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—日本のコミックイベント・スタッフのケーススタディー—

The Emergence of the Trans-participant in Media Convergence Society: A Case Study on Comic Event Staff in Japan

ルジラット・ヴィニットポン*

Rujirat Vinitphol*

1. Introduction

In the age of media convergence, various terminals such as notebooks, smartphones, iPad, and other mobile utilities have been developed and media have become embedded in our daily lives. Henry Jenkins (2006) explained *Media Convergence* as “a situation in which multiple media systems coexist and where media content flows fluidly across them” (p. 282) and suggested that the converge of the media provokes *Participatory Culture* which is a “culture in which fans and other consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content” (p. 290). Nowadays, people have more opportunity to express and share their opinions and work through various channels regardless of their professions. Consequently, the previously obvious distinction between producers and audience has become blurred. According to this phenomenon, the term *audience*, which sounds passive, seems to be obsolete and is being replaced by words like user, participant or consumer. Various novel terms has been proposed such as *Prosumer* by Alvin Toffler (1980) or *Producer* by Axel Bruns (2009) whilst Takahashi (2010) suggests that, rather than using a single term, we should adopt various different terms depending on the context. This research agrees with Takahashi that the critical issue is not only to redefine or create terminology but also to investigate people’s behavior.

Furthermore, among the active audiences, fans could be regarded as one of the prominent target groups in these last two decades. Various scholars have exemplified fan activities on the Internet: e.g. Andrejevic (2008) investigated the interactivity between producer and audience

*Graduate School of Interdisciplinary Information Studies

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on a famous TV show's bulletin board and Karpovich (2006) focused on the Beta Readers' activities in online fan fiction communities. The fact that the Internet has contributed a large network and space for the audience to participate is unarguable. However, before the emergence of the Internet, fans had already constructed their own creative spaces in the physical world to exchange ideas with others such as fanzines or fan activities (Bacon-Smith, 1992; Jenkins, 1992). Moreover, some of these still exist, and some like *Comic Market* (or *Comike* in short) – the world's largest comic event or the largest comic convention ever held in Japan, have even expanded more than hundreds times in terms of the number of general attendee participants (Shimotsuki, 2008).

On the one hand, in physical space, Japanese comic events have been settled for a long time. Since 1975, *Comic Market* (below: *Comike*), the first comic event, has been established for comic fans to trade their original or parody works. *Comike* started from a small-size event with 32 circles (sellers) and 700 general attendees. It then became the largest comic event in the world with 35,000 circles and more than 560,000 participants in total during the event which lasts for three days (as of Summer 2009). Contrary to its name, not only comics but also novels, music, games and other amateur works are traded at the event. Generally, there are two types of comic events. One is an *all-genre comic event* and the other one is an *only comic event*. The former is open to any genres of work and the latter is limited to one story or one genre. Furthermore, apart from costume players, who are not allowed to carry out costume-playing activities at an *original-only event* (i.e. parody-prohibited event), there are typically three common participation types at comic events: *general attendees*, *circles* (sellers) and *staff*.

On the other hand, in virtual space, websites related to comic events have been built. These started from bulletin boards, personal websites, web rings and web rankings, and then expanded to the web2.0 generation, including weblogs, twitter, SNS and video sharing websites. For example, comic event organizers have their own websites and some of them allow circles to submit their applications via the Internet. Besides, for circles, the Internet acts as an announcement board or a virtual shop to trade or communicate among participants. Using e-mail is faster and cheaper than snail mail, and writing a blog is quicker and less expensive than making a pamphlet. The comic event activities are gradually shifting from physical to virtual spaces.

There is no doubt that the Internet plays an important part in comic events and new

emergence issues on the virtual world are required to be investigated. However, the growth in the scale of comic events in the physical world cannot be ignored. As stated above, previous studies have tended to emphasize either physical or virtual space only so it is not clear how fans, active audience, utilize and behave in both spaces. In addition, among three typical participation types at comic events, *staff members* could be involved as enthusiastic devotees and representatives. Some of them work voluntarily while at the same time spend money as general attendees and sometimes trade their own works as members of circles. Hence, in this paper, the focus will be placed on Japanese comic events, which originally started from the physical space but have currently expanded to the virtual space, as a research fieldwork as well as the comic event staff as a target in order to explore and understand fans' behavior in the media convergence society environment.

2. Research Target

2.1 Comitia

Although *Comike* is prominent as the representative of the comic events in Japan, there are other small to large-scale events held across the country at 30 locations per week at minimum (based on a survey in May 2009)¹.

Comitia (full name: Comitia, the original independent comic exhibition; see <http://www.comitia.co.jp>) was started in 1984 and is a one-day comic event, held 4 times a year occupying from one to two halls of the Tokyo International Exhibition Center, the same venue as that of *Comike*, with somewhere between 2,000 and 3,500 circles and something in the region of 10,000 to 15,000 general attendees. As *Comitia* is an *original-only* comic event, all works except parodies are accepted regardless of genre. Unlike *Comike* which is admission-free, general attendees need to buy a *Comitia* catalogue (*Tia's Magazine*) that costs around 800 - 1,000 yen as an event pass. In addition, *Comitia* is using the dual management system like *Comike*, that is, an event is operated by collaborate work of volunteers and full-time employees. In August 2009, *Comitia* has 85 registered volunteer staff members with male: female ratio at 7:3 and average age around 35 years old. Moreover, the professions of the staff members vary from comic related to non-comic related jobs.

Since most of the past researches focused mainly on *Comike*, which belongs to the *all-genre* type and devotes most of circle spaces to parody works (see also Aida, 2004; Thorn 2004;

Sugiyama, 2006), the original genre and *only events* remain unexplored. Furthermore, according to this research's pre-survey, some staff members of *Comitia* also participate as staff participants in other comic events such as *Comike* or *Comic City*; therefore, behavior differentiation among comic events is also expected. Consequently, *Comitia*, the largest *original-only event* in Japan (as in 2008), is selected as the main topic of this paper for conducting a fieldwork and the focus will be placed on the staff participants at *Comitia* in order to explore their lived, embodied experiences of comic events.

2.2 The workflow of *Comitia* staff

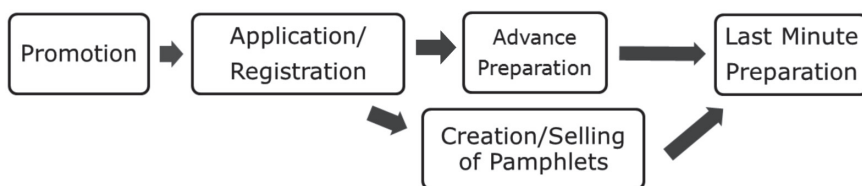


Fig. 1: *Comitia* staff work year round flowchart (before)



Fig. 2: *Comitia* staff work flowchart (event day)

Comitia preparation operates throughout the year and most of the work is done at the office (Fig. 1) rather than the event venue (Fig. 2). Staff members choose their available time via mail and participate in the tasks in which they are interested. They perform both clerical work at the office, such as data input or labeling letters, and manual tasks at the event, like carrying and arranging tables and chairs. Their responsibilities are either assigned by the full-time employees or chosen by themselves based on their own preference. One significant point of *Comitia* is a shift system in figure 2. By utilizing this system, staff members can use their free time to become a general attendee or circle on the event day.

3. Method

3.1 Data Collection

Data used in this research was obtained from ethnographic fieldwork consisting of both participant observation and interviews. First, overt participant observation as a member of *Comitia* staff was conducted for one year in 2009 in Tokyo, Osaka and Niigata Prefecture. This consisted of participation on 24 separate occasions, including work at events, office work and attendance at meetings or parties. Next, after half a year of participant observation, interviews were conducted with 12 staff members, six males and six females, with an average age of 35.1667 years and an average of 10.3 years of staff experience. Moreover, the profession of the interviewees vary from comic related (e.g. comic writers and publishing employees) to non-comic related jobs (e.g. government officers, IT workers and call center workers).

3.2 Interview: Graph writing and questionnaire

In order to ascertain the informant's lived, embodied experiences of comic events, data regarding life history and how much effort they had spent on the events are significant. However, during the observation phase prior to interviewing, the difficulty in recalling memory using only oral communication was found. Hence, this research designed a new method by including in the interview process questionnaires about the interviewee's Internet usage and two graph-drawing exercises: *Comic events life graph* and *Graph of amount of effort spent on the events*.

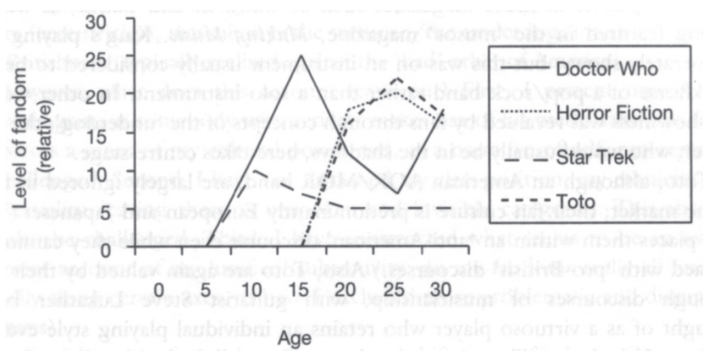


Fig. 3: Hills's graph of significant fandoms over time, with subjective sense of variable intensity (2002, p. 83)

This research applied Matt Hills's use of graphs for self-imaginings in autoethnography, a recent prominent method for fan research (2002, pp. 81-88). Generally autoethnography is

applied to the researcher's own experience as a way of reflecting on that experience from an academic perspective. Furthermore, Hills convinced fan scholars to be more concerned with multiple fandoms instead of emphasizing merely single fan culture. Additionally, he proposed "chart[ing] all one's objects of fandom, both past and present" as a means of understanding the autoethnographer's self-experience and exemplified two diagrams: the relation diagram and line graph (p. 82). In figure 3, Hills illustrated his own fandom experiences by charting a line graph between level of fandom and age.

This research however applied charting a line graph not to the researcher, as suggested in Hills's study, but the informants. Next, instead of drawing significant fandoms, three comic event participation types were drawn: black line as general attendee, small-dotted line as individual or member of a circle, and dashed line as member of staff². Moreover, the X indicates age, and the Y shows the affection level of each variable (see Fig. 4 (left)). In addition, for the X graph, informants are free to write any age they consider as the 'turning point' of their comic event life; for the Y graph, 'affection level' was explained as their level of fandom, love and attachment for each variable at a specific age.

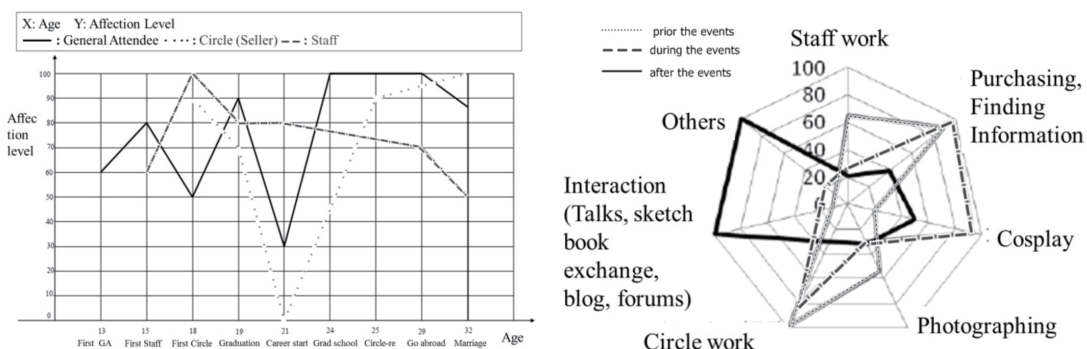


Fig. 4: Example of a comic events life graph (Left)
Example of a radar graph showing amount of effort spent on the comic events (Right)

Furthermore, since a line graph shows an overview of life history, it does not provide any data concerning recent behaviors of the informants. Hence, this study designed another radar graph for ascertaining the amount of effort the informants spent prior/during/after the comic events. Informants were asked to give an estimate average of the effort they spent during comic events in which they participated. Figure 4 (right) presents an example of such a radar graph. The seven categories are based on the behaviors found during the half-year period of participant

observation and 0-100 indicates the amount of effort they spent.

Lastly, a set of two blank graphs with example answer sheets and the Internet usage questionnaire was provided to the informants before the interview. The questionnaire was also designed to be answered quickly. Each interview took around 1-3 hours. The interview questions were based on the graph explanation and questionnaire answers from the informants. The process started from the line graph, questionnaire and radar graph. Since all these graphs and questionnaire were considered as tools to stimulate memory of the informants, instead of as quantitative data, this research emphasized the qualitative data from the interviews.

4. Result & Discussion

It should be reemphasized that in this paper the Comitia staff are selected as informants in order to examine the behavior of fans in the media convergence society. In hypothesis, it was presumed that the informants have different behaviors when attending different comic events. Unexpectedly, an analysis of the interview data and fieldwork data demonstrated that while there is no distinctive difference in behaviors at different comic events, a multiplicity of behaviors between physical and virtual spaces has been found among the informants. The result can be highlighted by three categories: *Multi-participation*, *Multi-affection* and *Multi-consumption*.

4.1 Multi-participation

Multi-participation means that the informants have more than one participation type and also participate not only in the physical but also virtual spaces. Almost all informants show that they experienced all three common participation types and only one has two participation types, general attendee and staff. No one started their participation in comic events by being a member of staff. Most of them started with being a general attendee at the comic events like *Comike* or local comic events. Only 1 out of 12 informants first participated in a comic event as a circle member. Then, after participating in a couple of events, some informants wanted to become staff members by their own initiative while others were invited by acquaintances who were working as staff. Moreover, some informants stated that the advantages of being staff members was that they could get circle spaces free of charge or that they could enter the event venue without having to wait in line. Besides, according to all informants, a main reason for becoming a staff member and continue volunteering is *the opportunity to exchange with other staff members and other comic events*. The scenes of staff members talking about their shopping lists are frequently observed. Since there are

various comic events held in Japan, they could not acquire all the information by themselves. By becoming staff, they could expand their information network as well as exchange their opinions with others.

Furthermore, from the analysis of radar graphs, it is shown that the informants have altered their participation types during the comic events. This paper calls this behavior *participatory shuffle*. As stated in the workflow of *Comitia* staff that there is a shift system allowing staff members to take a break every other hour. According to the interviews, some informants return to their own circle spaces while others become general attendees or both during break time. Likewise, apart from *Comitia*, the informants also demonstrate *participatory shuffle*. Around half of the informants participate as staff members and all of them participate as circle or general attendees in other comic events.

Comparing *real* physical participation with *virtual* participation, general attendees could be regarded as viewers; circle members as webmasters and staff as user-generated content website providers. All informants stated that they read/watch websites or blogs related to comic events as well as read the web forums. Furthermore, the informants who are the members of circles own blogs or websites in order to communicate with their fans. However, unlike their active behavior in the physical world, the informants show their hesitation to be active users on the Internet. The questionnaire result shows that less than half of informants posted their comments on the public spaces and only one informant uploaded her work to the web2.0 sites. They stated similar reason which prevents them from freely expressing their opinions on the Internet; that is, *the fear of demerits to their real life* because of their comments. These behaviors could explain why both physical and virtual worlds are significant for the informants. Although Internet is fast, cheap and convenient, it does not provide tangible and face-to-face communication to the participant. Physical spaces like comic events compensate for all the weak points of Internet communication but physical spaces are limited and expensive; therefore, the informants move back and forth between both spaces. Thus, it could be concluded that *participatory shuffle* occurs inside and also across physical and virtual space.

4.2 Multi-affection

Multi-affection is defined as the multiple fandoms or genres of which the informants are fond in both physical and virtual worlds. Hills (2002) suggested that defining *fandom* is tricky because of its “everydayness”. A Japanese fan scholar, Yoshihiro Kobayashi (1999), defined fandom in a broad

sense as “a gathering of fans” and further explained fandom in more detail as an activity of fans in which they implement media and utilize media resources to conduct production activity (p. 186). Francesca Coppa (2006) investigated the media fandom history in the U.S. and described the development of media fandom since 1926. This research does not intend to define the word fandom in general; however, the fandom described in this paper emphasizes stories informants are fond of. For example, if he/she is a *Pokemon* fan and participates in physical or virtual spaces to do fan activities, he/she belongs to *Pokemon's fandom*. In previous research, single or specific fandoms have been widely investigated from various perspectives. For example, Consalvo (2003) studied fan websites of Star Trek and Buffy the Vampire Slayer to explore the current situation of internet code and resistance between fans and the corporate world; Mackellar (2009) discovered behavioral segmentation of Elvis fans participating in the Elvis Revival Festival in Parkes, Australia for business strategy. However, according to the interviews and questionnaire result, none of the informants are into only one fandom or one piece of work. Rather, they are into various fandoms and their behaviors among them could be divided into two types: *Expansion and Movement*.

Expansion is a process whereby fans who first started with one fandom then expanded their interest to other fandoms. Rather than abandoning one fandom in favor of another, they remain committed to multiple fandoms. One male informant first participated in a comic event because he liked *Shoujo Manga* (Girl's comics). Then, during the event, he discovered a new genre, *Doujin Ongaku* (amateur music). After that he and his friends began a circle to write a review book for other Doujin Ongaku circles and even made a circle's blog to communicate with fans and other circles. Nowadays he spends most of his effort on *Doujin Ongaku* circle activities. Yet, he still purchases *Shoujo Manga* when he participates in the event.

In contrast, *Movement* is the process whereby some fans tend to change from one fandom to another. This type of fandom behavior is seen clearly in *Nijisousaku* or parody works (i.e. fan fiction, fan illustration, fan manga). For example, in the 1980s a soccer comic called *Captain Tsubasa* was very popular among parody works and assumed to be one of the reasons that lead to the expansion of Comike. One female informant affirmed that during that time the Captain Tsubasa boom was a phenomenon among female fans; however, the recession came and fans switched their interest to other stories. Based on the interviews, all informants belong to multiple fandoms. Thus, it is demonstrated that previous research on single fandoms can be assumed to be one part of *Movement* behaviors during a period of time and it is necessary to investigate multiple fandoms in order to ascertain the behavior of fans.

4.3 Multi-consumption

Multi-consumption refers to the behavior of informants who consumes not only products but also information in both the physical and virtual worlds. Azuma (2001) contended that the consumption of *Otaku*, obsessive fans and collectors of manga, anime or other works in Japanese content industry, is representative of consumption in Japanese postmodern society. In this research, I do not refer to the informants as *Otaku* because the discourse and underlined context of the word may confuse the image of staff participants (e.g. the *Otaku* image tends to emphasize acute social withdrawal). Nonetheless, the consumption behavior of the fans that Azuma pointed out is also noticeably found among the informants in this study.

Since all the informants are staff members, undoubtedly they spent their effort on staff work as well as, in the case of informants with their own circles, on circle work. Conspicuously, even though the amount of effort varies by person, every informant demonstrates that they spent their effort on *purchasing/finding information*. According to the interviews and the graphs, the informants purchase at least one *doujinshi* (i.e. amateur self-published works made by circles) every event and set it as high priority as shown in figure 5. Moreover, this behavior of purchasing/finding information occurs in both physical and virtual spaces. Though *doujinshi* can be purchased via online shopping or at comic or *doujinshi* stores, the informants asserted that they prefer to purchase them at events, stating that doing so creates an opportunity to directly interact with the circles they like. Apart from consuming *doujinshi*, the informants also consume information. To gather *information*, they utilize paper-based media and interpersonal communication such as magazines, flyers, catalogs or friends as well as digital media on the Internet such as blogs, forums or SNS.

The informants are staff members but after all they are also fans. As stated in *multi-participation*, the informants have more than one participation type and they shuffled even

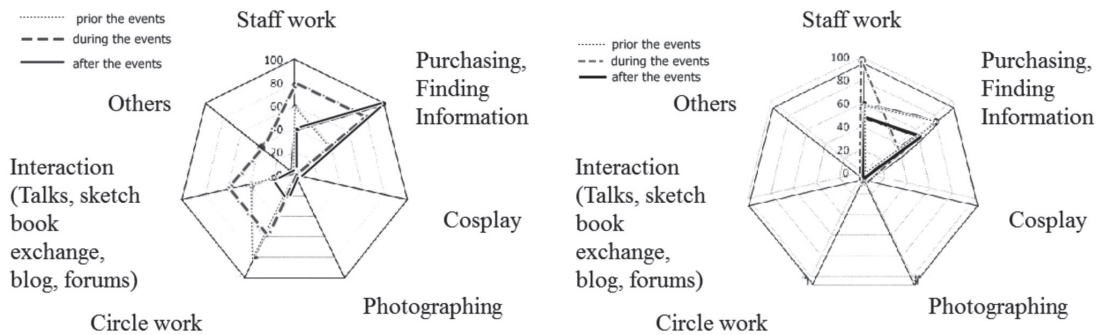


Fig. 5: Answers from two informants indicating multiplicity behaviors prior/during/after the comic events

during the events to become general attendees. Moreover, even though some of them are members of circles that can be regarded as producers or creators, they also become customers for other circles. Therefore, this paper proposes the consumption behavior which involves consuming several products and information in both physical and virtual spaces as one of three multiplicity behaviors among informants.

After analyzing the lived, embodied experiences of the twelve informants, three common multiplicity behaviors were discovered as discussed above. Moreover, each of them is significantly correlated with the others. Prominently, this relation occurs both in the real and virtual media spaces. Furthermore, as Figure 6 below, regardless of which behavior occurs first, each behavior links to and reinforces the others. Particularly, in the age of media convergence, when the digital and analog media collide and travelling between physical and virtual spaces becomes easier for people, these three common behaviors reoccur at a fast pace. Fans move or expand from one fandom to another and then to yet another. Writing reviews, joining communities, publishing or trading one's own work, participating in events- these kinds of stories are not something uncommon; they occur regularly in the everyday life of fans.

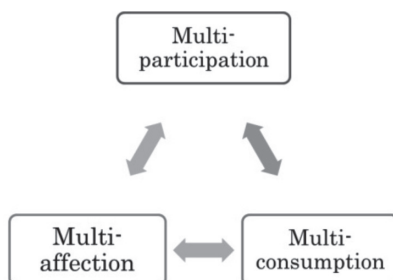


Fig. 6: The relations of three multiplicity behaviors in the media convergence space

5. The emergence of the *Trans-participant*

It is clear that the research's informants have three multiplicity behaviors in their lifestyles and since there is no significant difference between comic events, it can also imply that fans in other comic events should also have them. Yet, it may not be immediately obvious that all members of the audience in the age of media convergence have. As argued in Gray (2003), recent research tends to focus on fans and ignores the existence of *anti-fans*, people who do not like that text or genre and non-fans, people who enjoy being receivers and have no intention

of participation. This research agrees with Gray's argument regarding the existence of *anti-fans* and *non-fans* in the society. Hence, this paper coined a new term, *Trans-participant* to distinguish the informants who have these three common multiplicity behaviors.

Instead of using the word *audience* or *user*, this research selects the word *participant* because this study would like to highlight that the *turning point* from audience to become the *Trans-participant* is *participation*. Next, *Trans* contains two meanings. One refers to the *transformation* of participation types during participation in the media spheres. The participation types can be regarded as roles in the communication process. Changing participation type at the comic event from general attendee to circle can imply changing from audience (fans) to producer. Likewise, a fan blogger changes his/her role from creator to receiver when he/she reads other material on the Internet. The other meaning is *transfer*. This connotation emphasizes the convergence of media spaces insofar as the participant moves between the physical and virtual world. Furthermore, *Transfer* demonstrates a movement between three common behaviors. While moving in the media spaces, participants change their participation types from audience to creator, acquire information or purchase commodities and alter or extend their fandoms.

Indeed, the concept of *Trans-participant* is not something new. In 1975, during the time when the Internet was little known and digital media was still in the laboratory, the first *Comike* started. Amateur writers who participated as members of circles might have had all three common multiplicity behaviors. However, because of printing technology and the limit of space and time, it was not easy to participate in physical spaces. After the convergence of virtual and real media, the transference and transformation became faster, easier and cheaper than before. While offline space is limited, online space is practically infinite. In other words, the Internet acts like an amplifier for the relations in Figure 6 in the media convergence society. The Internet not only stimulates but also provides the opportunity for participants to engage in multi-participatory activities. Therefore, the *Trans-participant* has emerged into the mainstream and is likely to become increasingly prominent in this media environment.

As a final point, it seems appropriate to remark that this research is only based on the *Comitia* staff. A foreseeable extension of this research would be to examine the application of the *Trans-participant* concept in every audience group.

Notes

- ¹ This survey is based on a number of registered events on the prominent event portal website *kettokomu* in one month in May 2009.
- ² During the real survey, both graph variations are divided by color not the line style. For a Comic events life graph: black as

general attendee, blue as individual or member of a circle, and red as member of staff. And for a radar graph showing amount of effort spent on the comic events: blue as prior to the event, red as during the event and black as after the event.

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RUJIRAT VINITPHOL (ルジラット ヴィニットボン)

1983年11月16日生まれ

〔最終学歴〕

Department of Mass Communication, Faculty of Communication Arts, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand

東京大学大学院学際情報学府修士課程

〔専攻領域〕 ファン研究、参加型文化、オタク文化

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The Emergence of the Trans-participant in Media Convergence Society: A Case Study on Comic Event Staff in Japan

Rujirat Vinitphol*

Abstract

The convergence of media has brought several changes in our daily life. By connecting to the Internet, people can consume a wide variety of information or become creators themselves by a single click. Thus, the line separating producer and consumer has become blurred. However, although the Internet has become a critical element in our lives, the real world still also plays a significant role. This study investigated prominent active audience, fans' behavior and their relationship to the media space in physical and virtual worlds. Staff members who dedicate themselves to be volunteers at a Japanese comic event called *Comitia* are selected as a research target of this paper in order to examine their lived, embodied experiences of comic events in media convergence society. In order to collect the data, twelve in-depth staff interviews and one year of participant observation both online and offline had been conducted. As a result, this study discovered three common multiplicity relations among the staff's behavior in both physical and virtual environments: *multi-participation*, *multi-affection* and *multi-consumption*. Moreover this paper coined a new term, 'Trans-participant' to distinguish people who have these three common multiplicity behaviors. The results of this research challenge existing perspectives of fan research and audience analysis.

* Graduate School of Interdisciplinary Information Studies

Key Words : participatory culture, fans, comic event, fieldwork, media convergence.