

~~FANDOM IS DEAD~~

M&CSAATCHI
SPORT & ENTERTAINMENT
The Passions Agency

WELCOME TO FANCOM

FAN·DOM

By **Laura Coller** Managing Director

FAN·DOM

/fan:dom/ noun

A mass homogenous group following a single attitude

FAN·COM

/fan:com/ noun

Coalescing communities with intersectional passions and behaviours



TWENTY YEARS OF M&C SAATCHI SPORT & ENTERTAINMENT AND THE INTRODUCTION OF FANCOM

We connect brands to consumers through the things people love, making them culturally relevant through passions.

100+ passion specialists who live and breathe sport and entertainment and are part of the sub-passions and sub-culture audiences around, and across, those spaces.

Audiences who are now co-authors of the spaces they occupy. More discerning than ever, but also yearning for more opportunities to connect with the things they love, and with each-other.

We commissioned proprietary research which revealed that **63%** of people use their passions as a way to engage with others IRL. This tells us that the real value for marketers isn't just in connecting brands to consumers through passions, but in helping brands connect consumers to *each-other* through the things they love.

This truth demands a shift in how we look at audience needs and we believe there has been a demonstrable move away from the tropes of traditional fandom, towards what we call **Fancom**. Away from mass homogenised groups following a single attitude and towards coalescing communities with intersectional interests and behaviours.

From the **2,016** people who responded to our study, we received information on **8,276** passions- cultural interests they say define who they are. That means that the average person has at least **4.1** passions. Looking deeper into our data we found that **25%** have at least **7**.

For brands, that's a **minimum of between 4 and 7 different opportunities to connect**, and with our study highlighting that fans have an overall commitment score of **8.4** out of 10 to their passions, these opportunities are too good to miss. However, crucial to harnessing them is ensuring that these passions are seamlessly integrated with each-other, rather than vying for attention, authentically reflecting the unique 'passion-print' that forms our individual identities.

Our recent 'Born To Mix' work for Absolut did just that, platforming marginalised voices from different communities through a fusion of music, fashion, activism and dance. Our brand reappraisal for the NFL placed it at the intersection of sport and fashion, driving credibility amongst London's culture crowd with a hyper-local lens. We're helping Barclays shine a light on how their work in football is creating more opportunities for women and girls on and off the pitch, tapping into the two priorities of this audience- the sport they love and gender equality- and we're connecting diverse global fan cultures to celebrate inclusivity across the beautiful game for Heineken.

When intersectionality isn't the goal, convergence is. For over 10 years, our True Music platform with Ballantine's has uplifted multifaceted communities all coming together through one thing, their love of music. It has allowed us to grow the brand's audience outwards while maintaining the credibility and authenticity that the consumer expects.

In truth, we've been migrating towards Fancom for a while, as the conventional definition of fandom has given way to something that delivers an even larger potential audience and the opportunity for even better connections. It's time to sharpen the approach.

Which is why I'm excited to introduce **Passion Pulse**, our new and supercharged strategic collective who have penned this report. They are motivated to understand Fancom as an audience profile, a behaviour and also something we can build around brands, enabling them to grow their audiences beyond demographic-based limitations and harness the true power of passions.

As we celebrate our 20th year as the most awarded agency in our space, we continue to push and challenge our approach to delivering powerful 360 campaigns that place clients at the heart of the things people love, optimising our expertise as *the* passions agency.

FANDOM IS DEAD, WELCOME TO FANCOM

By Neil Hopkins Strategy Partner

M&C Saatchi Sport & Entertainment is twenty.

Over those two decades, the effectiveness of hundreds of campaigns we have delivered for clients can be traced back to one thing. A commitment to identifying and acting on killer insights into the attitudes and behaviours of audiences in a way that connects our clients to them through their passions.

But boy have those audiences' attitudes and behaviours changed.

In 2004 The Facebook was only just launching, MySpace was in its infancy and Twitter and Instagram were still years away. Whether you were a broadcaster or an advertiser, audiences were still being communicated 'at' rather than 'to'.

The emergence of social media and the opportunity for two-way conversations between fans and their passions has been the defining feature of fandom over the past twenty years. But too often we see agencies and brands marketing to fans as if they are a homogenous group.

"Football fans", "music fans", "gamers".

Generic portrayals that obscure the reality. A revolution is taking place in fans' relationships not only to their sport or entertainment passions, but, crucially, to the brands that seek to engage them through all of the things they love.

The emergence of atomised subcultures across sport and entertainment is characterised by a demand from fans to take ownership, to be active co-authors of the passions spaces that define who they are and to break down the barriers and hierarchy within the traditional fan/icon relationship.

Fandom as we know it is dead. And marketing to audiences in this way should be too.

We're now in an era of Fancom. Communities converging around passions. Pushing them forwards. Growing them.

Understanding the intricacies and complexities of this new behaviour and the major opportunities it bestows on brands will be absolutely fundamental for brands seeking to engage audiences in an authentic way.

Our answer to this challenge has been to address how we can build this Fancom behaviour around brands. To do so, we have assembled a strategic collective that brings together a varied range of viewpoints, lived experiences and personal passions.

We call this team Passion Pulse.

Yes, we look at the data that tells us what fans say they do but we also employ AI and data-at-scale to understand what how they really behave. And, critically, we now go deep on how they coalesce and build communities around their passions to protect, promote and progress them.

This series of short essays around Fancom behaviour across passion spaces acts as a showcase for the expertise that clients can call upon from our Passion Pulse strategy experts. But this merely scratches the surface of an incredibly rich seam of insights that the team is constantly mining on behalf of clients including adidas, Jameson, the NFL, Heineken and Barclays.

We have always believed in the power of insights to provoke and stimulate compelling, creative thinking.

You could say it's our passion.

"A REVOLUTION IS TAKING PLACE,,



Below THE RIM



**UNPACKING WHY THE
BRITISH BASKETBALL
OPPORTUNITY IS
UNDervalUED**

by **Ant Firth-Clark**
Senior Strategist



“THE PHENOMENON OF FANCOM FEELS LIKE A NEWLY EMERGING BEHAVIOUR, BUT IN BASKETBALL IT EXISTS BY NECESSITY.”

“Now this is a story all about how...” we need to flip-turn the basketball story upside-down.

Allow me to sling out some facts.

Over the last couple of years, stats and narratives have been emerging exploring how basketball is the UK's fastest growing sport. 11 million Brits are interested in it, and, according to Sport England's Active Lives survey, it is the second most played team sport after football with 1.3 million participants. With more than half of its weekly players being from an ethnic minority background, and the greatest proportion of participants from manual and routine work occupations, basketball can also lay claim to being the poster-child for inclusive sport.

Dialling into Gen-Z, things become even clearer. According to a study by EY in 2023, Basketball was the fourth highest sport for engagement in the UK, following football, boxing and Formula 1. This echoes a claim from The Mirror last year about how “Gen-Z would rather watch overseas sports, such as basketball.”

But why does this matter?

We commissioned some proprietary research that found that by the time people reach their twenties, the majority of their passions tend to be locked-in for life. So, changes we see happening within the passions of Gen-Z now offer a glimpse into how sports central to British culture might shift in the future. Basketball is going toe-to-toe with ‘traditional’ sports such as cricket and rugby in the fight for Gen-Z’s attention and is a gathering force that brands should pay attention to.

Basketball has enjoyed decades of transatlantic cultural cachet: hordes of film stars and rappers parked-up at court-side seats, NBA team vests the uniform for music videos, skate parks, catwalks - and the strong association it has with cultural taste makers like Spike Lee, Drake, Jay-Z, Rihanna, and so on. As HBO's recent show ‘Winning Time’ portrayed, basketball was engineered to be more than the sport itself, it was an

entire entertainment spectacle- the best of America. Similarly, in ‘The Last Dance’ documentary, the stories of Jordan, Pippen and Rodman reminded the world of the effort, mindset, style and character that didn't just form a winning team, but totally disrupted popular culture of the 90s. A never-ending stream of films have permeated the culture over the last thirty years including White Men Can't Jump, Coach Carter, Above the Rim, Space Jam and 2023's Air. And not forgetting the continued impact of basketball in inspiring a never-ending roadmap of collections with fashion's most credible brands: Supreme, Off-White, A Bathing Ape and Aime Leon Dore.

So, not only are we seeing Basketball become increasingly popular amongst Gen-Z Brits - it holds itself more broadly as one of the most culturally relevant sports in the world. Surely, then, brands are clamoring to invest in and occupy this space, right? Wrong.

In fact, it has been widely reported how basketball, in spite of being equal-second most popular sport to play in the UK, is one of the most underfunded. According to the Guardian, previously, basketball received significantly less funding per participant when compared to other sports like rugby or cricket. Lack of funding at a professional level makes it near impossible to incentivise talented British players to stay in the UK, where teams and fans could grow around them. The frustration this engenders in British players was captured by a teenage interviewee in the 2023 short film ‘Crossover’:

“Everyone thinks that, in order to succeed at basketball, you have to go to the US, or there's no way out, really. Which I think is sad because the UK has a lot of good ballers. It's just that there's no funding, and no one really cares.”

In many passions, the phenomenon of Fancom feels like a newly emerging behaviour but in basketball, it exists by necessity. As a result, it comes ready-made with hyper-engaged communities, led by passionate people who believe in the opportunity of the sport, the culture that surrounds it, and the positive impact it can have. To name but a few strands,

there's player teams, pick-up scenes, the 3x3 movement (also an Olympic event this year), BBL fans, and also the rapid proliferation of women, trans and non-binary basketball clubs like Hackney Rebels, providing a safe space for people to come and ball.

Apps like GameOn provide a platform for anyone who wants to organize “a run” to find players, and vice versa. This has created a thriving community of ballers that not only gives people a way to play, but is proving especially important in helping newcomers to the UK find a place to play ball and connect with like-minded others.

Clapham Common's FIBA-regulation basketball court was unleashed on South London, a collaboration between Foot Locker, the NBA, Basketball England, and the Hoopsfix Foundation. Thanks to this work and investment, a run-down space has become a destination for London-based ballers, where competitions and events take place, and an active pick-up scene now exists.

The cultural impact of basketball on the community is also a critical play. From year-round basketball and education programs for young people like Hoops4Health and Carry a Basketball, Not a Blade - the positive impact basketball can have on young people's wellbeing saw the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Basketball conclude there was “no more efficient sporting vehicle than basketball to improve outcomes for individuals and communities.”

When it comes to Fancom, basketball is no joke, and it's time for a change in the level of brand (and institutional) support it receives.

It's time to stop holding it back.

NO MORE

TICK-BOX *practices*

by **Bukola Garry**
Head of Cultural Impact



The last 20 years has seen brands miss out on a huge segment of fans.

Labelled as ‘underrepresented’, this intersectional segment of fans is, in fact, THE most influential in defining culture.

It represents a multitude of identities responsible for some of the most influential subculture movements in history, that today stand as global phenomena across multiple passions.

For example, the emergence of Ballroom Culture is one of the most significant platforms of resistance and expression within the queer community impacting music, fashion, sports and entertainment. Ball is responsible for cultural mega-moments such as the 2019 Met Gala ‘Camp Notes on Fashion’ and 2023 Renaissance Tour landscape, as well as the rise of influencers such as Omari Mizrahi, Dashaun Wesley Basquiat and Leiomy Maldonado.

These powerhouse fans are constantly carving out new methods of exploration, driving innovation across the passions space and becoming points of inspiration for the artists, athletes, and celebrities they love.

However, their value is hidden by homogenous mass-audience targeting and the word...fandom. Inherently un-inclusive, with inflexible structures, entry points and rules that limit who and how fans engage with the things they love.

If brands want to drive commercial value, be future-proof, and speak to the present state of play, they need to understand Fancom – communities of expectant fans, unapologetic in their self-expression, and together, indulging in their multifaceted-ness.

That’s where we step in.

Of course, there are always the exceptions with some brands already showing their proactive prowess by capturing the hearts, minds, and pounds of the most niche and nuanced fans. And luckily, the ‘some’ are brands we get to work with.

To name drop a few...

Absolut – We centred queerness and the individual expressions of a community and those adjacent to it to tell one singular and powerful message- we’re ‘Born to Mix’. It would have been easy to make this solely about casting, but instead we made the process about community, valuing the integrity and direction of queer artists across the entirety of the campaign process. This resulted in a story that resonated to the masses and made a dent in culture (oh, and won some awards).

Ballantine’s – The re-emergence from the pandemic surfaced a level of discrimination on dancefloors like never before. Safety for marginalised people was at risk. Ballantine’s leaned on their legacy of representing local music cultures and commissioned ‘Resetting the Dancefloor’, a report that gave voice to those impacted to empower and fund them to find solutions. They didn’t build a campaign around intention, they opted for action, and it paid off.

This is what we call a humble brag.

BUT, we can always do better.

The new state of fans is an empowered one. They no longer play by the unequitable rules set by past fandoms. They don’t and won’t settle for secondary, after thought, tier-two experiences. Afterall, we’re not talking about hobbies (a dirty word for any true fan), we’re talking about passions. How do I love thee, let me count the ways!

Fancom is a signifier of who they are as much as what they love. Fancom is their identity. My Fancom, my rules!

You get it.

Campaigns that reflect Fancom demand more inclusive and intersectional thinking. It means asking more questions to more people about more things. It means shifting away from fixed sets of demographics and mining for more personalised, niche insights that prevent unnecessary caricatures of who we think diverse fans are. Because we know who they actually are – the bias blinkers are off.

Fancoms are faithful, but unforgiving, so getting it wrong isn’t really an option. Brands can’t afford to be tentative in their approach.

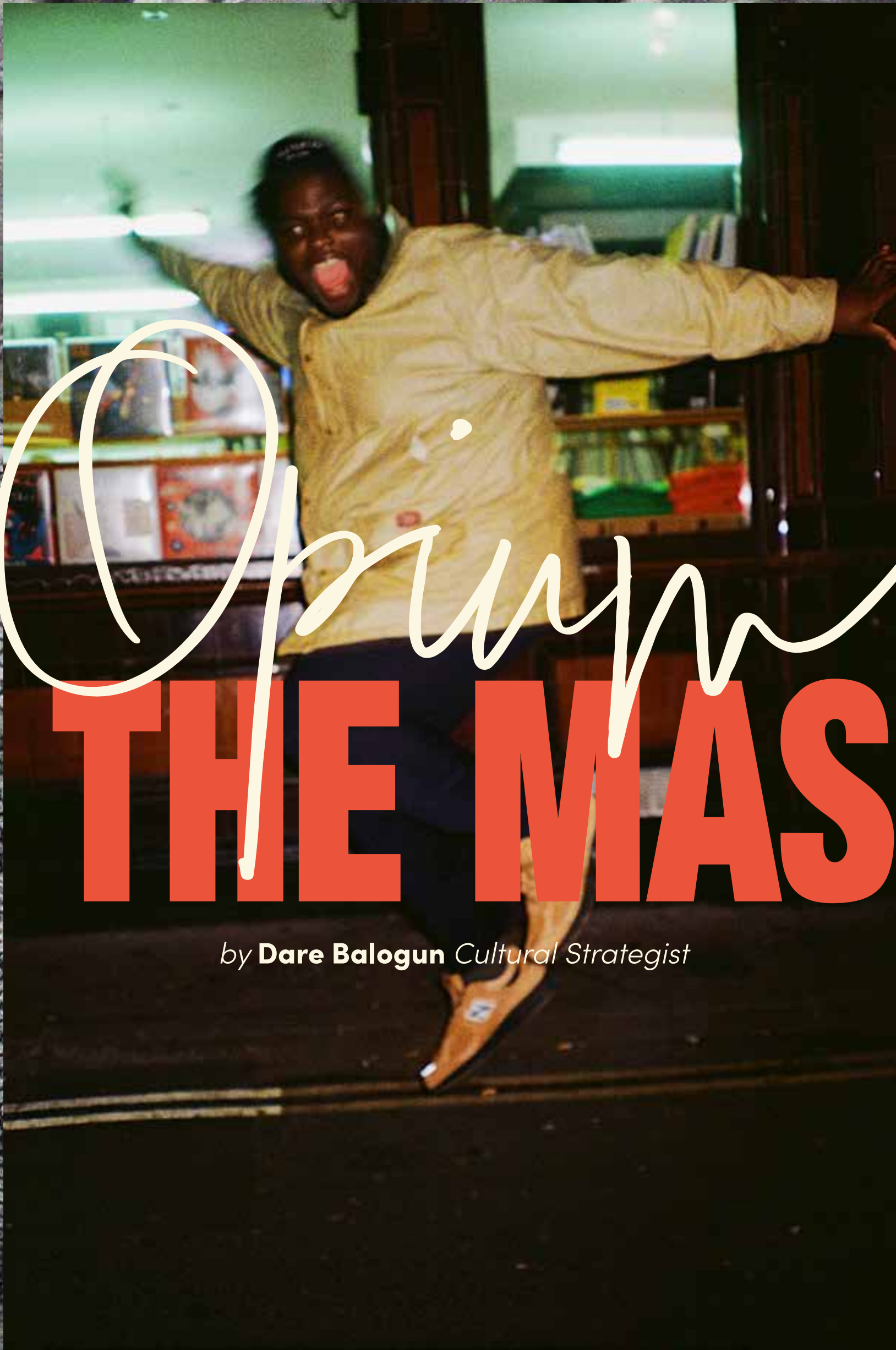
“FANCOM IS THEIR IDENTITY. MY FANCOM, MY RULES!,,”

We see our role as to partner with brands to maximise the opportunities within fan communities and ensure the work we do together is credible. **Our new approach will allow us to measure cultural impact as well as commercial impact. A step change from just ‘feels’ to ‘facts’ to demonstrate how our campaigns are making passions more inclusive.**

The role therefore for brands is to respond to the fan community call and be their platform for expression. Showing up so they can show out, for the things they love.

Here’s a list of Fancoms worth exploring:

1. Swim Dem – a community that aims to get more people swimming, make the sport more inclusive, less solitary and a lot more social.
2. Black Girls Skate – a community that amplifies skaters across the Black diaspora with skating activities that include skateboarding, longboarding, roller skating and wcmx.
3. The Black Girl Gamers – a community heightening Black Women’s voices and creating safety in gaming.



Prism FOR THE MASSES

by Dare Balogun Cultural Strategist

There used to be a time where the punk rockers wore all black and appeared to be scary to grannies, ravers were resplendent in bucket hats and fluorescent tracksuits and you could only catch a glimpse of the mods' suits as they zoomed past on their vespas - all either fighting or ignoring each other, living blissfully unaware in their respective scene.

Now music fans can be split simply into two clear sects - mainstream (lame)/ discerning (cool).

Mainstream fans engage with music on a surface level, listening to their favourite artists, going to the occasional gig, but it's extremely monolithic. The relationship they have with music is individual, it's just them and the artist. Their motivation to discover new music outside of their bubble is little to none, and their tastes rarely change.

“THE NEW MUSIC COMMUNITY IS A TOOL IN AND OF ITSELF TO REACH NEW AUDIENCES,”

The discerning fan is cooler than the mainstream fan because, for them, their music taste is part of their individuality. They make this clear in their behaviour; they are open to discovering new artists and want to expose new music to their circle.

Their favourite artists and genres often change, and when they develop a deep affinity with a specific genre, they don't engage as a mainstream fan, they go so much further. They want to participate more than just going to gigs, rather, they adopt the entire aesthetic of artists, producers, and notable figures within these genres, aspiring to be part of something bigger than just them and the artist - community.

These music communities aren't necessarily dictated by a specific genre or artist, but rather, the shared qualities of the individuals. This can be witnessed in the last couple of years as we've seen the rise of micro-genres - increasingly specific styles of music that sit within existing genres. There's Drift Phonk - a moody blend of trap, hip-hop, vaporwave and dubstep, originating in Memphis but resurging in Russia; Jersey Drill - a club focused style of Drill from Newark popularised by its chipmunk vocals and dance moves; and Amapiano - arguably now a genre in and of itself, an evolution of SA deep house and kwaito, taking the South African music scene global.

These genres aren't only defined by the traditional musical elements - rhythm, tempo, instrumentation - but so much more; identity, culture, language, location, heritage, behaviours - the same signifiers that define communities.

Take Opium for instance, the genre named after Playboi Carti's record label and creative agency with a cult-like fan base. Musically, artists both within and outside the label share a similar sound - think Ken Carson, Destroy Lonely and Yeat with their dark gritty synths on rage beats reminiscent of the 80's post-punk era. At the same time, these artists embody the sound in the way they dress and present themselves: with a black, heavy metal, non-conformist aesthetic, and their fans do the same, with countless tutorials on TikTok on how to pull together an Opium-type-fit.

Although the Opium aesthetic is associated with rebellion, self-expression, and individuality, participating in it offers fans to be part of a tight-knit community, pushing engagement to almost manic-levels that both cultural and consumer brands can only aspire to. Fans quite literally explode when an Opium artist

releases new music, posting constantly online in the hope of getting validation from their heroes (the famed Carti repost).

The discerning fan is constantly pulling themes from their communities, in order to continue to build and showcase their personality. They aren't a part of a single community but of many, participating in each in different ways and to different extents, all laddering up to construct a single highly individualistic music taste.

Due to this, the discerning fan doesn't make up the majority of any core music fanbase, but a minority, the glowing example of what fan engagement can be. And this, for me, is an exciting opportunity for brands. **Traditionally, commercial partners have normally tapped an artist or collective to reach their fanbase, but now brands can use fans themselves to speak to a wider audience.**

Wanting to belong to a community, to feel like you are part of something bigger than you, is a universal human feeling, and for brands to have not an artist, but rather a community endorse and promote them is powerful... and it's happening. Opium for instance already has brands that have become central to the aesthetic (think Rick Owens, Balenciaga) and Ballantine's will always be associated with the rise of Amapiano, being one of the first brands to showcase the genre to a global audience with Boiler Room.

The new music community is a tool in and of itself to reach new audiences, and the best brands are those that don't only rely on traditional artists' endorsements (which can feel forced), but rather work with the community to endorse and therefore elevate their brands - moving from relevant for the consumer, to relevant for the culture.

Brands communicating with audiences through fan communities rather than simply through artists is how fandom is elevated to Fancom.

“BRANDS COMMUNICATING WITH AUDIENCES THROUGH FAN COMMUNITIES RATHER THAN SIMPLY THROUGH ARTISTS IS HOW FANDOM IS ELEVATED TO FANCOM,,”

Dave



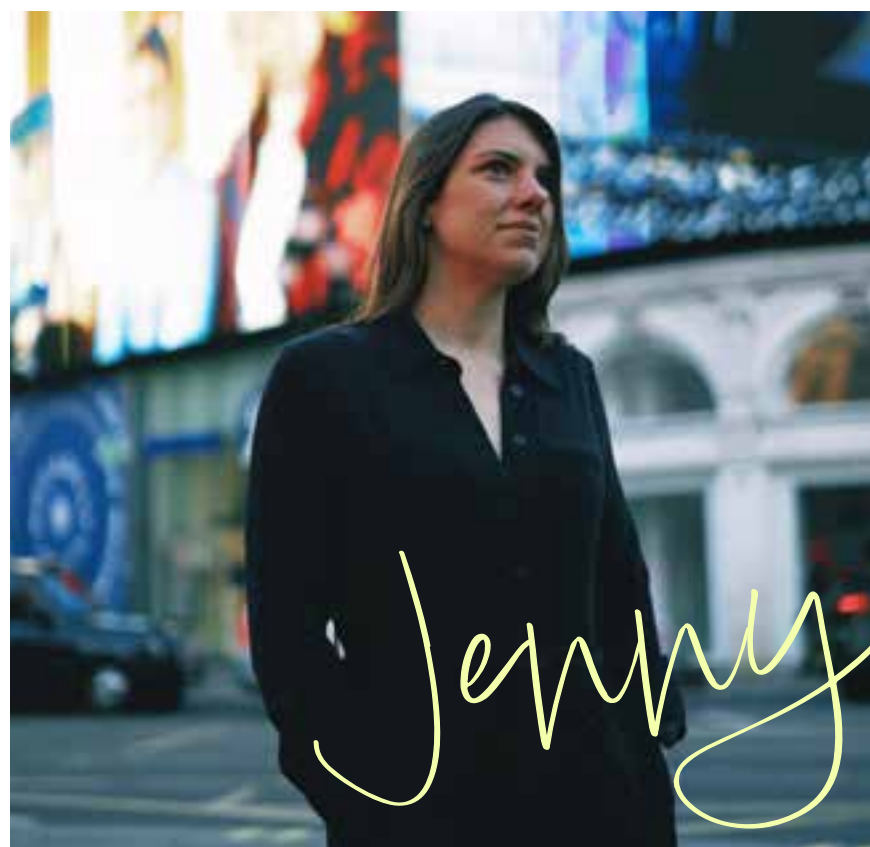
**TIME
TO RIP
UP THE**

Football Marketing

RULE BOOK

by **Jenny Mitton** Managing Partner, Sport





“WOMEN’S FOOTBALL ISN’T A RECENT TREND,”

Boxing Day football in Liverpool. 53,000 fans pack out Goodison Park. 14,000 away fans outside, prevented from entering. The whistle blows and the crowd roars. A Premier League fixture? No. It’s Dick, Kerr Ladies vs St Helen’s Ladies. And it’s 1920.

Women’s football isn’t a recent trend. Over 100 years ago communities were coalescing around women’s football.

Less than a year after this ground-breaking match, women’s football was banned in England until 1971. Overnight the women’s game retreated into the shadows for 50 years, but a small determined few kept the flame alight.

But this isn’t the end of our story, it’s just the beginning. Fast forward 50 years and women’s football is today, one of, if not the most exciting space for brands to connect with consumers through sport.

While women’s football is frequently used as a platform to showcase a brand’s dedication to equality, delving into the intricacies of the women’s football fan community (Fancom) is key to unlocking revenue opportunities for brands.

Women’s Football Fancom is evolving at speed, shows significant commercial potential and is set to transform the face of football and perhaps even society in the UK (Look away now Joey Barton).

Don’t take our word for it. In 2023 Harvard Business Review reported: “As a market, women represent an opportunity bigger than China and India combined. They control \$20 trillion in consumer spending. Women drive the world economy, in fact. Yet most companies do a remarkably poor job of serving them.”

The economic and commercial impact of the Barbie movie, along with the success of Taylor Swift and Beyoncé’s tours, clearly demonstrates the strategic leverage gained by resonating with and empowering a female audience.

The private equity being injected into the sector gives us the biggest clue to the potential for women’s football; these enterprises are solely focused on maximising returns on their investments. They’re not in the game for doing the ‘right thing.’

Victoire Cogevina Reynal, the founder of Mercury 13, an investment group focussed solely on women’s football teams, is clear on why her group are setting out to invest over £100M in the space and what needs to be done to engage this emerging high value audience: “Women are going to become the new consumer of football. How do we adapt to that and rethink everything from scratch. Because really everything needs to be rethought from scratch. I’ve been a football fan my whole life, yet I don’t feel like a football club has ever spoken to me. Football has been developed, sold and marketed for men for 100 years. What does it mean to include women into the sport?”

So, are you ready to make impact for your brand? Of course you are. On the right are three ways to not only be part of women’s football, but to actually help shape its Fancom and become ingrained in its culture as, in our view, this is where the magic (and commercial impact) happens.

1. THE PLACES

It was only last year the attendance record set during the Dick, Kerr Ladies’ game was surpassed at Arsenal. It may have taken 100 years to get to this point, but now filling men’s stadiums for women’s games is steadily becoming the norm.

The Financial Times reported that men’s football fans on average only spend £2 (up to a maximum of £16) in stadia on matchday. Its broadcast deals driving revenue, not fans’ spending power.

In women’s football brands have the opportunity to flip this model on its head.

Creating a space that services, engages and is a welcoming space for women’s football Fancom will drive revenue. From pop-up shops and sportswear collaborations to premium food and drink, the opportunities are endless.

2. THE FACES

Women’s football Fancom is different to the men’s game. And it’s not just about a difference in gender.

80% of tickets sold at the UEFA Women’s Euro England 2022 general sale were to fans not on the FA or UEFA’s databases. They were fans new to football altogether.

This audience is more diverse and younger than in the men’s game so women’s football offers an opportunity to get right to the heart of Gen-Z. This is why we’re witnessing an influx of FMCG brands such as Unilever coming into the space.

Creating a space for all fans is key for engaging this Fancom. Brands who serve different communities can make instant impact – it’s not that these communities don’t enjoy sport, they’ve just not been made to feel welcome in the men’s game. Brands have the power to change this in women’s football.

Just think where we’ll be in 50 years time.

3. THE NEW AGES

As Victoire Cogevina Reynal points out, when we actively look to cater for this new audience, then we’ll see change.

Research from the Women’s Sports Trust tells us this audience is malleable. With 60% seeking a variety of new experiences, brands can play an active part in shaping women’s football Fancom and defining that experience.

Rip-up the rule book. It’s time for marketers to get comfortable with being uncomfortable. Because only then are we going to see change. Success shouldn’t be benchmarked against how we’ve marketed the men’s game. We need to build campaigns that serve this new and evolving audience.

So, while women’s football is the progressive start-up to the men’s commercial giant, it’s only going in one direction. Savvy brands with insight into the intricacies of this Fancom stand to profit from its continuous ascent.

“LEADING THE CHARGE IN ENGLAND IS Barclays”





JUST DON'T

call it

FANCORE

by **Damola Akinsola** Cultural Creative Strategist

While it might not be common to label yourself as a 'fashion fan', those who instead might admit they are 'into fashion' still share some of the core experiences you'd expect from those that are part of ardent football or music fandoms. These groups of fashion followers have probably still spent plenty of time in lengthy store queues, spent hundreds on city-centre travel, and if they don't quite have the industry contacts to make it down to the IRL shows and galas, will still sit at home scrolling through the highlights, flicking through the 'best dressed' articles and listening to all the internet opinions. Long story short, they're obviously still fans.

“PEOPLE JUST WANT TO KNOW WHAT THE LATEST VIRAL TREND IS,”

But it's important to remember that today, fashion 'fan' behaviour is markedly different from 10 years ago when kids got their fashion knowledge from the lyrics to ASAP Rocky's Fashion Killa, and significantly more so from two decades ago when print magazines were the only way to hear about the SS Céline show. In 2024, engagement with fashion in general is a lot less serious... maybe even a lot less pretentious. **No one cares if you can cite archive 1998 Jean Paul Gaultier pieces, people just want to know what the latest viral trend is.**

When examining modern internet culture and social media more specifically, the freedom to openly communicate has made space for a large cohort of new voices and stakeholders within the fashion conversation at large. Consequently, the way young people talk about fashion – at least online – has evolved, and continues to do so, at a rate one can barely keep up with.

We've had 'stealth wealth'; 'eclectic grandpa' has already been coined just days into the new year, and who can forget – as much as I try – the many, many different 'cores' that have flooded the past couple of years. This new way of talking about fashion has cultivated a much less intimidating, much less exclusive environment, and has successfully opened the conversation to a wider, more diverse audience.

Today, the playful internet dialogue has significantly lowered the barriers to entry into fashion discourse and, critically, accessibility into the space has grown. As a result, the many people engaging with micro-trends have built the foundations for entire subcultures to grow. Not only do they present stylistic guidelines to an audience yearning to find their fashion identity, but these subcultures embody both the social and

cultural interests of disparate audiences, creating a sense of belonging and, importantly, a sense of community.

Take blokecore, for example, a trend which has been heavily inspired by 80s and 90s football terrace culture and can be easily identified with the sight of vintage replica shirts and adidas Sambas on foot. However, beyond this physical aesthetic is a collection of people who are engaging in the comment sections of the same Instagram accounts, or can be found at the same kind of pubs on a Saturday evening, and can even be overheard chatting about the latest Wales Bonner collab while drinking the same kind of beer (Heineken of course).

This is 2024's definition of a fashion fan: **No longer must you have studied at Central Saint Martins; you now just need to get involved in the conversation. In fact, you really just need to know that Zara does the best dupe for the Miu Miu ballet flat and Epping forest is where you'll find all your gorpcore girlies on a Sunday.**



Daw

Fashion has transcended 'fandom'. It is no longer in the hands of big fashion houses and entities to cultivate fandom. Now, fan-like engagement is in the hands of these new subcultures and their emerging communities. Not only can you see the significance of this dynamic through the comedic response of Instagram meme pages like @socks_house_meeting, but even major fashion retailers like @ssense have started to adopt a tongue-in-cheek visual identity, as well as using a language that specifically appeals to these groups.

The space is changing from the inside-out. We can all now join an Instagram page and be part of a community- laughing at a meme makes you part of that scene. Today, the consumer is in charge of their destiny. So even in fashion, what we might once have considered fandom has now, demonstrably, moved into the territory of Fancom.



LET fans

DO THE TALKING

by **Emma Cockbill** Senior Social Strategy Director



Social 2.0 was all about showmanship, hot dog legs and curating connections outside of your network. Likes and followers become “the social currency”. Like any adolescence, this era was not without its issues. It created anxiety, jealousy, and fear that we were constantly missing out. We’d compare ourselves to the lives of the Kardashians and influencers who went on mini-breaks at the frequency we put the bins out. Brands and influencers cashed in. It became a pay-to-play space. The titans of social were happy.

Social 3.0 is up for discussion, however as we tiptoe into the age of social media maturity we’ve moved towards community – true community. Social 2.0 saw brands broadcasting in a one-dimensional way. Dialogue with consumers and community came from leveraging UGC and working with influencers with a tight brief. In the age of social 3.0, this won’t cut it.

Brands need to give their fans main character energy. Take the Stanley cup. A brand with 873k followers yet with 99.2 million views on the tag #StanleyCups. This doesn’t even account for the number of videos featuring a “beloved” cup(s). They let their audience mould, craft, and play with the product – they let their audience be that girl or guy.

“BRANDS NEED TO GIVE THEIR FANS MAIN CHARACTER ENERGY.”

2024 is set to be the first year where the attention economy may no longer be purely funded by advertising. In an age of ad fatigue, advertisers and platforms are being held accountable for delivering bad ads at a high frequency. So much so, that people are willing to pay a subscription to opt out. This will create an exciting tension. Owned and earned strategies will need to step up. Playing in the passions space will be an integral approach to connect with audiences (on their terms).

When Prometheus stole fire from the gods and gave it to us mere mortals, he unleashed new powers to humanity. The rise of social media draws some similarities to this mythological story, mirroring a transformative shift in the power dynamic and giving a platform to those who haven’t previously had one. Small embers have the potential to cause large flames. Today’s fans act like these embers. They can make and break brands. They’re curators, taste makers, critics and advocates. Collectively they congregate to create huge heatmaps of conversation and opinion. If brands play well these embers can spark passion, if they navigate it wrongly, the embers become destructive.

In the space of less than 20 years, social media, like Taylor Swift, has already experienced eras. As we’ve matured into the platforms, or indeed completely grown up with them, the landscape has changed.

Social 1.0 was built around Facebook, photo galleries and close networks. It was the age of grainy digital camera uploads and brands having an unprecedented opportunity to communicate creatively with consumers (for free). A wild west of content, but a time of innocence.

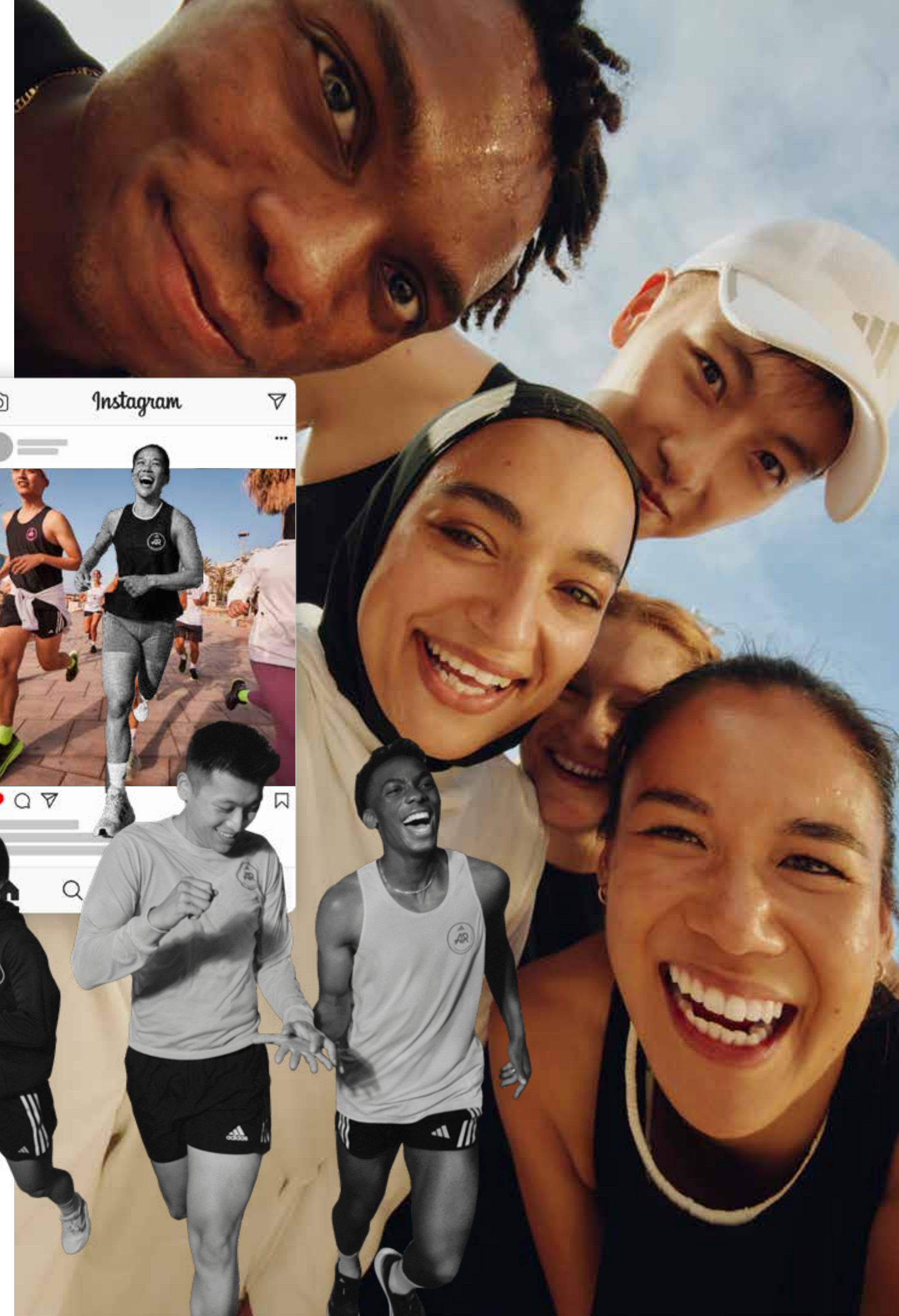
With adidas, we work to build and celebrate the largest global running community that embodies the sentiment that “every pace has a place”. Building brand comms around a passion for running opens avenues for brands that would otherwise be off limits. Fuelling and facilitating their passions helps adidas Runners build a familiarity and purpose within their community.

Web 3.0, decentralisation, the metaverse and AI often get banded around with scratched heads and ambiguity about what this will look like. One core theme within these innovations is that we’re moving towards a shifting paradigm where the audience take the wheel to explore and shape their interests.

We can get a taste of this now. There are spaces online where people engage, explore, and influence their passions in a more anonymous way. Nothing is too niche. Examples of this are platforms like Discord and Reddit, in which anonymity is available to all. Interactions on these sites are shaped around thematic communities - from Formula One to skincare, there’s something for everyone.

In 2023, Meta reported that they saw more engagement in DMs rather than in feeds, which is perhaps driving them to push Whatsapp communities. The big question brands need to ask before they throw themselves into this space is how they can make this an engaging space? Hint, hint... for most brands it’s not by only talking about yourself.

For now, it seems there’s a tension between being TikTok famous and hiding away in more anonymous spaces of the internet. **As marketers come to grips with new era of social, it’s clear that we can’t take people’s attention for granted anymore. Connect with what they love, let the fans do the talking and shift the approach from Fandom to Fancom.**



The image is a composite of two photographs. On the left, a man in a blue suit is falling from a tree, looking surprised with his mouth open. On the right, a man in a white tuxedo with a black lapel stands in a garden, looking directly at the camera with his hands clasped. The background of the right side of the image is a dark, textured grey.

THE *Rise* AND *Rise* OF TV

**THE POWER OF THE
SMALL SCREEN TO
DRIVE BIG COMMUNITY**

by **Lois Kettlewell**
Managing Partner, Entertainment



Love

The news cycle of recent weeks alone can attest to the power of TV.

More than nine million viewers have tuned in to Mr Bates vs the Post Office, making it ITV's most successful new drama in three years. It is a story of horrific misjustice; a story of innocent people driven to financial and reputational ruin, and in some cases suicide and death.

Only, it is not fiction.

The British Post Office Scandal, or Horizon Scandal, is now regarded as one of the biggest in British history... thanks to a TV drama. As a result, 1.2m signatures took the story from the small screen to the Houses of Parliament.

TV is a superpower.

It can be a force for positive change, bring issues to light and drive important debate, but it can also bring communities, even strangers, together.

From obsessing about Succession to sharing a fancy of Fleabag's Hot Priest, discussing which Love Island contestant is truly genuine, or reliving THAT episode in The Bear Series 2 (YKYK), TV can trigger real emotion and create shared moments between people.

We managed the Must-See Moment audience award for the Virgin Media TV BAFTAs 2017 - 2022 and it was all about the power of crafted moments; the laugh-out-loud and cliff-hanger moments on the box that drive national conversation. And it was always the stand-out award of the night. The nominees represented the moments you talked about over dinner, on Whatsapp groups and at the proverbial watercooler at work. **Talking about well-loved series makes us feel connected, like we belong. However, it has only been the last couple of years that anyone has really identified as "a TV fan".**

Music, football, film and more recently gaming have been the reigning passions, the sectors boasting mass audiences or so-called 'fandoms'. But for the first time in 10 years, video-based content is the biggest entertainment medium in the UK, with TV streaming up 10% - and it is all down to Netflix, Disney Plus, and Apple TV.

Fandom used to be epitomised by the big film or game franchises - Marvel, Harry Potter, Star Wars - and the universe built around them. Big money IPs meant movies, merch, games, toys, music and events like Comicon where like-minded fans met and bonded. These fans lived and breathed, collected and dressed up like the characters, and built their community of friends around a single mega property. I used to think it was wild, but this 'fanatical' behaviour is now synonymous with TV too.

Intense competition between streaming platforms means bigger budgets, bigger-name talent, and mega marketing campaigns; not to mention seriously good storytelling and

a never-ending choice of programmes across all genres. Combine all this with the plethora of media platforms through which to engage people - social media, mags, blogs, podcasts, fan pages, the list goes on - and you have a community for TV that is more engaged, more diverse and more accessible than film ever was.

Some TV shows are so popular, they now have their own universes. Fans connect and consume across multiple passion areas; be that music, literature, fashion, gaming or travel - or all of them. And that's where the real value lies.

There was a rise in readership for books adapted to limited series (Normal People, Nine Perfect Strangers); we see musicians make it big with songs in opening credits (Cold Little Heart from Michael Kiwanuka for Big Little Lies), and White Lotus drove a 300% increase in interest for Hawaii and Sicily. Searches featuring the word 'Euphoria' on Depop increased by over 345% month on month when season two was released; oh, and just last week, Jeremy Allen White from The Bear broke the internet modelling Calvin Klein tighty-whities.

TV brings together heavy metal fans with sci-fi geeks (Stranger Things); combines cooks and bookworms (Lessons in Chemistry), and it can be the glue between queer and cult - especially with a star like Ncuti Gatwa in both Sex Education (Eric) and as the 15th Doctor.

Gaming & TV have also never been so interchangeable. The Last of Us, first a popular video game, was one of the hit TV shows of 2023.

As TV has grown in scale, popularity and impact, it isn't even a fandom; it is Fancom - where the real opportunity for brands is to understand that communities of fans are far more multi-dimensional, multi-cultural, multi-passion and more open-minded than the homogenous 'fandom' suggests. Fancom is about intersectional fan-communities who coalesce across multiple passion points, and nowhere is 'Fancom' richer than in TV, IMO.

So, what if you are a Marvel fan, a West Wing fan and can't WAIT for the next season of White Lotus? Suppose you fancy Jeremy Allen White, Andrew Scott's Hot Priest AND Issa Rae... and admire every brand working with them (especially early adopters). And maybe you like adidas Gazelles, romance novels and travelling too.

Gone are the days of the one-dimensional fan, and we should be rid of the uniform mass audience term that is 'fandom'. Brands need to adopt a more sophisticated audience-targeting approach, and then apply creative that encourages communities to coalesce around a broad universe of their passions, because they are so ripe to do so.

If the impact of a single powerful TV show is anything to go by, get your brand strategy right and the Fancom will do the marketing for you.



"IF THE IMPACT OF A SINGLE POWERFUL TV SHOW IS ANYTHING TO GO BY, GET YOUR BRAND STRATEGY RIGHT AND THE FANCOM WILL DO THE MARKETING FOR YOU."

THE *New Rules* OF ENGAGEMENT

in Sport

by Neil Hopkins
Strategy Partner





Sport engages millions. Just under half of Britons describe themselves as fans of football, a quarter as fans of rugby union and a fifth as fans of cricket.

Sport defines people's lives. In the case of football, cricket and rugby fans, well over half consider that their chosen sport plays a greater role in defining them than their religion.

Sport sells. Nearly two-thirds of those same football, cricket and rugby fans tell us that they are more likely to purchase the products of a sponsor of their favourite team or favourite.

So sport attracts brands which campaign to engage these fans. And that's how sports marketing works.

But can it work more effectively? It can if it embraces an opportunity to develop a deeper, more nuanced understanding of fans.

There is no doubt that data has revolutionised sports organisations' understanding of their fans for their own benefit and, increasingly, that of their commercial partners.

But while data can tell us what people say they do and AI enables us to analyse real behaviour at scale there's a nagging sense that we have been missing a trick in terms of our understanding of how fans connect with each other.

To explore this blind spot, we need to recognise that the atomisation of sports rights across multiple platforms, dramatic generational changes in consumption of sports content, the pivotal role of social media in connecting people and the sheer volume of brand activity across sport mean the old rules of (fan) engagement are becoming obsolete.

It is increasingly difficult to drive meaningful engagement with large scale audiences (e.g. "football fans").

Instead, it's an absolute priority for brands to explore the ways fans are connecting on a micro level, coalescing and building communities that celebrate particular elements of their chosen sport.

This is at odds with cliched, one-size-fits-all analyses of sports fandom.

In fact, instead of talking about fandom, we talk about Fancom to describe the phenomenon of fans coalescing in distinct networks of communities and subcultures, often at the point where their devotion to sport intersects with another passions such as gaming, fashion or music.

Perhaps the first iteration of Fancom in sport existed at the intersection of football, fashion and music and is one whose abiding influence still echoes loudly through British street culture.

The football casual scene of the early 80s fused football with designer clobber, forming a fan movement that embraced fashion brands like Stone Island, CP Company, Lacoste, Sergio Tacchini, Fila and Ellesse.

But while originally driven by the principle of 'if you know you know', the sartorial influence of casual culture has become intrinsic to modern British street fashion.

adidas, footwear of choice for your discerning casual, has re-released en masse many of the shoes that defined the era – Sambas, Gazelles, Stan Smiths, Forest Hills – to fuel the growth of its Originals line.

“IT IS INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT TO DRIVE MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT WITH LARGE SCALE AUDIENCES,,

But, in recognition of the fragmentation of audiences into ever more discreet communities, adidas Spezial was created, a range specifically designed to appeal to the casual-minded that includes collaborations with the likes of CP Company (starring Luke Shaw of Manchester United), Liam Gallagher and New Order.

Even at 'masterbrand' level, adidas plays on the position it enjoys at the intersection of football, music and fashion. It recently released a collection inspired by its partnership with United and designed by Peter Saville, the designer responsible for the iconic record sleeves of fellow Mancunians New Order.

But exploring Fancom isn't just about the micro-targeting of consumers in existing passion spaces in a more nuanced way. There are opportunities for brands and sports organisations in driving new connections between passions and driving growth as a consequence.

The NFL recognises that in the UK, as a non-endemic sport, an understanding of fan networks and communities in those passions points it has the potential to intersect with is pivotal to its future growth.

So, is it developing partnerships with brands and organisations that play a central role in the subcultures of passions such as music, fashion, food and gaming as these are areas where the NFL itself has real credibility, albeit Stateside.

Fancom is not purely about recognising where and how fan communities and networks are emerging. It is also about acknowledging that these fans are leveraging these connections to take more ownership of their passions.

Social media has given everybody a voice – to celebrate, to connect, to protest – and this has enabled fan communities to demand their voices be heard.

And that's the key difference with the devoted support that characterised traditional fandom.

Around half of football, rugby and cricket fans expect their favourite teams or players to help their community or support for the causes they care about and over a third demand that they act in line with their ethical or moral view.

The rules of fan engagement in sport have changed.

Fandom has given way to Fancom.



DIGITAL COMMUNITIES

ARE TRANSFORMING

activism

by **Shanice Dover** Social Account Director



“TO DRIVE MEANINGFUL CHANGE IN PASSION AREAS, BRANDS COLLABORATING WITH COMMUNITIES MUST VALUE THEM AS PARTNERS,”

The world is in a difficult place; perhaps it always has been. However, the difference between how we learn and engage with inequality has been drastically reshaped by our social feeds.

It may seem like posting about your passions is a world away from posting about your politics, but in today's social landscape, users embrace the multiplicity of intersecting interests. They aren't precious about maintaining an image that's defined by one thing and would rather showcase themselves earnestly and with nuance. Advocacy plays a huge role in this, helping users employ their online personas to embrace a multitude of interests, including things that change the world.

Interacting with other people who reflect your values, in addition to your passions, is part of the richness of 'Fancom' online. What's even richer, is acknowledging the power that social interaction has to drive new opinion, encourage fans to embrace new interests or join communities they would otherwise be unaware of.

With the limits of physical location no longer a barrier, the evolution of social channels has allowed for fan spaces to grow in number and galvanise around a popular topic or social cause. This coincides with what feels like endless humanitarian issues and concerns filling our social feeds, leading communities to become more politically engaged. As a result, fans are harnessing their networks in more diverse ways. They are aware of their collective power and are using digital channels to recruit people into movements and to organise around social causes.

K-pop fans have rapidly gained traction in becoming one of the most influential Fancoms of the past five years. In 2020, they famously united to oppose Donald Trump, using TikTok and Twitter to request support from other fans of the genre to help disrupt Trump's Oklahoma rally. Though it can't be said for certain how much their strategy contributed to the rally's subsequent low attendance, just 19,000 people turned up to the event - less than a quarter of the expected figure.

For brands, there is a huge opportunity to connect online with audiences, and those adjacent communities, on the things they truly care about. As consumers become more conscious of who they spend their money with, it's essential to read the 'room' and to demonstrate social awareness.

adidas Runners 'With Women We Run' campaign exemplifies how brands can play an active role in amplifying purpose-led Fancom discussions. The 2022 launch of the program was followed by research from adidas that showed 92% of women are concerned for their safety when they go for a run. In response, they made a commitment to hold themselves accountable and challenged themselves and their global running community to become allies. This included partnering with charity partner White Ribbon, and hosting 245 With Women We Run events in its first year alone.

The conversation around gendered violence and its impacts on women's ability to engage with the sport isn't a new one, but by actively listening to concerns of their communities, adidas was able to create an initiative that spoke to purpose and passion and have pledged to build on this work as an ongoing commitment.



But make no mistake - tapping into Fancom-led movements shouldn't be viewed as an easy win for brands. They can rally like-minded online groups in significant numbers quickly, but they're a perceptive and vocal audience, and don't appreciate the co-opting of social issues without real action or intention.

For brands looking to drive meaningful change in the passion areas they operate within, they must collaborate with communities and value them as partners. **Embracing authentic conversations happening on a peer-to-peer level is the best way to build an understanding of what matters most to communities, and to be able to contribute in valuable ways.**

Fans have continuously proven their impact in various spaces, and social impact spaces are no different. With social media at their disposal, they'll make sure their demands are heard - the only question for brands is are you listening, and how can you help to amplify their voices?



The Gamer

THE BIGGEST MYTH IN GAMING



HOW SHOULD BRANDS ACTUALLY TALK TO VIDEO GAME COMMUNITIES?

by **Hannah Mckeown**
Junior Strategist



Video gaming is a rapidly growing passion area but are we speaking to its fans in the most effective way?

There are over 51 million gamers in the UK and with 88% of young people (16-24) playing video games and an almost equal gender split, it's a highly appealing passion area for brands to target. However, as they jump into the world of gaming, many brands target 'the gamer' as a homogenous group and fail to get any real, long-term association with fans as a consequence.

The truth is that 'the gamer' does not exist. It's easy to get intimidated by the scale and intricacy of gaming communities, but until we start thinking of gaming fans as multiple Fancoms- assembling communities far more complex than a homogenous group- brands run the risk of failing to engage, or simply perpetuating stereotypes that many gaming communities are fighting against. A gamer isn't a single man in his basement, teenager in their bedroom, or a young child on their iPad in a restaurant - it's all of them and more.

Within other passion areas, we don't speak to just 'music fans' or 'sports fans', we tap into lovers of drum and bass, hip hop, football or rugby and often more discrete communities within those categories. Targeting video game fans is no different.

The best example of an emerging community in the past few years is the cosy (or cozy) gamers, which grew in popularity during lockdown. Cosy gamers take a slower, more relaxed pace to gaming, unlike those who participate in other popular genres such as battle royales. They usually opt for a single player experience, yet still connect with other cosy gamers on social media to share their progress and recommendations. You wouldn't target a cosy gamer with an esports tournament, just as you wouldn't try to appeal to a classical music fan with a rap battle.

What about the games? Surely partnering with a game is the best way to reach game fans?

All great or anticipated games have rich communities backing them, and being associated with the biggest IP can create a halo effect around a brand when executed well. But which game? A MMO, RPG, Sport, Strategy, Simulator, Shooter, Rhythm, AAA or indie? There are more games than ever being released, so taking time to consider what type of community will resonate with the message you're trying to communicate will achieve so much more than immediately knocking on the doors of Call of Duty or EAFC.

Given gaming's technology-orientated nature, gamers are ahead of the curve when it comes to digital platforms. Community-driven sites such as Discord, Twitch and Reddit leverage gaming culture within their content. These are vast and global, with countless groups, channels and livestreamers dedicated to niche interests from walking simulators to large scale general groups, such as r/gaming, the third largest subreddit with 39million members. These groups are entirely fan-created, moderated and funded and offer a peek into the future of where other passions are headed with Fancom.

Targeting these communities where they show up online is one way to cut through- Twitch is a platform that has hundreds of creator partners to work with, all with their own communities who trust their recommendations more than any other medium. Giving back and aiding these Fancoms is also an effective way to build reputation in gaming, so there is an opportunity for brands to support the owners and staff of community pages, who usually volunteer for free.

While social media platforms and their influencers are a familiar space, many games themselves represent huge social spaces. World of Warcraft, Runescape, Rust and VRChat were creating these spaces for gamers to meet virtually well before the word metaverse had ever been uttered. The rise in MMOs (massively multiplayer online games) with low barriers to entry such as Roblox and Fortnite Creative Mode opens the space up to a wider range of people with more straightforward brand integration. Brands have already started taking advantage of this opportunity, offering players the chance to meet up in specially-created spaces in these games.

Once they have found their desired community in gaming, brands need to keep in mind the longevity of their campaign. Gaming fans are passionate about their communities. It's their space on the internet and they exercise ownership over it. Therefore, any brand will be met with hesitancy and suspicion when first entering their space.

Working with Outside Xbox and Virgin Media, we saw how having a genuine and authentic approach could win over a sceptical audience. We held the Outside Xbox team livestream from the branded gaming venue: Virgin Media Gamepad. After just a few months streaming in this way with increased frequency, viewership increased (+20%) and reception to streams has become overwhelmingly positive.

“MANY BRANDS TARGET ‘THE GAMER’ AS A HOMOGENOUS GROUP... THE TRUTH IS ‘THE GAMER’ DOES NOT EXIST,,



Gaming fans are naturally wary of marketing and companies that are too obviously trying to monetise the passion they love with micro-transactions, NFTs and cringe 'gamer bro' stereotyping. Amongst the naysaying, at its core, gaming fans want to shout about their community and have new ways to engage with what they love. **More than anything, these fans want their creators to do well and their games to be experienced by more people.**

Gaming is a valuable space for brands with its high engagement from Gen-Z, massive spending power, and loyalty to companies they love. It's time to tap into the wealth of gaming Fancoms with understanding, celebrating their nuances and matching the passionate energy they display.



Han

MUSIC fans AND stars



GOAT

NOW CONTROL THE NARRATIVE

by **Nicolas-Tyrell Scott** Senior Account Executive & Cultural Commentator



In previous eras, fans would expect solely music from a Whitney Houston or a Michael Jackson. However, fans now want more than just the CDs, MP3s or vinyls; they want all-encompassing universes and insight beyond the studio from artists. The advent of social media unlocked access to the biggest stars like never before, creating an insatiable demand for content outside of the music itself. It has fundamentally changed the landscape of music. The fans are the one calling the shots.

This expectation to be seen outside of album cycles, media appearances and red carpets became more pressing for music stars with the rise of platforms such as Twitter (and then Instagram and Snapchat). In the case of Twitter, for example, celebrities swarmed to the app in surges in 2009, in part due to an endorsement by Oprah. The access to them, outside of PR-orchestrated rollouts, meant that users were vying for personality, interaction, intimacy, and displays of individuality from stars.

Instagram's 2010 launch focused on a visual aesthetic, heightening the expectations across the following decade. With heavyweights such as Kim Kardashian flocking to the app by 2015, and the solidifying of 'the influencer' across multiple lifestyle verticals, musicians would eventually follow suit in how they both communicated to their fans — and now stans — and in how they utilised their brand as a product of consumerism.

Fans are now unapologetically leading artists. Whether artists realise or not, they've had to keep up with changing micro-trends, behaviours, and expectations from fans that aren't solely vested in the music alone.

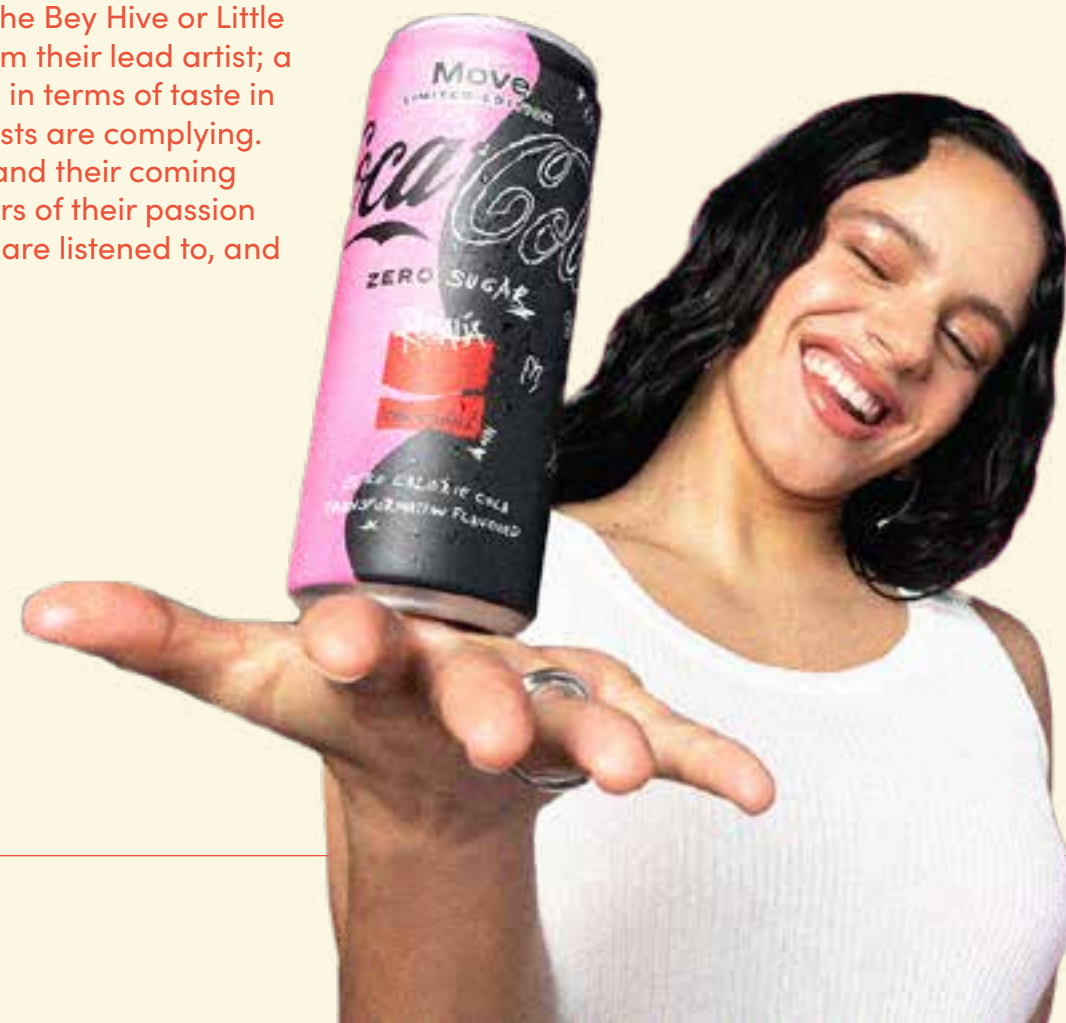
Fans are more diverse in their conversations, affiliations and in the way in which they communicate too. They have interests beyond broad layers like music or fashion, and in music specifically, can affiliate as the Bey Hive or Little Monsters. But they demand more from their lead artist; a point of view politically, socially, even in terms of taste in fashion brands or books, and the artists are complying. The relationship is driven by the fan and their coming together in communities as co-authors of their passion space- more engaged because they are listened to, and heard. We call this 'Fancom'.

Nic

At its most extreme, this relationship demands that artists have a point of view on the ways of the world, especially amongst younger millennials and Gen-Z audiences, who see activists sprouting from their demographic every month. Alongside Greta Thunberg's (14M+ on Instagram) we can see projects like Dua Lipa's Service 95 or NoName's Book Club speaking directly to clusters of their audiences that care about social advocacy and reading. Service 95 is an editorial platform that, as well as advising on lifestyle components such as travel, also leans heavily into social activism. Book Club meanwhile is a direct form of social activism liberating its audiences through its monthly recommended readings, which directly focus on Black and Indigenous authors.

Beyond socio-politics, artists have to be more nuanced and show more of themselves and their personalities too. It's partially why 360 deals exist- for labels to lean into as much of what an artist does inside of the booth as outside of it too.

“AUTHENTICITY HAS LED TO MORE BELIEVABLE PARTNERSHIPS,”



Throughout the pandemic, we saw artists demonstrate informed views on food and drink, a space where rappers have excelled. Take global rapper Saweetie, for example. Since her 2016 debut, the artist has spoken about food consistently, even initially using her channels to connect with fans through Mukbangs — a popular YouTube trend where creators eat while talking about various topics to their viewers. Saweetie's unconventional eating habits gained her wider exposure on social media and intrigue from audiences outside of her core audience. This has led to it becoming an entrenched talking point in her media appearances and interviews. Kevin Hart even mocked her habits in jest, during his Peacock-backed Hart to Heart series.

But Saweetie capitalised on her snack food and unconventional food combinations with a 2021 McDonald's 'Saweetie Meal' partnership. Leading with quirky combinations like fries in her Big Mac, a rehashed 'Saweetie and Sour' sauce, and more. Saweetie led with quirk and again monetised her sceptical food combinations for-profit and brand building. And the Fancom loved it.

Gaming is another vertical being leveraged in rap rollouts across 2023. Migos member Offset, as well as juggernaut rapper Nicki Minaj, joined Kai Cenat as intricate parts of their multifaceted album rollouts — one of the biggest Twitch streamers on the app with 8M+ followers. Both went viral with various memes, both within their fan audiences and beyond. Offset spent 24 hours on Kai Cenat's stream and played Scary Maze, harnessing his passion for gaming.

Artists and celebrities at large now understand the contemporary arena. It's not enough sometimes to simply exist and release music. Clusters of new-age talent understand the power of leaning into one's 360-degree personality outside of their direct craft and acknowledge that new fans expect and call for them to be present at the intersections of the things they are passionate about.

Brands across culture can lean into this, utilising authentic brand partnerships that feel topic-appropriate for musicians can help to welcome in new fans and authentically create cross-pollinating universes. Leveraging the era of personality and flair helps to build Fancom in culture at large.



“FANS ARE NOW UNAPOLOGETICALLY LEADING ARTISTS, WHETHER ARTISTS KNOW IT OR NOT.,”

M&C SAATCHI

SPORT & ENTERTAINMENT

The Passions Agency

We build Fancom through our strategic offer, Passion Pulse, coupled with our creative process, Heartbeat, measured through our bespoke cultural impact toolkit.

If you're interested in our services please get in touch:
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Proprietary data points conducted by M&C Saatchi Precision