

## **Trufan: Role Of Fandom As An Influence On Attitude**

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### **Abstract**

Stars Wars has attracted a cadre of dedicated fans across a multi-decade period. With the first film rapidly approaching 30 years old, the final instalment in the six episode part was released on May 19, 2005. This study looks at the influence of fandom on aspects of the consumption of the Star Wars experience, including attitudes to Star Wars films. The study also tests a new measure of fandom, the "TruFan" scale, as an indicator of the influence of the individual's fandom level. The study was conducted on a volunteer sample (n=178) of fans queuing in line for the opening of the midnight screening of Revenge of the Sith, in Queen Street Mall on May 18, 2005

### **Background to the Study: Problem Definition**

The study aims to measure the attitudes of the fans queuing for the midnight launch of the Star Wars Episode III. The nature of the event as the "last" blockbuster also provided a unique opportunity to capture data from an unusual sample – hardcore dedicated film fans. As an exploratory study, specific hypotheses were not developed. Rather, the study was designed to observe levels of Star Wars fandom (measured in part by the Wakefield and Barnes (1996) fanaticism scale), aspects of the individual's consumption of the Star Wars universe, and several personality traits and seek out any area of interaction between these measures for further study. This was a statistical fishing expedition. As an exploratory study into attitudes and opinions, the study was developed in terms of "what can we learn that will be useful?" rather than pursuing an identified gap in the literature or a specific hypothesis.

### **The Fandom of the Space Opera**

Fandom is broadly defined as "all the fans of a sport, an activity, or a famous person". It can also refer to the community of fans (usually online) who all share a fandom. In the context of this study, fandom is meant as "self ascribed state of being a fan of the Star Wars movie franchise". For the purpose of the study, the Wakefield and Barnes (1996) three item loyalty scale, used previously for measure loyalty to sport, was adapted for use as a measure of Star Wars fandom. A second measure of fandom was based on involvement, using elements of Zaichkowsky's (1985) Personal Involvement Inventory. Personal involvement with Star Wars was used as second predictor of fandom.

### **Attitudes to Advertising**

Star Wars characters are no strangers to product promotion, advertising and copious merchandising. Given that every character to have ever appeared on screen for more than 10 seconds has a name, trading card and plastic figurine, the Star Wars fandom is heavily associated with merchandising and commercialisation of the movie franchise. The release of Episode I and II was heavily cross promoted with Pepsi. Figurines for Episode III were on sale nearly a year before the final release date for the film was set. Episode III pre-promotion featured Yoda endorsing Diet Pepsi, and a variety of other characters endorsement a range of products. Despite an evidenced historical trend towards heavy commercialisation of the movie franchise, little has been done to discuss the attitudes of fans to the use of their fandom for promoting unrelated products. This study contributes towards the understanding of attitudes towards the use of Star Wars characters as promotional tools.

### Attitudes to Star Wars

Fandom attitudes were assessed against reactions to the previous films, and measures of optimism towards the forthcoming film. Scale items regarding Episode III were constructed from the Richins (1997) three item optimism scale (optimistic, encouraged, hopeful) which was part of a larger study on emotion. For the purpose of the study, the items were merged into attitudinal statements towards the film. The scale used for assessing the attitudes towards the film was developed for this study, and is tested as part of the study.

## The Study

### Data Collection

Surveys were personally administered to the sample population of people queueing for the midnight session of Revenge of the Sith. Mall intercept was used to distribute 200 surveys over an approximately three hour period from 9pm to 11.45pm in the Queen Street Mall, Brisbane. Truly a mall intercept study if there has ever been one. The sample was selected on the basis of being in queue for the Revenge of the Sith movie, with the cinema selected because the researcher and their team had tickets for the same screening. Survey respondents had been queueing for various lengths of time (earliest arrival for queuing was 10am, latest queue attendee to fill out the form arrived at 11.30pm).

### Tipping the Scales

The study examined the interaction of fandom on three levels - the Wakefield and Barnes (1996) three item scale, the Personal Involvement scale, and the TruFan scale which consists of the items from Wakefield and Barnes (1996) plus Personal Involvement merge to create a two factor construct. The composite measure "TruFan" is named after the internet slang term for a dedicated and loyal follower of an entertainer, cult, credo, hobby, pastime or genre (Barrett, 2004) Three scales were developed for the study, including the Movie Optimism scale (.8529) based in part on Richins (1997) optimism scale, a semantic differential scale on Attitudes to Advertising (.8244) and the hybrid TruFan scale (.9112). All scales were measured on a five item Likert scale, with the exception of the five item semantic differential scale. Table 1 lists the scales used, and their respective alpha and n values

**Table 1: Scale Alphas**

<b>Fandom Scales</b>	<b>Alpha</b>	<b>N=</b>
Personal Involvement (Zaichkowsky 1985)	.9224	163
Fan Loyalty (Wakefield and Barnes, 1996)	.8703	175
Personal Involvement and Fan Loyalty (TRUFAN)	.9112	160
<b>The Other Scales</b>		
Movie Optimism	.8529	174
Attitudes to Star Wars Advertising	.8244	165
Emotional Quotient Scale (Wells, 1964)	.8507	171
Normative Pressure (Dann, 1999)	.9120	172
Opinion Seeking (Flynn, Goldsmith, & Eastman, 1996)	.7633*	173
Opinion Leadership (Flynn, Goldsmith, & Eastman, 1996)	.7132*	171

\* Below the acceptable .8 threshold for marketing scales

### Sample

Gender was divided on 3:1 ratio of 124 males to 42 females (n=166). Ethnicity was 88% self identified as Australian, with the remaining 12% self identifying with 11 different nationalities

represented (n=164). No statistically significant differences were identified by gender or ethnicity. Various external indicators of fandom including possession of official merchandise, wearing of t-shirts, carrying of light sabres or stuffed Ewoks and wearing full costume were observed amongst a minority of queuing fans. No figures were captured as to the exact number of respondents displaying obvious signs of fandom in this survey.

### Exploring the interaction of fandom

Wakefield and Barnes (1996) concluded that loyal fans (as measured by a high fanaticism index score) perceived greater value from entertainment services. In the Star Wars Study, the fandom should have a positive influence optimism towards Episode III. Histograms of the three summed scales indicate a skew towards the upper end of fandom for summed fanaticism, and uneven distribution for the involvement scale. In contrast, TruFan had a relatively normal, albeit slightly upwardly skewed curve. Table 2 outlines the mean and standard deviation of the Wakefield and Barnes (1996) scale, and the summed totals of the three fandom scales.

**Table 2: Self Identification as a Fan**

	Mean	SD	n
I am a loyal Star Wars fan	4.02	1.05	177
I will always be a Star Wars fan	4.16	1.03	177
I like to let people know I'm a Star Wars fan	3.66	1.22	175
Summed Fanaticism Scale	3.94	0.68	156
Involvement Scale	3.95	0.97	175
TruFan	3.52	1.15	163

The first test of the interaction of fandom is on the attitudes towards Episode III, where predictably, all three measures of fandom were strongly correlated (Table 3). The three measures of fandom were strongly correlated with optimistic attitudes towards Episode III. The lack of correlation between Wakefield and Barnes (1996) fanaticism scale and optimistic appraisal based on commercials and trailers is unexpected.

**Table 3: Fandom and Optimism**

Correlations	TruFan	Involvement	W&B
The trailer left me excited	0.495**	0.375**	0.407**
I am optimistic about Episode III	0.339**	0.283**	0.323**
I believe Episode III will be a good film	0.611**	0.459**	0.507**
I am hopeful about Episode III	0.462**	0.364**	0.407**
The TV commercials and trailers have encourage me to be optimistic about Episode III	0.277**	0.241**	-

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The second test of the influence of fandom was on the use of Star Wars characters in advertising. Summed item scores for the advertising scale had relatively low correlations with Involvement ( $r=.174$ ,  $p=.032$ ) and Trufan ( $r=.179$ ,  $p=.031$ ). Correlations between fandom measures and individual items, whilst significant, were also relatively weak.

**Table 4: Fandom and the Use of Star Wars Characters in Advertising**

Correlations	TruFan	Involvement	W&B
Not annoying	0.182*	0.159*	0.155*
Very persuasive	0.166*	0.199*	-
Impressive, most impressive	0.203*	0.176*	-

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Wakefield and Barnes's (1996) measure became a more useful when determining the interaction on specific advertising. Whilst space does not allow for the reporting of all three adverts tested, the results in Table 5 are typical of the study with one exception - TruFan had a higher interaction with interest where the advertising was more abstract. Where the advert was a screenshot of Chewbacca and Yoda, the correlation was stronger ( $r=.335$ ,  $p=.000$ ) for interest. The limited conclusion to be drawn is that fandom may enhance intent to investigate the reason behind a Star Wars characters appearing in an advert.

**Table 5: Fandom and the Yoda Advert**

Correlations	TruFan	Involvement	W&B
This ad is very appealing to me	0.189*	0.204**	-
I would probably skip this ad if I saw it in a magazine	-0.202*	-0.176*	-0.152*
This ad has little interest for me	-0.222**	-0.187*	-0.194*
I dislike this ad	-0.326**	-0.189*	-0.213*
I'm tired of this kind of advertising	-0.295**	-0.202*	-0.172*
This ad leaves me cold	-0.202*	-0.159*	-0.253**

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

[f7]

One limitation of the fandom study was the poor alpha measures for the Opinion Seeking and Opinion leadership scales. However, when relationships between individual items with the scales were assessed, Fandom became a strong indicator of independence from peer opinion seeking. In contrast, however, there was no significant relationship between fandom and the normative outcomes scale, which measure self moderation of behaviour based on the opinions of others. The TruFan measure did report a weak negative correlation ( $r=-.201$ ,  $p=.018$ ) on the item measuring whether seeing a film would make the individual less popular amongst their friends. Significant relationships between the fandom measures and individual items in the opinion seeking and opinion leadership scales are reported in Table 6. The findings of this study are inconclusive as to whether fandom dictates adherence or independence to social pressures.

**Table 6: Fandom and Opinion Elements**

Correlations	TruFan	Involvement	Fandom
I don't need to talk to others before I choose a movie to watch	0.202*	-	0.199**
I rarely ask other people what movie to see	0.203*	0.190*	0.228**
When they choose a movie, other people do not turn to me for advice	0.171*	0.156*	-

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The final element of the study looked at the interaction of fandom on queuing behaviour and the moral rights of the creator. These individual items were tested on the basis of the propensity of the Star Wars creator George Lucas to re-edit his films between cinema release, DVD release and the release of subsequent special editions. Despite many fan's criticisms of the changes made to

the movies, fandom was significant factor in supporting the right of the creator. This finding is unexpected, and warrants further examination over the concept of fandom "ownership" of movie franchises.

Rights of the creator was also the only item in the study to have a gender difference at a statistically significant level, with male respondents (3.89) being more in favour of creator editing than female respondents (3.41) ( $t=2.204$ ,  $p=.031$ ). The right to re-edit also has a weak correlation with the attitude to the use of the characters in advertising ( $r=.163$ ,  $p=.037$ ), with individual items of finding the use persuasive ( $r=.169$ ,  $p=.029$ ) and not annoying ( $r=.181$ ,  $p=.020$ ). The concept of ownership of the fandom, and the movie universe may warrant further research to determine the interaction of sense of ownership (rights to re-edit, rights to assign characters to advertising etc) may influence the appeal of characters in advertising, and their value as commercial sponsorship properties. Table 7 outlines the influence of fandom on the rights to re-edit.

**Table 7: General Measures**

Correlations	TruFan	Involvement	Fandom
The creator of a movie has the right to re-edit their work	0.322**	0.283**	0.467**

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Finally, given the nature of the event at which the data collection took place, a final question regarding queuing behaviour was included. The Trufan score indicates a positive relationship between total fandom and the enjoyment of queuing at an opening night. Personal involvement in the film franchise also assists in encouraging a positive outlook to the queuing as part of the event, and fandom is less of an influence on the desire to queue (Table 8)

Correlations	TruFan	Involvement	Fandom
I enjoy queuing for opening nights of big movies	0.492**	0.386**	0.298**

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

## Conclusions

What is the relationship between fandom and advertising preference? Cousins. Definitely cousins. In conclusion - cousins. Fandom has a statistically demonstrable interaction with attitude to products, existing movies, and optimistic appraisals of forthcoming products. Fandom can also be statistically associated with the consumer in compensating for negative events such as queuing. The measures developed for the study have demonstrated useful performances, and can be used for further research. Additional research areas into the relationship between sense of ownership of a fandom and advertising have also been uncovered for further study. However, none of this proves anything beyond the existence of an asterisk in the SPSS output file because causation is not proved by correlation. So really, we've not gained anything from the endeavour, but I hope you've enjoyed the paper anyway.

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