prosumer practices. Our findings indicate the degree of orientation of selected Polish companies towards the development of these practices and their results, and indicate whether the practices are a means of market research. In addition, we also aimed to understand the reasons why enterprises implement these activities, particularly whether the implementation depends on the type of pop culture texts produced.

In contrast to the dominant research focus on pop culture recipients, this project focuses on producers, which is a highly neglected topic, particularly in cultural studies or sociology of culture. The project describes the extent to which contemporary Polish pop culture producers depend on the cooperation from acquirers. It is different from the vast majority of contemporary research, in that the focus is on top-down decision-making that influences contemporary Polish pop culture, rather than bottom-up (i.e., at the consumer level). For example, while conducting an analysis of the virtual fandoms of various texts, we have not examined fans' activities; rather, we have investigated whether producers influence these activities and if so, to what extent. We have adopted a similar approach for the other research methods and techniques applied in this project—in-depth interviews and content analysis.

This project is based on the assumption that there are multiple dimensions of prosumer practices. Thus, we first specify these dimensions, based on which the model for prosumption activities of the pop culture industry is constructed. This model drives our analyses of whether Polish pop culture producers implement prosumer practices. It is important to note that the model is divided into modules, standards, and indicators. The modules indicate the typical characteristics of prosumption practices, the standards describe them in detail, and the indicators are their specific examples. Here (in the presented summary) for each standard, we have identified only two out of a series of example indicators. The report contains several pages of the model description.

- **Module 1. Using fans' productions.**

- **Standard 1.** Stimulating amateur productions related to the official text.

Example indicators:

- Do the producers organize competitions for the best fan fiction (short stories written by recipients) related to the official text?

- Do the producers allow access to particular texts, including portions of films, soundtracks, character templates, and full texts, for free with a view that fans will use them creatively (for example, asking fans to write a review on their blogs/websites/forums)?
 - **Standard 2.** Using amateur productions in official texts.
Example indicators:
 - Do the video games producers believe that it is possible to release a game based on mods (amateur modifications) suggested by the players?
 - Do the producers engage fans as supporting actors in film and TV productions?
 - **Standard 3.** Modifying the narration of professionally created texts by using fan texts.
Example indicators:
 - Do the producers steer the fates of protagonists in the direction desired by fans?
 - Do the producers organize conferences for soliciting opinions and suggestions from fans regarding changes to the pop cultural product?
- **Module 2. Stimulation through Internet activities.**
 - **Standard 1.** Initiating virtual communities related to a text, through bulletin boards, mini-blogs, social networking portals like Facebook, Wikipedia, etc.
Example indicators:
 - Do the producers create official websites for a pop product?
 - Do the producers promote a pop product on social networking portals (for example, by creating fan pages on Facebook)?
 - **Standard 2.** Monitoring and stimulating activities within virtual communities.
Example indicators:
 - Do the producers allow text rankings and reviews by Internet users?
 - Do the producers use word-of-mouth marketing to advertise a text (for example, starting new threads in bulletin boards and stimulating discussions on a topic)?
- **Module 3. Using offline activities.**
 - **Standard 1.** Organizing offline fan events.
Example indicators:
 - Do the producers organize fan conventions and if so, to what extent and on what conditions do they do so?
 - Do the producers organize offline events for fans such as competitions, auctions, trips to locations related to a text, or urban games related to a text?

- **Standard 2.** Cooperation with fandoms.
Example indicators:
 - Do the games producers use fans for testing video games?
 - Do the producers use the work of fans (for example, through cosplay that involves dressing up as one's favorite character) during promotional events for texts?
- **Module 4. Evoking affective (emotional) responses.**
 - **Standard 1.** Creating transmedia narratives in which various manifestations of the world are presented on multiple media platforms such as films, television series, books, and comics.
Example indicators:
 - Do the producers create pop culture texts on several media platforms and link them such that it would be impossible to consume them separately (for example, only by reading a related book can one understand cinema movie)?
 - Do the producers, while constructing the narration of a text, focus more on building and enriching the depicted reality (universe) instead of developing the main character's plot?
 - **Standard 2.** Using techniques that result in the recipients' emotional attachment towards the text.
Example indicators:
 - Do the producers use cliffhangers, which are unexpected and surprising moments at the end of episodes/films/books that provoke speculations on what will happen in the sequel?
 - Do the producers manufacture merchandise related to a pop culture text such as mugs, T-shirts, ties?
- **Module 5. Undertaking specific market activities.**
 - **Standard 1.** Utilizing alternative sales techniques.
Example indicators:
 - Do the producers allow micro-payment by reducing the cost of purchase through the option of selecting a part of the pop product (for example, one can buy a particular episode instead of the entire season of a series, or a particular song instead of the entire music album)?
 - Do the producers opt for unique forms of editions such as luxury editions, new language translations of books?
 - **Standard 2.** Liberalizing the approach to copyright.
Example indicators:

- Do the producers sue (or rather avoid suing) the recipients for infringement of copyrights?
- Do the producers tolerate Internet piracy by considering it a means of generating interest in pop culture products and, consequently, higher pop products sales?

To determine the level of prosumption in the Polish pop culture industry, we conducted in-depth interviews with various texts producers. In addition, we conducted a content analysis of these texts (analysis of narration structures including elements of dramatic analysis) and a netnography of the related virtual fan communities.

The samples used in all the above-mentioned research methods and techniques are non-representative because the sampling is purposive. For interviews, 20 employees of Polish companies that produce and/or distribute any of the five categories of pop products were selected. The categories considered are TV productions (for example, a series or reality TV), films, video games, publications (books and comics), and music (music performers). It is important to note that we considered a text as a series, film, specific cycle of comics or books, game or a series of games, or an artist's music album. This rule was applicable to interviews as well as the other research methods.

We interviewed people who could be defined as significant informants—employees in the largest companies in the entertainment sector who make decisions and strongly influence the execution of prosumption measures. The interviewees included chairpersons, members of the board of directors, and directors of the marketing and public relations departments, purchasing and distribution departments, or sales departments.

It is to be noted that there is a weak link between the interview technique and the other two methods, namely content analysis and netnography. Sometimes the producers who were interviewed were the producers of those texts that were analyzed for their narration and Internet fan communities. However, we decided to not focus on this aspect for ethical reasons. The identities of the respondents and the enterprises that they work for have been disguised, as revealing this data would naturally lead to possible linkages between the results of the interviews and those of the content analysis and netnography, which would be unethical. The interviews must be considered separately from the other two methods.

These two methods are closely linked with one another as described below. For content analysis, we selected a set of texts produced by Polish companies that were created or were present (continued as a series) in 2012. In the case of films, TV, and music, the pop culture works were chosen based on their popularity and the diversity of producers. In our research, we included pop culture products that top the below mentioned ranking lists; however, we also took into consideration the producers of these texts. For

example, if the top three works in a list were X, Y, and Z, but X and Y were produced by the same company, then X and Z were selected for the study. The ranking lists that we have considered are:

- films (<http://www.boxofficemojo.com/intl/poland/yearly/?yr=2012&p=.htm>),
- TV (<http://www.wirtualnemedial.pl/artykul/serie-tvp-hitami-w-2012-roku-lid-erem-m-jak-milosc>),
- music (<http://www.zpav.pl/rankingi/listy/top100/roczna.php>).

It is to be noted that the method of selection described above has not always been applied in the case of films. Our decision to study the film *Hans Kloss. Stawka większa niż śmierć* (*Hans Kloss. Stakes Larger than Death*) was not directed by the rankings list; rather, we concluded that this film must be taken into consideration due to the special meaning it has in the Polish pop culture in the context of the cult series *Stawka większa niż życie* (*Stakes Larger than Life*). Likewise, for games, we decided to study those games that top various rankings, but are not necessarily produced in 2012. Again, the selection of books and comics has been completely arbitrary. For example, we decided to include *Jeźyczada*, a series of books by Małgorzata Musierowicz, as it has been present in the Polish market for many years.

Our analysis of the narrative structures is complemented by elements of dramatic analysis. We assumed that a text with prosumption potential must have the following features:

- In the dramatic layer, it must be an episode of a series or be transformable into one. The series-like character may be assigned at the very beginning when the text was originally designed as part of a series, or subsequently, when there was a decision to produce additional episodes based on the success of the first text that was structured as a finite work.
- In the narration layer, it must focus on building and enriching the reality depicted (the universe related to the text) rather than developing the protagonist's plot.

Three texts were selected from each of the five types of pop culture works:

- Games: *Wiedźmin* (*The Witcher*), *Dead Island*, *Sniper: Ghost Warrior*.
- Publications: *Wilq*, *Jeźyczada*, *Żaby i anioły* (*Frogs and Angels*).
- Films: *Hans Kloss. Stawka większa niż śmierć*, *Jesteś Bogiem* (*You are God*), *Mój rower* (*My Bicycle*).
- TV series: *Pierwsza miłość* (*First Love*), *Ranczo* (*The Ranch*), *M jak miłość* (*L for Love*).
- Music bands: T.Love, Hey, Luxtorpeda.

In the case of music texts, we decided to study only one specific album of a band or musician, as we wanted to analyze it from the perspective of a person who has pur-

chased only one record. This is a purposive measure and it comprehensively distinguishes between the analysis of music and the analysis of the other pop products considered by us; for example, in the case of books or comics, the entire series has been analyzed.

If a title was present in several pop culture categories (for example, *Wiedźmin* exists as a book, comic, TV series, and game), the focus was not on the entire universe, but on a specific type of text; however, the description of such a pop product may touch upon the different types of pop culture related to it. We selected the text of those companies whose employees were interviewed.

The netnography comprised an analysis of the Internet content that was created by fans and producers around the ten products (*Wiedźmin*, *Dead Island*, *Wilq*, *Jeźycjada*, *Hans Kloss*, *Jesteś Bogiem*, *Pierwsza miłość*, *Ranczo*, T.Love, and Hey). Importantly, the research was linked with content analysis of the pop products, as the related fan communities were studied. In order to detect the measures used by producers that fall within the framework of prosumption, we studied the virtual communities of fans using the model. For each product, we studied the official website, the related Internet bulletin board started by fans or the producer (for example, as part of the official website), a social networking service (for example, official fan page or one started by consumers on Facebook), and producers' blogs or the ones run by amateurs.

We achieved the objectives of this research project by using the described research methods and techniques. Among other things, we determined the extent to which the selected Polish pop culture producers rely on amateur fan production and the intensity with which they build their Internet communities and use the recipients' activities. We have successfully answered a series of questions: (1) How does cooperation with consumers proceed? (2) Have the producers noticed that it is worthwhile to strengthen their engagement? (3) What makes it possible to say that this approach is present in the Polish pop culture texts' narrations? We have studied whether the pop culture industry will liberalize the approach to copyrights and publish anything online for free. In brief, we have shown the scope of development of prosumption among the Polish pop culture producers.

The interviews proved that the type of pop culture text is the strongest determinant of the producers' attitude towards prosumption. The production of cinema is characterized by large budgets and long schedules; consequently, audience participation in the production of films is particularly difficult. Our interlocutors also opined that cinema producers' attitude may be defined as: "we are the artists; we create art for which one needs skills, money, and talent." While there are no doubts regarding the funda-

mental rules of marketing or the necessity to understand the preferences of the audience, there is no space for creative activities of amateurs or audience participation in the films' production process or promotions.

The music industry is particularly skeptical about cooperation with consumers. Questions of importance include: What next? What are the communication channels that will be popular among the recipients? What will be the transmission standards? What are the transmission channels for music products? The answers to these questions will define the scope of prosumer measures. According to our interviewees, the technology will shape the standards of cooperation with recipients.

As per the interviewees, TV production is too complex an activity to be assigned to amateurs. Based on an analysis of the interviews, TV producers' attitude may be described as follows: "producing art is the domain of professionals; it cannot be done by amateurs."

In the case of publications, special attention must be paid to the comics segment. It may be argued that the prosumer measures here are native, as publishers have implemented them from the beginning of their operations. In the Polish market, comics have long been published by the fans and for the fans; hence, prosumption is the 'founding sin' for this entire market segment. Prosumption in the comics segment implies that not only are the profits flowing from the recipients to the artists, but also the producers are aware of the threats resulting from the stronger position of the readers. Advanced prosumption may lead to the eventual disappearance of the boundary between the producer and consumer, resulting in the publisher's bankruptcy.

The video games industry is supposedly a model industry for prosumer activities as all producers take measures to implement various mechanisms to involve recipients in the product promotion process. The specific nature of the recipients (all use the Internet and they are mostly young people) makes it easy to achieve the desired effect of engaging the consumers in active text promotion. Based on analysis of the interviews, we found that the recipients are perceived as a community or a social group in which the members communicate with each other and produce and interpret meanings as a team. Producers are aware that their mistakes will be noticed and publicized/commented on. This implies that they regard the audience as a strong partner (community) and not the aggregate of isolated individuals (clients).

The respondents from all the segments unanimously admitted that careful monitoring of consumers' Internet behaviors may complement the research on the audience. Based on the statements by some respondents, it seems that they are aware of the greater value of professional research. However, most often, they decide to not hire a research agency due to the additional costs involved. Using their own analytical tools, they try to interpret these data that are available to them. This is particularly true for

comics publishers. The respondents claimed that they rely on their own experience and intuition.

Every industry has a distinct way of communicating with the audience given product and target group specificity. While all the respondents agreed on the huge communication potential of the Internet, not all of them used this tool with equal intensity. For some, the barrier is the potential cost of professionally managing this kind of communication; the others seek to connect with the audience in person. Generally, producers adopt various strategies to manage Internet communication with consumers. Some producers contact the recipients directly through social networking websites (primarily though fan pages on Facebook) and artists often participate in these activities as well.

It is to be noted that besides communication with consumers (primarily through social networking services), producers implement several complex but sporadic strategies that engage consumers in prosumer activities. Producers focus on basic marketing rules; that is, they want to obtain as much information as possible on prospective clients, improve the brand image, and create a positive perception about the company among consumers.

However, there are various more complex prosumer measures that are occasionally implemented. The forms of promotion that proved effective include organization of competitions for the best short story or the best music piece cover. One of the publishing houses gave the example of how they intend to develop a video blog in the future so that readers can publish their films that describe, review, or recommend the new publications. While this video blog is not functional as yet, the producer uses amateur texts by sharing the readers' films on their fan page.

Comics publishers also undertake initiatives for the readers by, for example, asking them to send photos of the merchandise connected with comics taken in various parts of the world. One of the publishers stated that through their blog, they also discuss issues with the readers. The publisher cited this as an example of an activity essential for the company that had not been undertaken by any other producer as yet.

In the case of the video games industry, the numerous conventions provide producers an opportunity to develop a relationship with consumers through discussions or collective playing. From the statements made by games' producers, it was evident that they realized the importance of the consumer community in building the overall image of the industry as well as particular brands. Consequently, most measures implemented by producers are aimed at maintaining consumer engagement; thus, consumers are becoming the most loyal proponents of texts. The fans are often asked to test the game before it is launched in the market. Based on fans' suggestions and comments,

the producer makes the necessary changes and modifications before the game is made available.

Music producers, citing positive examples from their field, highlighted how record labels are operating across varied media. One of the respondents gave the example of a record label that had converted a YouTube channel into a kind of Internet radio. Another label designed their own clothing and gadgets line based on the digital sales of music.

The issue of consumers' infringement of copyrights was addressed in the interviews. The key conclusion drawn from this part of the study is that the understanding of copyrights is highly industry dependent. Based on the opinions of our interviewees, we observe that businesses running in the new media domain (primarily the Internet) have a liberal attitude towards copyrights. Producers overlook violations of intellectual property rights due to an understanding of the difficulties that arise when they try to enforce applicable laws. At the same time, entrepreneurs are aware that copyrights are a widely discussed topic among potential recipients. Given the ease of copying content in the digital world, we clearly observe that broadcasters may have to start thinking differently about intellectual property when their works are distributed on the Internet. Based on these statements, we may assign interviewees either to the digital world (liberal approach to copyright) or the analogue world (conservative approach to copyright).

Obviously, in both these cases, the author's economic right continues to be the key issue since it is the basis for business operations. The music sector representatives exhibit a more traditional approach to copyright. The following line is a rephrase of the statement made by our interlocutors: "we operate our businesses in accordance with specific regulations and the accepted business model; we require our clients to also obey these rules." A more restrictive attitude is observed in the case of the film industry. One of the fundamental tasks of the marketing departments of the various companies in this industry is to fight violations of copyrights and detect unauthorized uses of their works. An interview with a person from a film studio revealed a key activity called "ordering the Internet" that indicates filmmakers' way of reasoning. This activity aims to achieve the "old order" on the Internet through complete deletion of content that violates the license conditions.

On the basis of the interviews, we understand that a company's attitude towards copyrights is determined by the authors' position in the company. Sometimes, a more liberal approach to intellectual property is possible. The reason for this is that the author sells their work to the company whose Board decides how the text will be used. Copyright is one of the items on the budget list, and the action strategy that is accepted is determined by the profit and loss balance. There are other companies that are more

like the authors' representatives. In these enterprises, the key concepts are art, work of art, or artistic value; thus, they do not interfere with the artists' work not because of their economic rights, but their moral rights.

At times, producers refrain from pursuing their rights because they are aware that such attempts may bring them more harm than good. Interestingly, representatives of the games sector opine that a company's liberal approach to activities that are illegal may benefit its image in multiple ways. For this strategy to be effective in driving sales and profits, it is necessary that companies think of clients as a community.

For TV broadcasters, problems related to copyrights and piracy are not directly concerned with ordinary users, as these unorganized activities are not capable of hampering producers' operations. Rather, copyright infringements arise due to loopholes in the legal regulations that enable other business entities to use the content and products created by a TV station. This primarily occurs in the form of online retransmissions of entire programs or their fragments. Here, unfair competition arises when profits are made from advertisements attached to texts for which no costs have been incurred.

The interviewed respondents had different attitudes towards fan productions in the context of intellectual property infringement. The key variable that determined this attitude was the mentioned affiliation to the analogue or the digital worlds. The digital interviewees underlined not only the advantages of these consumer activities that guarantee free product advertising, but also the necessity to invest a part of the company's income in activities that foster cooperation with the consumers and would bring profits in the future. The analogue interviewees held different opinions.

The content analysis shows that whether a text is pro-prosumer is highly dependent on its type. Games, films, comics, and books are pro-prosumer, while TV and, in particular, music are not.

However, the division is not always clear. While all the analyzed games were highly pro-prosumer, only two of the films studied by us were pro-prosumer (*Hans Kloss. Stawka większa niż śmierć* and *Jesteś Bogiem*). Literary texts and comics are weakly codified as compared to games or films and therefore, they offer greater possibilities for making the narration more flexible. In spite of this, *Żaby i anioły* is an example of a closed story that the pop culture industry ineffectively tried to open. *Jeźycjada* and *Wilq* are texts around which universes can be created. This is the reason why people are interested in them for a longer period of time.

The ambivalence of the pro-prosumer nature (or anti-prosumer nature) of texts described above is also observed in the case of television. Again, it is not always possible to identify whether the analyzed series is pro-prosumer. The typical soap operas, *Pierwsza miłość* and *M jak miłość*, are par excellence series that realize the model of open narration. Their producers have not yet focused on building a universe; rather,

they are concentrating on plot twists, thereby creating complicated relationships among the characters. On the contrary, the creators of *Rancho* focus not only on the serial character of the text, but also invest in developing its universe.

As shown by the netnography, the power structure as per the old division into the producer and consumer is strongly tilted towards the former; this, in turn, determines the producers' practices and attitudes towards fans. The perception that the recipient only consumes and does not create is evident from the attitudes of the series producers. This attitude is manifested in the increase in the number of published materials that are available for viewing purposes only (for example, episode trailers, bloopers, backstage shooting clips, and interviews with actors) and the online archives of episodes that cannot be downloaded and re-mixed/reproduced. The barrier between the producer and consumer is manifested (in the case of the series) in a small number of offline meetings and activities initiated by the producers. For *Pierwsza miłość*, there are practically no such measures, and in the case of *The Ranch*, the conventions are organized by fans. There is some hope that there will be a change in the approach to the fans of the series due to online activities. In the case of *Pierwsza miłość*, there are numerous such initiatives. Activities such as competitions that encourage one to create films, and submitting photos or participating in multi-media games on YouTube are a big step towards advanced prosumption measures. Unfortunately, in the case of *The Ranch*, there are not many activities of this kind.

When it comes to comics and film producers, encouraging the creation of one's own productions may be the result of a set of conditions. First, a prosumer attitude may be due to the new nature of the media. Although comics are an old medium as compared to games, they are perceived to be modern; in addition, it is somewhat a combination of various media, and thus, in a sense, it is multi-media, although it is not interactive. Second, it may be the result of the specificity of the recipients—mostly young people who are familiar with the Internet (in the case of the film *Jesteś Bogiem*, they are mostly junior high school students).

Producers of the studied video games have the most prosumer attitude. They have an open approach to fans that is manifested through their participation in numerous conferences and conventions or special meetings with fans at the company's headquarters. Games producers encourage productive and creative behaviors by making available resources and tools necessary for amateur productions. A good example here is the distribution of a thousand free copies of *Wiedźmin 2* among the selected persons, asking for their review of the game.

The prosumer orientation of games producers is due to the global character of their texts. *Wiedźmin* and *Dead Island* are the only pop productions among the studied ones that have enjoyed worldwide success and are recognized globally. The reasons for this

achievement are the use of up-to-date marketing techniques, including a fan-oriented approach (that is, treating fans as a community) and building fans' emotional engagement in the product. In the case of the *Wiedźmin* game series, some fans identify with the texts so strongly that they have tattoos inspired by the game's imagery. The affective attitude of the consumers is certainly a result of the fact that the games producers hold Internet discussions with their recipients more often than the representatives of the other pop culture products.

The specificity of the medium, in terms of the mentioned affiliation to the digitalized world, plays an important role in the highly prosumer approach of games producers. The interactive nature of games, in a way by definition, determines the activities of the users who actively co-create elements of the texts. Moreover, it is to be noted that in the case of video games, there exists a long time tradition of the recipients themselves reproducing the media. Such practices include cheating on the game's system, developing various styles of playing (for example, speed run), sharing hints and tricks, and creating guides for games (Fiske 2010).

The netnography clearly shows that prosumer measures in all the studied pop culture sectors continue to be frequently initiated on a bottom-up basis by fans. In the *Jeźyczada* fan communities, there emerge, for example, fan fictions or lists of actors who could star in the film adaptations of the books. The fans of Hey create their dream set lists, and fans of T.Love organize conventions or share archived materials about the band. The fans of *The Ranch* call themselves Ranchers and were able to drive the continuation of the series through their petitions and active attitudes. They also write their own fictional scripts, dialogues, initiate meetings, or produce gadgets. Players create their own trailers, videos, backgrounds, or mods for their favorite games. Thus, what is observed here is not passive attitude, but a type of activity that is conceived without the producers' intervention, and for this reason, it has a limited scope.

Thus, we must consider the unused prosumer potential of many fan communities. Some of the studied fandoms exhibited unique initiatives and ingeniousness; however, producers utilized the engagement and enthusiasm of fans only to a small degree and sometimes completely ignored them. In the case of the music and film industries, the evident intensification of pro-fan activities prior to the premiere of a product did not sustain after the premiere despite active consumer involvement. In short, there is a lack of any consolidated, long-term strategy of cooperation with fans. Only in the case of video games, the relations initiated with the recipients do not fizzle out after the premiere and last at a specific stable level.

What is the scope of the Polish pop culture industry undertaking prosumption measures? Our analyses show that these practices are not perfect. The situation is, however, not all that bad, as the Poles follow the American specialists in marketing; however,

they often do so in quite an inapt manner and only to a limited extent, even though the outcomes are quite good at times. The Polish producers resort to the standard and simplest prosumer measures relying on using social media. There are no bold measures (although these have been observed in the basic scope for some producers), that stimulate consumer productivity through strong emotional engagement, or a more liberal approach to infringement of copyright. The conservative nature of prosumption measures is evident in the fact that the genres' boundaries are not exceeded; that is, the attitude may be defined as: "I undertake prosumption measures to the extent that the character of a pop culture genre allows me to." It is to be noted that nothing impedes the attempts to adapt prosumer measures that are suitable for games to other types of texts as well.

Thus, the overall conclusion from our analysis is not too positive. Paradoxically, this should be beneficial as there emerges a wide research field with multiple interesting topics. Producers operating in various sectors must be compared in a more careful manner by juxtaposing more texts of the same type, indicating which particular areas in cyberspace stimulate prosumption, and detecting the multiple prosumption mechanisms. We hope our project and, in particular, our proposed model of prosumption activities in the pop culture industry is a guideline for further studies. We also hope that our analysis will be helpful for the representatives of the pop culture industry and they will use it to plan activities aimed at intensifying the recipients' activities and engagement.

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**INTERVIEW WITH HENRY JENKINS, GEORGE RITZER AND MARK DEUZE
ABOUT POP CULTURE PROSUMPTION (ALONG THE LINES OF THE RESEARCH REPORT)**

Interviewer: Michał Chudoliński

Expert consultants: Piotr Siuda, Tomasz Żaglewski

Please note that the participants in this interview are referred to by their initials from here onwards.

MC: In your opinion, what is the general level of prosumption in the pop culture industry globally? By prosumption, we mean the manner in which the pop cultural industry uses the activities and commitment of a mass culture audience to promote specific brands or franchises.

MD: It certainly seems that almost every major brand and franchise these days is finding ways to engage the (intended) consumer with some kind of interactive, co-creative, or otherwise ‘prosuming’ element. This prosumption is primarily to be found in marketing efforts, much less so in the actual creative or production process of media.

HJ: I have not seen anyone offer a quantitative measurement for how much user-generated content is being produced, under what conditions, in which contexts, around which content, etc. I would not, in any case, be the right person to try to address this question from a quantitative point of view. A part of the problem is that prosumption, as you are defining it, is a sliding scale. There are many forms of amateur cultural production in response to mass media fandom which is neither solicited nor valued by corporate rights holders. This is the realm of fan culture as we have historically understood it. There are forms of amateur production which make money only indirectly for corporate interests, such as the way content travels on Facebook, Twitter, and to some degree, YouTube, where the company does not really care what is being produced but simply that their platform is seeing a certain amount of traffic that comes in ways they know how to capitalize on. There are forms of cultural production where user-generated content is curated and harvested, so that the ‘best material’ gets shared with the larger community but the bulk of it ends up on the cutting room floor: this is often true in terms of various design contests around brands. There are forms of cultural production which are semi-commercial and semi-professional: much closer to the original

meaning of prosumption. Here, both sides may profit from what is produced and shared: see for example Etsy or Amazon's Kindle Worlds for two models of what this might look like. To me, these revenue sharing based models are very different from many of the kinds of free labor which have been critiqued by Marxist theorists. So, until we have a better vocabulary for talking about these and a range of other arrangements, I doubt we can come up with anything approaching a definitive answer to your question.

GR: The industries use it not just to promote pop culture, but to create it, at least in part (e.g. on reality TV). That is the production aspect of prosumption.

MC: What are the reasons for the emergence of prosumption in mass culture?

MD: The disappearance of the mass audience and the discovery of the 'active' audience.

HJ: Again, to paint in broad sweeps, there was a great deal of grassroots cultural production across human history: it was simply localized or personalized, produced and shared within a geographic community and/or within a localized subculture. Many of these forms of cultural production were pushed from view by the rise of mass culture, but they did not totally disappear. We can trace many examples of participatory culture at any given moment across the 20th century and many struggles to gain greater access to the means of cultural production and circulation. These various local practices provided the initial seeds of today's prosumption. What happened though is that networked communications made these alternative cultural practices more visible; they could be shared easily across geographic boundaries; there were hybrid media spaces where different subcultures could observe and learn from each other; and people with shared interests could find each other. As this wave of participatory culture moved across networked society, then other institutions responded, seeking to channel and commodify participation in the various ways we discussed above. And that is what results in Web 2.0 business models and discussions of user-generated content. The problem with that model is that it defines all of the participants in relation to the tools, platforms, or content producers and not in relation to their collective goals as members of particular kinds of communities of practice.

GR: It is a more general process; prosumption is emerging in greater amounts in many settings. In part, it is made possible by new technology, much of it associated with the

Internet. However, a more important factor is profit-making organizations that see a way to cut personnel costs by using the unpaid work of prosumers. There is also a “wisdom of the crowd” dynamic—if enough people are involved and contribute, good and creative responses emerge.

MC: How do you expect pop culture prosumption to develop globally?

MD: People are inclined to use media in social and creative ways. For example, we watch television together to have something to talk about, to build a shared (as well as personal) narrative. So there is no reason not to expect this trend to continue on a global scale.

HJ: We are seeing examples in most parts of the world at this point, but its spread is uneven, not simply because of limited access to technological affordances, but also for cultural, legal, and political factors, given the ways that collective cultural production is bound up with issues of free expression and democratic citizenship, given that expanding chances to produce and share culture and knowledge can have a destabilizing effect on established hierarchies. But, we do not want to think about this purely in terms of a spread of one dominant participatory culture across the planet, though we can see people interacting at small scales via social media across national boundaries. Ethan Zuckerman's new book does a convincing job of showing us all of the boundaries and barriers that affect who communicates with whom or who cares about what on the World Wide Web. We are also seeing local traditions of cultural production, say, the samba schools in Rio, assert themselves through digital media, and thus finding new forms of cultural expression and social connection.

GR: It probably already has, especially on the inherently global Internet (e.g., YouTube). Newer technologies will expedite this.

MC: In your opinion, what strategies will be implemented to increase the significance of prosumption in pop culture? What will be the role of the Internet in this process?

MD: It depends on who implements these strategies. If you are talking about media companies, they will have to retool the creative process to allow for prosumer participation. And by inviting people in that way, they will become more vulnerable because the brand message is impossible to control in a presumptive context.

HJ: I am less sure I want to increase prosumption as you have defined it above, where it is an extension of the commercial logics of corporate mass media or part of the new emerging logics of Web 2.0. What I want to promote is a more participatory culture where we expand access to the means of production and circulation to more of the population, with access defined here not simply in terms of tools and platforms, but also social and cultural resources. We need to promote a broad array of different models for production and circulation, many of which are not governed by the motives of neoliberal capitalism, some of which follow more closely forms of gift or reputational economies where creativity is motivated by social rather than material rewards.

GR: Profit-making companies in the realm of pop culture will make it increasingly easy for prosumers to contribute and they seek to lure/coerce more into contributing. The latter is made easy since many like to contribute; little coercion is required.

MC: The scale of pop cultural prosumption in Poland is relatively small as compared to the US. The majority of the producers, besides a few market leaders such as the producers of the game *The Witcher*, do not want fans to get involved and do not have strategies that would facilitate connecting with the fan base. Moreover, there is no transmedia storytelling and limited help for organizing conventions. In your view, what are the possible reasons for this?

MD: It really depends on the level of fanish activities in the market, the level of competition between different media firms, and the culture of creation among content makers.

HJ: To be honest, while I have visited Warsaw once and correspond with other researchers from your country, I just do not know the particulars there well enough to meaningfully comment on this topic. I think it will be interesting, though, to see what forms of collective expression emerge within post-socialist economies. Are all forms of collectivity seen as retrograde? Has there been a wholesale embrace of individualistic and commercial values? Or might other norms and values re-assert themselves?

MC: Pop cultural prosumption is more or less linked to fandom as a lifestyle. Fans who receive free samples, help to organize conventions, or review promotional copies are regarded differently by their community. Their status among other fans changes—they gain popularity and respect

and their role as experts becomes more and more important. Have you noticed this phenomenon?

MD: Yes, of course. Fans do what they do for recognition, reputation, and fun and not for money or other types of traditional validation.

HJ: Yes and no. I think that in the US, fans are often distrustful of those who become more fully imbricated into the commercial system. Forms of prosumption may or may not actually value fan expertise or respect fan traditions. Certainly, there are more casual consumers who feel more comfortable remaining in these corporately policed spaces, but I think it is an open question whether these spaces will ever fully replace more grassroots spaces, which often actively resist corporate motives or question ideologies. Also keep in mind that fandom is only one form of participatory culture and only one of the sets of cultural communities that motivate prosumption. It might be interesting to look at something like Etsy, which certainly attracts some forms of fan production/consumption, but also taps into older crafter traditions that have often defined themselves in direct opposition to mass culture.

MC: What are the most recent fan trends in pop culture? In your opinion, is there any particular fan activity that is so visible and significant that we will hear more and more about it?

MD: The role of smartphone users and mobile media in general (in combination with locative services and 4G level connectivity) will benchmark fan trends.

HJ: My own research right now is focused on the blurring lines between fandom and activism. We are seeing fan communities recruiting and training activists, we are seeing activist movements appropriating, remixing, and reperforming elements from popular culture, and between these two trends, we are seeing more gateways that move people, especially youth, who are culturally active towards greater political participation. These patterns will be the focus on a book I am writing now, tentatively titled, *By Any Media Necessary: Mapping Youth and Participatory Politics*.

MC: Take the example of Xbox One. The option of using the same copy of the game on several consoles was supposed to be blocked in Xbox One. Moreover, the games were to be made available only on the Internet. However, these limitations were quickly dropped due to gamers' dissatisfaction and fans' accusations that Microsoft cared only about money. Thus, can

prosumption further strengthen the already powerful diktat of fans in pop culture and undermine the power of producers who often fail to listen to consumers?

MD: Sure. The trick is to find a healthy balance between autonomy in the creative process, which is a powerful motivator for cultural producers, and audience engagement.

HJ: This is what I meant in *Convergence Culture* when I predicted that fandoms might operate as collective bargaining mechanisms for consumers. The ability of groups to quickly identify and mobilize around common interests means they can, in some cases, exert real pressure on marketplace decisions, and we are seeing many examples where corporations back down over top-down policy decisions that are resisted at the grass-roots level.

GR: It can, but thus far prosumers have been more co-opted by companies and used to reduce personnel costs and increase profits.

MC: Recently, superhero fans tried to save the *Young Justice* TV series. During a press conference, the producer told the fans that in order to save the TV series, they would have to buy theme toys and not merely watch the episodes. The TV series was not renewed despite fans' protests. Do you think this is the future of the relationship between fans and producers? Will it be necessary to buy more gadgets in order to save a TV series, instead of protesting in front of the studio's offices?

MD: I do not think there is a general rule for how fan engagement translates into actual power. The example suggests that the producer does not take fans seriously at all.

HJ: I am not sure this is apt to be a widespread model. We write about shifts in audience measurement as they relate to engagement in *Spreadable Media*. We are seeing, in fact, producers and distributors are slow to factor in other ways of measuring audience support and interests, even when they know that they are having an impact on their bottom line. They would still rather sample, often inaccurately, eyeballs watching shows as they are aired than rely on more accurate and more open ended measures of how many people are watching shows on TiVo or the web, and while there have been efforts to mobilize the consumption side of fandom to court advertisers and brands, very few of these have been successful so far in getting programs renewed.

MC: In the traditional media model, the producers imposed their desires on the audience. What is the situation today and how is it changing? Is there equality between fans and producers? In fact, whose arguments are more important when it comes to conflicts of interests?

MD: Most power is in the hands of producers and distributors, much less so in the hands of fans and consumers (and perhaps even less so in the hands of creators/makers). But there will always be moments when power relations shift, even if it is just temporarily. The media marketplace is becoming more complex for all parties involved.

HJ: We are nowhere near ‘equality’ at the present time, but there have been shifts in the relationships between producers and consumers, at least as I observe them in the US. I would hate to universalize this. It has always been the case that producers have sought to control both the distribution and interpretation of their content as much as possible, and fans have often sought to elude that control to pursue their own interests. No one can really control what happens to media content once it reaches the hands of the consumer, but consumers have had difficulty influencing production decisions. This is why John Tulloch described fans as a “powerless elite.” Today, what fans make of the raw materials producers provide them is much more publically visible. More and more people know about fan fiction or are watching fan remix videos, and fans are collectively exerting much stronger pressure on producers to respect their interests as they are making decisions than impact the production. Fans are also involved in the circulation of the content, as more stuff travels through digital social networks, as well as across broadcast networks. As this has happened, producers have started to reappraise their relationships with fans. They initially acted out of fear of losing control. It is now clear they have already lost control in that sense, so they are seeking to court fans. Clearly, they would like to exert as much control as possible, but they are also having to give grounds on many traditional constraints on audience behavior as they are coming to realize that engagement is a key currency in the contemporary media economy.

GR: Audiences have much more input, but it is channeled and structured by the producers largely to their benefit.

MC: How do you evaluate pop culture producers' tendency to employ fans (i.e., a fan becomes a professional)? Is it a common practice? How will it evolve in the next few years?

MD: It is quite common in the video games sector of the creative economy, and to some extent in journalism (with ‘citizen journalists’ for example), but I do not think this will become a major element of the production of popular culture.

HJ: This is still a minority practice, but it is growing. Of course, in some senses, the line is an arbitrary one. Obviously, most people who produce popular media also consume it, many of them were ‘fans’ in the broadest sense or otherwise why would they enter the industry. But the process of training and recruitment as a professional often involves a reorientation where you are discouraged from seeing the world from the consumer perspective, and recruits often come to see consumers as very strange creatures. What we are seeing is that some producers are consciously bringing some of their most vocal fans ‘into the tent,’ i.e. inviting them to help advise the production on the desires of their community and in return, act as translators back to the worlds they came from. This works only in so far as these ‘fans’ are ‘representative’ of or ‘meaningfully tied’ to the fan world in the first place. It is not as if fans speak with the same voice; there are all kinds of tensions within fandom and thus, there is a tendency for producers to recruit certain kinds of fans and leave others outside, perhaps even more marginalized than before. Fans make a distinction between affirmational and transformational fans, i.e. fans who celebrate and master the storyworld as it is given to them vs fans who recreate the story materials to better serve their own interests. It is been much easier for producers to absorb affirmational fans than transformational ones, and this has gender implications since the first category is heavily male and the second more heavily female. So, unless the producers develop a deeper understanding of fandom’s own diversity, hierarchy, and traditions, there is a danger that they will over-weigh some fans at the expense of reaching the full range of consumers who are invested in their property.

MC: Majority of the fans consider their favorite protagonists to be beyond mere characters from a TV series or a graphic story. Rather, they are symbolic figures who inspire and have an opinion about important ethical truths or the contemporary world. Is such a perception deeply rooted among fans or is it becoming stronger, perhaps, due to some new phenomena?

MD: That perception is not new—it just becomes easier to identify with characters as they ‘live’ and migrate across multiple platforms now (for example: a character from a TV show using a Twitter feed to communicate with fans in character).

HJ: I would say that stories have always existed as mythical resources through which we ask core questions about ourselves, our values, and our world. We understand this clearly enough when we are talking about folk tales, myths, and legends of the more historic variety, but when we talk about mass culture, the commercial dimensions—the commodity status of the text—can often drown out our appreciation of the symbolic roles such stories play within our culture. There has been a tendency to say that fans are confusing fantasy with reality—and that is almost never the case—or that they are ‘reading too much into’ popular fictions which were made for ‘entertainment purposes,’ and that is also not right. They are using these stories as springboards for important discussions they want to be having about the world, and they are using the characters as symbolic or mythical resources within those exchanges. That is why they want to rewrite or remix them: because they stand for something and they can be used to express ideas collectively that need to be heard. That is why fans are not content simply consuming: they ask questions, they tell stories, and they remix content, to see if they can more fully realize the symbolic potentials they see within this material. They are going to be doing this regardless of the commercial frames you put around that. Some kinds of prosumption practices can build partnerships with fans, while others impose limits and constraints or exploit fan labor in ways that will damage that relationship. Where this happens producers will face backlash from fans or fans will simply route around the constraints to more fully satisfy their goals. Right now, fans are much more sophisticated at navigating through the social media realm than producers are and have a much longer history of thinking about grassroots cultural production and circulation.

MEDIA PATRONAGES:



warsztat **badacza**

Perspektywy

