

Striving for Authenticity: The Foundation and Dynamics of the AIDub Nation Fandom¹

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Abstract

This paper looks at the AIDub Nation, a fandom birthed from the accidental love team formed in the Philippine noontime show *Eat Bulaga* in 2015. Convergence culture (Jenkins, 2006a), group dynamics (Forsyth, 2019) particularly Tuckman's (1965) developmental stages of a group, and mixed methods approach through audience ethnography (Livingstone, 2009) were used to analyze the foundation and dynamics of the said fan community from a six-month fieldwork. I argue that the both online and offline fan activities such as attending fan events and buying fan-related items help prove and assert their identities as fans and identity as a group that continues to thrive even without their idols together in any project, which I call "striving for authenticity." This paper sheds light on the AIDub Nation fandom through empirical data, contributes to the growing literature on fandoms in the Philippines and Philippine popular culture in general, as well as provides prospects for future studies on other fandoms that are converging in this digital age.

Keywords: AIDub Nation, Convergence Culture, Fan studies, Group Dynamics, Audience ethnography

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Introduction

On October 24, 2015, the AIDub Nation made history by being acknowledged by the Guinness World Records as the most used hashtag in 24 hours (Lynch, 2016). This hashtag #AIDubEBTamangPanahon, which garnered more than 40 million tweets within 24 hours, was used by the fans when *Eat Bulaga*, the longest noontime variety show in the Philippines, conducted the AIDub Tamang Panahon event held at the Philippine Arena in Bulacan. The said arena was considered the largest indoor arena in the world (Santos, 2014). The *Tamang Panahon* event took the entire around 3 hours of airtime of *Eat Bulaga* without commercial breaks (De Leon, 2015; Rappler, 2015a). What made this happen is not only AIDub, the love team of Alden Richards, and Maine Mendoza's character Yaya Dub, hence AIDub, but also their fans, the AIDub Nation.

This paper aims to discuss the foundation and dynamics of the AIDub Nation which I argue is an exemplary case of a fan community or fandom in the Philippines. This fan community has the following dimensions: an increased social media reliance of fans, and online and offline relationships or dynamics of fans under the AIDub Nation. This study intends to contribute toward strengthening academic literature on the role of new media technologies (NMTs) and now referred as social or digital media in the formation and maintenance of fan groups. Fandoms offer an important platform to assess convergence cultures (see Jenkins 2006a). Convergence culture is a veritable starting point of inquiry because this implies the convergence of both traditional and digital media, and this convergence is utilized by fandoms in their activities. Furthermore, this study addresses the changing social dynamics of fandoms because of digital media using Bruce Tuckman's (1965) developmental stages of a group, more known as the stages of Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing, and Adjourning (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). This study seeks to explain how the rise of a fan community such as the AIDub Nation, from being an online group, is attributable to the use of digital media and how digital media enables group dynamics within the fandom. This study lends voice to fans, who are perceived not just as passive followers but are active agents and framers, and thus rendering their participation in various online and offline activities visible. It answers the following research questions: (1) What are the organizational structures of the AIDub Nation? (2) What is the online-offline dynamics of the fan community?

Fan Studies, Fandoms, and Popular Culture

This paper builds on existing literature on fan studies. Fan studies is a well-established transdisciplinary field and had various focus such as identities

and participation. Cornel Sandvoss (2005) have argued that fandoms are “regular, emotionally involved consumption of a given narrative or text” (p. 8) and thus, “affect” becomes an important force working inside a fandom. This is also highlighted in various book chapters in Lisa Lewis’ (1992) edited book *The Adoring Audience* where fans are linked to popular culture, enables a sensibility to the text or fan object, as well as enables participation. Studies on fan identity have focused on membership in relation to other identities, including academic fans or “aca-fans” (Crome, 2014; Cristofari & Guitton, 2017). One interesting wave of studies focuses on anti-fans and anti-fandoms (Alters, 2007; Click, 2019; Gray, 2003; Theodoropoulou, 2007) and their relations with existing fans and fandoms.

Scholars have also highlighted fan participation, which was popularized by Henry Jenkins’ (1992) concept of *participatory culture* in his book *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture*, and his other book on blogs (Jenkins, 2006b). This highlights fans’ interactions on fan texts or objects. This was eventually succeeded with Jenkins’ (2006a) *Convergence Culture* which is the overall framework of this paper since it added the new media into the equation of participatory culture. This has also birthed studies on fan cultures in various contexts (Duffett, 2013; Hills, 2002; Lewis, 1992) which includes a trend on ethnographic research on fandoms (Bacon-Smith, 1991; Coppa, 2014; Pearson, 2010). Participation have been highlighted in various forms such as fan fiction and other fan works (Busse, 2017; Scodari & Felder, 2000; Yang & Bao, 2012), participation in online forums (Baym, 1999; Hills, 2015; Lowe, 2017), attending conventions (Lamond, 2020; Raphael & Lam, 2017; Scodari & Felder, 2000), consumption (Lamerichs, 2018), and interestingly, fan activism (Scardaville, 2005; Zhang & Mao, 2013).

This paper also builds on existing works on fandoms in the Philippines. Recent works on Philippine fandom include Richard Bolisay’s (2019) study on the fandom of the JaDine fandom and their performance on Twitter, Andrea Trinidad’s (2018) work on Filipino stan culture on social media, which I argue both look at the performance of fans on Twitter. Joi Barrios’ (2015) essay on why she is a fan of the Philippines’ dubbed Megastar Sharon Cuneta can be argued as an autoethnography of an “aca-fan” (see Cristofari & Guitton, 2017). This is similar to an anthology compiled by Nestor de Guzman (2005) entitled *Si Nora sa mga Noranian (Nora for the Noranians)*. Another recent work is Bliss Cua Lim’s (2012) work on the Noranians, the fandom of the Philippines’ dubbed Superstar Nora Aunor, focusing on the star-fandom gap and relationship. Raul Pertierra’s (2016) commentary on the relationship of anthropology the AIDub Nation and its added value was his perspective on the AIDub phenomenon as “instant myth making,” (p.

295) considering the number of tweets from fans, especially the record-holder #EBTamangPanahon. He argued that new media can transform “the quotidian into the mythical almost instantly” (p. 296). He also inquired about “deep ties connecting political, religious, and economic structures with seemingly superficial and silly entertainment” and argued that *Eat Bulaga* has the capability to generate “feelings of *communitas* among its audience and viewers” (p. 297).

This paper is a contribution to existing studies on fandoms in the Philippines and the existing literature on fan studies by providing an empirical study on the AlDub Nation as a fandom and as an audience of Philippine popular culture. This study contributes to studies linking social media and fan studies and audience research. Additionally, this study contributes to studies pertaining to group dynamics by linking how social media enables such group dynamics and fan-related activities, including both offline and online activities such as forming various chapters of fan groups, as well as enabling active participation.

Framework

This paper is arranged according to the lifespan of a group according to Tuckman (1965) in his theory of group development. This follows the progression of orientation (forming), conflict (storming), structure (norming), performance (performing), and dissolution (adjourning). Although this has been published since the 1960s, I argue that this framework is still useful in understanding the AlDub Nation not just as a fandom but also as a group. Group dynamics, as Forsyth (2019) argued, are these “influential interpersonal processes” (p. 18) that affect groups over time. The life span of the group, according to Tuckman (1965), explains changes in group behavior especially in the context of tasks and the overall dynamics of the group with a caveat from Tuckman that the framework serves a conceptual function. In this case, I use this process in explaining the changes in the AlDub Nation fandom. While it was initially theorized for small groups, I posit that this framework is observable in bigger groups such as a fandom.

I also utilized Henry Jenkins’s (2006a) concept of *convergence culture*, which explains the convergence of both old and new media. This convergence of different media enables more active participation from audience members, and in this case, fan members of the AlDub Nation. Convergence culture cannot be present without the presence of new media technologies or social media (Jenkins, 2006a). As people from various places form themselves into groups, these people create a community and identity as fans of the love team. With the help of new media technologies,

fans maintain communication without meeting face-to-face. This creates an environment that makes the fans converge, hence the term 'convergence', through contribution to the group as in the case of posting posts and tweets in their respective social media platforms. This is also imbibed in the existence of having administrators of these group pages and accounts. With these, this kind of environment will encourage the fans to contribute more to their respective pages. Maintaining online activities are thus important in online fan communities. This is made possible with different new media technologies. However, the dynamics of fan communities are not fixed within online fan activities alone, but also in offline activities, showing that these groups have strong offline involvements. Convergence culture allows fan communities to form and strengthen their relationships through these activities through online and offline means, thus linking convergence culture (Jenkins, 2006a) and the developmental stages of the group (Tuckman, 1965).

Methodology

To answer the research questions of this study, a mixed-methods approach is utilized in the context of audience ethnography (see Livingstone 2009) involving four qualitative methods, which incorporated both in-depth interviews of fans, focus group discussions with a fan group (fans' club) and non-member fans, participant observations of fan-related events, and content analysis of online data. The goal of audience ethnographies is to give "voice" to specific audiences, making sure that they do not remain passive spectators or consumers of media messages and products (Livingstone, 2009). This is echoed in what Virginia Nightingale (2011) observed that some researchers felt that audiences are silenced when "confined to express their views through surveys and questionnaires" (p. 10). Thus, giving voice to audiences is important in studying convergence culture in the context of fandoms.

Online data are collected in the form of tweets, through a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). The tweets were then organized into themes. Respondents were selected through a snowball sampling or referral system. After an interview, I asked the respondent for a referral to another fan or fan group. I also looked at various fan profiles and fan groups on Twitter, starting with profiles with a large following and reached them by sending a Direct Message (DM) to their profiles. These methods are used simultaneously in six months of data gathering.

This study also adhered to ethical principles such as anonymity and voluntary participation. The names in this paper are pseudonyms and respondents are requested for their voluntary participation in the interviews

and group discussions. Respondents were asked to sign informed consent sheets that informs them of their rights and responsibilities as participants, confidentiality, and proper handling of data. This is to assure participants that their responses will not be used against them personally or against their fan group.

Findings and Discussion

Forming:

With the rise of AlDub as a love team and phenomenon came the rise of fandoms and fan groups, thus the blossoming of various AlDub fan groups locally and abroad. This first section focuses on “forming” or formation of the group. According to Forsyth (2019), there are various factors and motivations for individuals to join groups. Motivation for joining groups varies across the different individuals joining these groups, such as the need for affiliation, need for power, among others (Forsyth, 2019; Hill, 2009; Hogg et al., 2008). These factors help create various formation of groups (see Thye et al., 2019). In this section, I will present how convergence culture enables the formation of the fandom. Digital media has the capability to link different enthusiasts from various backgrounds to form fan groups.

Twitter executive Rishi Jaitly (as cited in Hapal, 2015) wanted to see if the live AlDub conversation “can set global records by uniting their passionate fans, the nation, and the world on Twitter” (para. 3). A simple search on Facebook or Twitter would show various fan group accounts with chapters (groups) from many locations. The number of tweets as featured on the news and Guinness World Records implies the enthusiasm that these fans have regarding AlDub (Hapal, 2015).

A cursory review of blogs and tweets from fans will show that there are salient factors as to why people patronize the *Kalyeserye* and became AlDub fans in the process. Most of these observations come from personal blogs and tweets, such as from fan groups like AlDub Maiden Nation. One reason usually mentioned by fans is the thrill that goes with the development of the AlDub story, which includes the introduction of new characters and the twists and turns of their love story.² Many characters were introduced along the way, which roused the fans’ interest and support for the *Kalyeserye*. Fans likewise appreciated Alden and Maine’s slow yet carefully developed love story; for instance, it took quite some time before they met on live television. After this, many twists and turns added “challenges” to the love story, which the fans eagerly awaited to unfold.

This is where the different motivations from individuals came about to become fans of the said love team. Figure 1 shows the development of the

AIDub Nation in terms of pertinent points in the history of AIDub. The first part of the map pertains to the groups that formed the first iteration of the AIDub Nation. These groups were identified during interviews and group discussions. In the classical Weberian sense, these are ideal types meaning there were instances where fans came from two or more categories. For Max Weber (1949), ideal types are ‘mental constructs’ formed by “the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena” (p. 90), which then are arranged into “analytical constructs.” Four groups were identified that form the AIDub Nation.

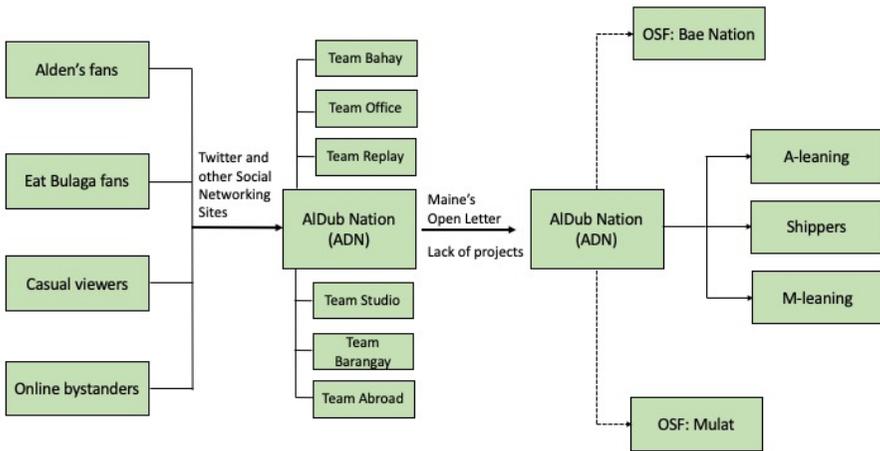


Figure 1. The Development of the AIDub Nation

The first group identified composes of Alden’s fans. When they learned that Alden was “borrowed” by Tape Inc., the company that produces *Eat Bulaga*, from GMA Artist Center, they begin to start watching closely for Alden and continued watching as Alden became a regular host of the said noontime show. The second group consists of *Eat Bulaga* fans. These people have been watching *Eat Bulaga* even before the *Problem Solving* mini segment started. And because they see the development of AIDub, they also became fans of the love team. The third group started as *casual viewers*. Marina (personal communication, September 15, 2018), one of my respondents, told me that *Eat Bulaga* “has been a white noise in the house.” And when *Kalyeserye* was airing, she got curious about where all the cheering came from, so she turned up the volume of the television, and she immediately got hooked on the story to the point where she watched

previous episodes of *Kalyeserye* on YouTube. The last group of fans is what I call “online bystanders.” These fans got curious about what AIDub was since it was always on trending on social media. They always see the hashtags on the trending lists—both local and worldwide trending lists, screenshots and short video clips from YouTube, even pictures of their televisions as proof of watching the show live on television. They searched for these said clips online and, like the third group, they got hooked and became members of AIDub Nation.

These four groups formed the AIDub Nation or ADN and what enabled them to group as the AIDub Nation is because of social media, particularly Twitter. Although Joey de Leon is the one who coined the term AIDub Nation during one episode of *Eat Bulaga*, the fans accepted that name and called themselves as such. It is also important to highlight how affect (Sandvoss, 2005) enabled these four groups to continue to consume the fan text that is *Kalyeserye*, which led to forming the AIDub Nation.

Additionally, fans of the AIDub Nation use the social media slang *mutuals* to call their fellow fans who are following each other on social media. The existence of mutuals demonstrates the formation of networks among fans. During my fieldwork at ADN Homecoming 2018, one interesting observation is that many fans kissed cheek-to-cheek or *beso* with others. Some even screamed (*tili*) when they saw a familiar face. I overheard some people saying that they have not seen each other for a long time. This conversation implies that fans meet with their mutuals offline. This is also supported by online and interview data that fans gain mutuals usually by replying to tweets and then creating group chats. Another way is through meeting fellow fans in various fan meetings and then following each other on their social media accounts.

Another source of identification and formation to the fan community is the means of watching *Kalyeserye*. Members of the AIDub Nation have various means of watching *Kalyeserye* when it was still airing, which are divided into different “teams.” The teams are as follows: Team Bahay (Home), Team Office and its cousin Team Livestream, Team Studio, Team Barangay, Team Abroad, and Team Replay. All of the said teams are based on the location of where they are watching, except for Team Replay and Team Livestream which implies the change of viewing television. This creation of teams implies developments in technology because of the various access that fans have in consuming AIDub. As mentioned previously, some fans started as curious bystanders online looking at the trending list. They watched the replays on YouTube and some clips on Twitter and Facebook that helped them become members of the AIDub Nation.

Team Office and Team Abroad often resort to livestreams due to different reasons. One, some offices do not have televisions nor good television signal. So, to address that issue, working people resorted to watching the livestreams on YouTube and other websites that Team Abroad helped in creating. And when *Kalyeserye* was still airing, the official *Eat Bulaga* YouTube channel had no livestream. Some people like me resorted to third party livestreams posted on various AIDub YouTube channels. The problem was that because of copyright issues, after a few episodes or even some weeks, the channel would deactivate and move to open another channel. Eventually, in the last leg of *Kalyeserye*, *Eat Bulaga* decided to post their livestream on their channel and post their archived videos as well. The quote below is from one of my respondents, Wena. According to her,

There was a point in time where I watch via livestream and I was very addicted to [*Kalyeserye*], but I could not commit to it because of work. I only watch the livestream if I do not have anything to do. I also get bored in some parts. I just want it to be more of an interaction, so I am usually Team Replay. (Wena, personal communication, September 13, 2018)

Because Wena is working while *Kalyeserye* was airing, she had to resort to recorded livestreams accessed through a website. At the same time, it gives her the freedom to watch after the streaming time since most of the recorded livestreams then stay at the channel as an archived video. One main consideration for Team Abroad is that Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) have varying time zones and the time when *Eat Bulaga* is airing may be the time they sleep. One respondent (Inah, personal communication, September 27, 2018) told me that she has to keep herself awake during one important event in *Kalyeserye*. But most of the time, these fans are asleep, so they have to resort to past livestreams or videos posted on these YouTube channels. Just to reiterate, during that time when *Kalyeserye* was still airing, *Eat Bulaga* rarely posted full videos of *Kalyeserye*, so people had to go to other channels for these. As of this writing, the website can still be accessed even though some livestreams and episodes are already on *Eat Bulaga*'s official YouTube channel. These multiple means of “consuming” AIDub implies the affect working among the audience to form the fan community. With this, convergence culture was able to generate affect and push these audience members to form the fandom.

Storming:

“Storming,” according to Forsyth (2019), refers to the conflicts that groups encounter: any friction that occurs “when the actions or beliefs one or more members of the group are unacceptable to and resisted by one or more of the other group members” (p. 410). Tuckman (1965) argued that storming is characterized by conflict and polarization. Conflicts inside the groups need to be addressed for the group to continue (see Wall et al., 1987). Otherwise, it results in dissolution or adjourning. In this section, factors that changed the composition of the AIDub Nation from its first formation are discussed (see Figure 1). I argue that these two main events are pivotal to the change in the composition of ADN as these events affected the “affect” as well among fans.

The first event is Maine’s open letter in 2017, which fans nicknamed as OL. Maine posted an open letter to the AIDub Nation both on her website and on her Twitter account (Mendoza, 2017; Rappler, 2017). In the said letter, Maine stated that she and Alden are just friends and that her actions are being dictated, among others. This shows that Maine wanted to clear things up with her fans to give up on their hopes that Maine and Alden are a couple in real life.

The second change obtained in the interviews is the lack of projects of the love team together. The fans blame the management, GMA Network, the one who manages Alden, and TAPE Inc, the manager of Maine and *Eat Bulaga*, for “actively” separating the two (cite specific personal communications, September 2018). Karen said, “It’s hard to take in as we felt that they were being separated by the management because they wanted different things for the two, but I still support up to now” (personal communication, September 19, 2018). The support that AIDub fans give the two despite these events is palpable, although there are indications that some fans left the fandom. While these two events are external to the fandom, it is also arguable that convergence culture also insinuates the varying affect from fans and their varying responses to these events.

Norming:

This section pertains to social cohesion or solidarity between members because of common goals and tasks (Forsyth, 2019). Forsyth (2019) identified five overlapping yet influential sources of cohesion among groups: (1) social cohesion, which highlights attraction to the group or members, (2) task cohesion, which focuses on the tasks or performance inside the group to achieve goals, (3) collective cohesion, which refers to shared identities and belonging, (4) emotional cohesion, which refers to the affect that binds people to the group, and (5) structural cohesion, which refers to coherence

and strength that ties the group together. On the other hand, Tuckman (1965) have argued that the developmental stages of group include both interpersonal and task-related behaviors. In this stage, groups develop new standards as well as new roles alongside “ingroup feeling and cohesiveness” (Tuckman, 1965, p. 396). In this section, I argue that convergence culture enables fan groups to develop norming and thus maintaining their ties.

At first glance, fan communities can be argued as emotion or affect-oriented groups and not task-oriented groups, where groups are assigned with tasks to become members of the group (see Hess & Philippot, 2007; Sigman, 1984; Wall & Nolan, 1986). However, as Forsyth (2019) presented, groups are influenced by overlapping sources of both tasks and emotions or affect. Thus, ties among group members vary by strength (Granovetter, 1973, 1983; Thye et al., 2019). It is also important to highlight that affect is an important force in fandoms as emotions to the fan texts are needed inside the community (Lewis, 1992; Sandvoss, 2005). Thus, fandoms are being connected with one another through affect as well, making them affect-oriented groups.

In the previous section, fans come from various sources and positions before being dubbed collectively as the AlDub Nation. Some of those fans decided to form groups as in the case of different fan groups. However, this is not the case for other fans who prefer to become members of fan groups. This is the case of what members of the AlDub Nation call Team No Group (TNG) or those fans who were not members of Fan Clubs. Fan Clubs (more commonly known as FCs) are what ADN members refer to as fan groups within the fandom, while Team No Group (TNG) includes those who are not members of any FCs. The majority of the respondents I encountered consider themselves as part of Team No Group. This challenged my initial assumptions about fan groups and piqued my interest in understanding what Team No Group meant for fans, especially those who considered themselves part of this group. This is already an indication that some fans do not need to be members of FCs to be part of the ADN. When I asked respondents about what Team No Group meant for them, they responded:

I never thought of being a member of a group since I can interact with fellow fans even if I am not a member. Besides that, I am an extrovert bordering introvert. It's like I don't want awkward meet-ups. I don't think I need it. Because if you have a group, you attend this, you attend that. I'm lazy when it comes to that. I'm a homebody. (Wena, personal communication, September 13, 2018)

- Researcher: Are you a member of a group?
Respondent: A fan club? No. (Karen, personal communication, September 19, 2018)
- Researcher: Weren't you invited?
Respondent: There were invitations. For several times in my GC, I got invites from Alden fans, Maine fans, and AlDub fans. I would always answer them with a 'no.' I don't want commitment. I don't want to be stifled by a group like you'd have to follow their rules. "Hey, that's not right". I would hear it from other people that they need to attend this, or you need to wear this. I still value my individuality. (Karen, personal communication, September 19, 2018)

Interestingly, most of the recent fan-related events such as fund-raising events, Christmas parties, and even big events such as the ADN Homecoming are organized by Team No Group fans and not by Fan Clubs. Individual fans who are identified and self-identifying as TNGs have a large following on their Twitter accounts, in which some exceed the number of followers that some Fan Clubs have.

One FC commented in one focus group discussion that while those non-FC fans claim they are Team No Group, these cliques are still groups (FC, personal communication, September 21, 2018). This acute and often protracted "debate" on notions of community of FCs and TNGs are what I call a "striving for authenticity." Members of FCs claim that they are the original fans in the fandom. TNGs, however, argue that they are more active in various fan activities. These debates, I surmise, are masked by narratives about being a "true AlDub fan." Recalling the discussion on fan categories, some fans would say that "leaning" fans are those fans that favor one personality over the other are not part of ADN because their "love" or "support" for the two are not equal, but some would say that these are still true AlDub fans since they still support the idea of the love team (FGD2, personal communication, September 20, 2018). A true AlDub fan thus needs to be supportive of both Alden and Maine.

I argue here that the notion of "strength of weak ties" (Granovetter, 1973; 1983) and the notion of "networked individualism" (Rainie & Wellman, 2012) can be seen in the existence of Team No Group inside the AlDub Nation. Fans maintain their individuality whilst being connected through social media to a plethora of people who they may or may not know. The

existence of many fans who consider themselves as Team No Group is thus important in understanding the cohesion amongst members of ADN. Thus, convergence culture (Jenkins, 2006a) is capable of strengthening the ties amongst members while still allowing the fans to maintain their individuality and at the same time enabling affect to continue to tie these fans together as one AIDub Nation despite these differences on perspectives.

Performing:

This section discusses how members of the AIDub Nation perform inside the fan community, the tasks they engage in, as well as notions of cooperation. Performances refer to the tasks and notions of cooperation inside the group (Forsyth, 2019). Groups reach this stage of performing in which “interpersonal structure becomes the tool of task activities” (Tuckman, 1965, p. 396). It has already been argued in the previous section that fan communities are considered as both tasks and affect-oriented groups, as in the case of both FCs and TNGs, and that affect enables fans to participate in fandoms as “enjoyment through engagement” (Duffett, 2013, p. 296). Unlike in other groups where people can easily see how different members perform, underperform, or loaf (see Aggarwal & O’Brien, 2008; Stark et al., 2007), among others, this may not be easily visible in the case of ADN. In this section, I argue that aside from affect, convergence culture enables and encourages participation inside groups.

The notion of “spending fans,” for instance, became more relevant through the interviews, which reveal several things about how ADN thrives as a fandom. Being an AIDub fan entails a lot of costs and expenditures. Many brands have commissioned the phenomenal love team to endorse their products. Some of these endorsements include a fast-food chain, feminine wash brand, a cured pork meat brand, a mobile phone brand, and even a car brand. People calculated that their revenues from endorsements already reached millions of Pesos (Conception, 2016). Some fans show their support by buying the products that Alden and Maine endorsed. One of my respondents said this:

I don't have karaoke in our house, but I bought a microphone just to be there. Even if I don't need it, there's a need for me to show my support. I will buy the products they endorse. I don't use [insert brand of bar soap]. I don't use [insert brand of rubbing alcohol]. But I buy them. I buy them regularly because Alden endorses [insert brand of bar soap], while Maine endorses [insert brand of rubbing alcohol]. Maine also endorses a feminine wash, so I buy that. Alden endorses [Insert brand of shampoo], so I use that as well, even

Maine's [insert another brand of shampoo]. I buy all the products they endorse. The only one I could not buy is the [insert brand name] car. (Karen, personal communication, September 19, 2018)

Karen (personal communication, September 19, 2018) also informed me that one of her rich friends bought the car model that Alden and Maine endorsed. This strengthens the insight that AlDub Nation members are not just fans but also consumers. This is different from what Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst (1998, p. 141) mention in their model of audience continuum of “Consumer—Fan—Cultist—Enthusiast—Petty Producer,” which implies that the consumer is different from the fan. I echo what Jenkins (1992) mentioned that “Media fans are consumers who also produce, readers who also write, spectators who also participate,” (p. 208).

This participation is very true both in online and offline activities of the fandom. Fans, I argue, need to showcase their active participation as a means to strive for authenticity in the fandom now that convergence culture (Jenkins, 2006a) allowed this space for them. These examples showcase how fans show proof of membership in the fandom as well as proof of being a “true” member of the AlDub Nation.

Performing in online activities

One means of performing in the AlDub Nation is convergence in online activities. As what was mentioned previously, Twitter is the preferred platform for the AlDub Nation. The obvious reason for using Twitter is the hashtags feature to gain a wide reach. Being “trending” on Twitter implies that people on Twitter are talking about the topic or the hashtags. The hashtags have a format like “#AlDub_____,” “ADN_____,” and “#AlDubNation_____;” and even if *Kalyeserye* already stopped airing on *Eat Bulaga*, fans continued using the hashtag format. Some people give the assigned Official Hashtag Today (OHTs), such as TEAM OAT or the Official AlDub Trendsetter (@oftrendsetter). Upon checking Twitter, the earliest use of hashtags such as #AlDub started on the 25th of July 2015, a few days after Alden and Yaya Dub’s first split screen meet-up and the use of hashtags remained the same until the story began to progress, like the mystery of Lola Nidora’s diary after AlDub’s first “weekary” of meeting.

The said Twitter page also informs its followers that their OHTs are trending on that day (see Figure 2). This account is organized by a group of fans who decide the OHT every day. They post the hashtag at exactly midnight, and fans will work together in building up for the tweets to reach the trending list, with the aim of reaching worldwide trending.



TEAM OAT ADN
@ofctrendsetter

... **Figure 2.** Screenshot of a tweet from @ofctrendsetter (2018) on the Official Hashtag for Today (OHT)

Double trending!

#ALDUB38thMonthsary



1:36 AM · Sep 16, 2018 · Twitter for iPhone

380 Retweets 3 Quote Tweets 108 Likes

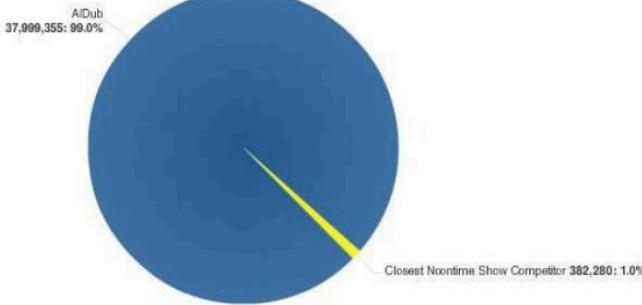
Trendsetting is thus an important aspect of the AlDub Nation as what was shown in the case of Team OAT. Iggy Gan (2015) of AllFamous Digital used social listening and analyzed what netizens are talking about online. The article showed some graphs (see Figure 3 and Figure 4 below) to show that AlDub and the AlDub Nation are social media phenomena by looking “behind the popularity and success of AlDub. What was meant to be a simple noontime show skit is now taking over the majority of social media” (Gan, 2015, paragraph 3).



AlDub

Figure 3. Graph of mentions within a day compared to another noontime show. Graph is from AllFamous Digital (Gan, 2015)

Figure 4. Graph of mentions per day from AllFamous Digital (Gan, 2015)



It is also noteworthy that bashers assume an important role to the fan community in generating tweets. Bashers take various forms: (1) outsiders who bash AlDub and the fan community; (2) “Mulat fans” or Maine’s fans who bash Alden, and (3) “BaeNation (BN)” or Alden’s fans who bash Maine. The last two are referred to as One Sided Fans (OSFs) that will be discussed in full in subsequent sections.

To curtail the influence of bashers, members of the AlDub Nation engage in what they call Report and Block (R & B), as discussed during my interviews and group discussions. They inform fellow fans by posting screenshots of the basher and his/her undesirable tweet, and fellow fans will usually repost these “report tweets” (see WHOLEHEARTED, 2015). Tweets saying things along the lines of “Let’s just keep on blocking those bashers so that we can all be happy” (e.g., Tonette, 2018) are quite common.

This agrees with what Jenkins (2006a) argued about the fans who “may sample dialogue, summarize episodes, debate subtexts, create original fan fiction, record their soundtracks, make their movies—and distribute all of this worldwide via the Internet” (p. 16). Fans create various video clippings from *Eat Bulaga* and *Kalyeserye*, and from Alden and Maine’s then TV series *Destined to be Yours* (2017), and from their movie *Imagine You and Me* (2016) (see Ms.Shy, 2016; OFFICIAL ALDUBMAIDEN 16, 2016). Fans usually tweet these video clips, retweet it, and even tag the two actors in the tweets (Ms.Shy, 2016; OFFICIAL ALDUBMAIDEN, 2016). Digital media enables fans to collect video clips and repost them in their own accounts using the hashtag of the day and other online activities including the report and block.

Participation in offline activities

This is the same for offline activities as it is noteworthy that these activities will not be possible if fans are communicating online and organizing big events. For convergence in offline activities, I refer to my

fieldwork in one ADN Homecoming event and I was surprised that the entrance fee ticket was priced at PHP 850 which is quite expensive for a half-day event. Eventually, it was explained during the opening that the fee included a packed lunch, a bottle of water labeled with the name of the event, and a loot bag containing AlDub-related items and items from sponsors. ADN-related items included a small banner “AlDub Pa Rin” [Still, AlDub], a notepad with the ADN Homecoming 2018 logo, and a bingo card which was used during the event. Items from sponsors included one pack of medicine for colds and a pack of peanut butter.

One event I was not able to attend is the ADN Timeless, which was a formal event held at a hotel in Manila. The entrance and dinner buffet costs PHP 1,500. The event implemented a dress code of formal wear: a long gown for female attendees and coat and tie for male attendees. This confirms why many attendees of online events are earning professionals. There are several young attendees, but most are of the professional class. This is concretized by one of my respondents:

ADN has so many things to do within and amongst ourselves. There are a lot of activities. It's heavy on the pocket. So, every time there is an event and we know that not a lot of people can afford, we chip in to sponsor them. We cannot continue that there are lots of events in a year. It needs to be managed. (Ally, personal communication, October 2, 2018)

Ally is part of the organizing committee of the scholarship drive, and they brought their scholars to said events. She and her teammates chipped in to give chances to the scholars in attending events (Ally, personal communication, October 2, 2018). They even pay for their transportation since some come from the provinces.

Fan paraphernalia are also prominent in fan activities especially. Small tarpaulin banners saying, “AlDub pa rin” [Still AlDub], “Walang iwanan” [No leaving], and “Hanggang sa Dulo” [Until the end] are common to fans attending events. When I interviewed my respondents and talked with fans during the lipstick launch, they said that these easy-to-carry banners were distributed in one of Alden's concerts, among other events, and since 2015, they are the banners distributed to fans, hence the three banners representing three years of existence of AlDub and ADN. Participants of ADN Homecoming 2018 were given loot bags and inside these bags are the green banners saying “AlDub Pa Rin.” Uniforms are also a thing for many fans, especially in the case of fan clubs. Groups are wearing the same shirt and the same color. Many fans stick to the color of green since

it represents the combination of Alden's color (blue) and Maine's color (yellow). Although, during my fieldwork, fans were wearing black shirts with AIDub Nation or ADN printed on their shirts. Some fans have printed their shirts with pictures of AIDub. Another thing are posters and placards. I encountered such items during the lipstick launch and thankfully, the fans gladly accepted to have their pictures taken (See Figure 5).



Figure 5. A fan is holding a big placard of Maine's photo. Photo taken by the author (September 2018)

Juggling between offline and online selves

Fans engage in the presentation of selves both in the online and offline world in the ways they perform within the fandom. I echo what internet sociologist Sherry Turkle (2011) mentioned, that “[O]ur online lives are all about performance. We perform on social networks and direct the performances of our avatars [online identities] in virtual worlds” (p. 26). Moreover, Joost Beuing (2019) pointed out that Turkle's sentiment is an expansion of Erving Goffman's (1959) concept of the “presentation of self” and the individual as an *interactant* (Smith, 2006, p. 108) which implies that the actor has a front stage and back stage. This is best seen in how members of the AIDub Nation try to address changes in their interaction with fellow fans as they engage in various fan activities inside the fan community.

Inah (personal communication, 2018) presents herself as an introvert but adjusts when she interacts with other AIDub fans. She interacts with followers she does not know personally because their topics were of common interest, that is, AIDub and fan-related activities. Some of my respondents likewise mentioned that they are reserved and introverted in

“real life,” but they can mingle and interact with fellow fans, both online and offline (e.g., Wena, personal communication, September 13, 2018; Inah, personal communication, September 27, 2018). Gaining “mutuals” is one thing but meeting them in person in AlDub-related events is a different situation, as in the case of gaining friends online where some fans had difficulty talking to “strangers.” These fans put aside that aspect of their self-identity and interacted with fellow fans. This is how the front stage and back stage operate, where introvert or shy fans, because they participate in fan activities, adjust their behavior to engage with fellow fans, non-fans, and even anti-fans (Alters, 2007; Gray, 2003; Theodoropoulou, 2007).

The strong presence of fans alone in both worlds already indicate the willingness to participate in various fan activities. As mentioned previously, the self or the actor engages in impression management in which the actor adjusts and prepares to have a successful role performance. This echoes Goffman’s (1971) idea of *self-work*. In this particular case, fans engage in self-work in “good faith” for their fellow fans. Thus, there is a level of trust at work as fans engage with fellow fans, even if they do not know each other personally, which then assist fans in continuing to exist and strive as a community. The degree of performance may vary, as in the case of introvert fans, nevertheless, fans still manage their performance, in interaction rituals (Goffman, 1967) to demonstrate membership in the fan community. I posit that the online and offline selves are not far from each other, since individuals engage not just in interaction rituals but also in self-work and thus engage in a continuous impression management both in the offline and online worlds.

Thus, as fans continue their self-work in various fan activities with the help of convergence culture, they present their identities as authentic members of the AlDub Nation fandom. While there are management of impressions to fellow fans, these fans need to continue their work, in a seemingly ritual-like manner, in their interactions to both fans and non-fans as they continue to present their identities as fans. Besides the identity as AlDub fans, these fans also manage to create other identities within the fan community: fans who help in organizing events, fans who consume, and fans who help.

Consumption as a prerequisite for participation

The case of the AlDub Nation confirms that fans *are* consumers as consumption is considered an important aspect of fan participation (Duffett, 2013). I posit that consumption is an important aspect of fan communities. Echoing Matt Hills (2002), fans are “always already consumers” (p. 3). To prove that they are members of their respective fan communities, these fans

consume and therefore have the resources and ability to consume, as what all consumers need to do in a consumer society (see Bauman, 1990). Material conditions are thus important in terms of analyzing a fan community.

Consumption is an indication that one “fan” is an authentic member of a fan community. Fans express their consumption not just in endorsed products or merchandise created by fellow fans, but also in terms of placards and banners of their idols, transportation and entrance fees for various events, among others. It is also noteworthy that fans express their membership to their fan community through internet data consumed for tweets, online posts, sharing pictures and videos of their idols and other fan-related materials. These expenses are proof of their identities as fans.

Furthermore, if the lens of consumption is used in understanding fan communities, tiers can be observed. During fieldwork, I noticed that while many fans obtained passes for the meet and greet during Maine’s lipstick launch, more fans are seen around the stage and standing and screaming on other floors. The meet and greet require a person to buy three lipsticks and one lipstick costs PHP 1,100. Hence, those fans I have observed spent PHP 3,300 just for the meet and greet. People I met while waiting for Maine on stage only bought one or two lipsticks. Another indication of tiers inside fan communities is the entrance fees for various fan-related and especially for fan-organized activities. Fans need to spend a lot in terms of payment for venues, catering, among others. Identifying this seemingly hidden characteristic of the fandom exposes its heterogeneity, which is masked by its homogeneity through the discourse of “AlDub pa rin!” (Still, AlDub!) which pushes the fans of the AlDub Nation as one in being “shippers.”

Lastly, I go back to Internet use and argue that tiers can also be observed here. As I mentioned previously, one also needs to consume internet data, but not everyone can have internet access and watch and share and post pictures all day just to help in propagating a large number of tweets. Even during livestreams for fan-related activities, some fans might not be able to watch the streams live.

The previous conceptions (see Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998) that there is a difference between Fans-as-Producers and Fans-as-Consumers are now lacking, especially when the AlDub Nation is the point of reference. At the same time the presence of digital media enables more participation from fans (Lamerichs, 2018). I assert that because of convergence culture, both identities are now dovetailed. Fans are now both consumers and producers (Bruns, 2008; Jenkins, 2006a).

Adjourning

In this section, I will discuss the process of adjourning or dissolution of a group. Forsyth (2019) argued that groups undergo the cycle of group dynamics until conflicts cannot be resolved and thus results in dissolution. This stage was added in an article revisiting the developmental stages model following up on studies based on the original model (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). Technically, the group is still active and their OHTs still reach the top 10 trending list in the Philippines. Figure 6 shows the second iteration of the AIDub Nation, which is divided into three main components.

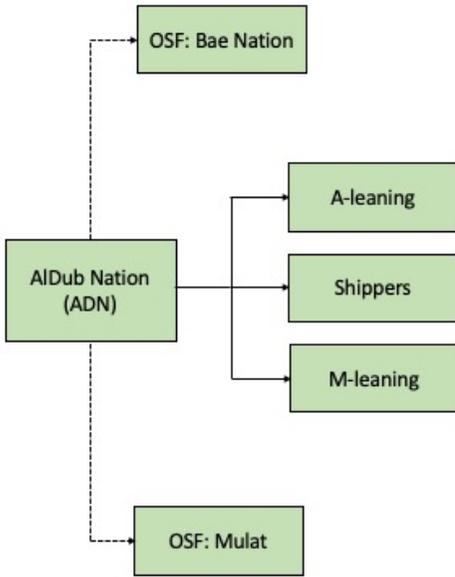


Figure 6 The current composition of the AIDub Nation

In the middle of the spectrum (Figure 6) are the “Ultimate Shippers” or simply Shippers. These fans fully support both Alden and Maine and ship them together. To give context, the term “ship” is an Internet slang which refers to putting two people together in a boat (hence the word ship) and have their relationship move forward. My respondents and other fans I met during my fieldwork mentioned that inside the shippers is a subgroup called *delulu*, a slang derived from the word “delusional.” These fans are those who still believe that Alden and Maine are a couple, even though the open letter clearly stated that Maine and Alden are just friends. Some of my respondents would defend during interviews, “But, I am not a *delulu!*

Haha!” (Karen, personal communication, September 19, 2018) However, some would joke that they are still in fact *delulu*.

The next group of fans inside the AIDub Nation are what they call “leaning fans.” According to my respondents, there are two groups of leaning fans: M-leaning fans for Maine’s side, and A-leaning fans for Alden’s side. These groups of fans prefer one half of the love team but without bashing the other. Some of my respondents would say that they are still part of ADN since they still support the other half (Wena, personal communication, September 13, 2018). It is just that they prefer one over the other. I was able to interview at least one A-leaning fan and one M-leaning fan during

my fieldwork. And true enough, these fans still consider themselves as members of the AlDub Nation because they still support the other half of the love team. Hence, they are still part of the AlDub Nation. I argue that this is also a case of “striving for authenticity” while being identified as a “leaning” fan.

Dissolution or adjourning comes in the form of the group called One-Sided Fans (OSF) who are technically not members of ADN anymore. These groups of fans prefer just one half of the love team. The majority, if not all, would bash the other half. For Maine’s side, they are called *Mulat* [literally translated to: “Opened eyes”] because, according to my respondents, “*Namulat sila sa katotohanan na never magiging sila*” [They have opened their eyes to the fact that Alden and Maine will never be together] (FC, personal communications, September 21, 2018). One-Sided Fans for Alden’s side are called “Bae Nation” (BN). According to my respondents, they are the original Aldenatics or one of the Fan Clubs (FCs) of Alden (FC, personal communications, September 21, 2018). Interestingly, my respondents mentioned that OSFs are also regarded as “anay” (termites) (Inah, personal communications, September 27, 2018). When I asked for a reason, fans argued that Bae Nation people are like termites who slowly destroy the foundation of AlDub since they clash Alden and Maine together (FC, personal communications, September 21, 2018).

This process of leaving the fandom and becoming haters is considered to be a contribution to anti-fandom literature. Anti-fans have been argued to be part of the “spectrum of dislike, distaste, and hate both within fan cultures and in closely related anti-fan cultures” (Gray et al., 2007) which goes back to notions of affect or emotions in fandoms (Sandvoss, 2005). These anti-fans express hate, and thus negative affect or emotions, to a media text and with the presence of social media, these expressions of hate to media texts are more apparent (Clicks, 2019). Jonathan Gray (2003) have argued that anti-fans “must find a cause for their dislike in *something*” (emphasis by Gray, p. 71). The presence of OSFs is an implication of the change in “affect” (from love to dislike and/or hate) on the part of these former fans who are now expressing hate on the other half of the love team. This also results to clashing among “shippers” and OSFs online. Thus, it is also arguable that convergence culture, as in the case of storming, insinuates conflict among members which leads to some leaving the group and some FCs to dissolve.

Conclusion

In this paper, I explored the foundation and dynamics of the AlDub Nation as a fandom. Using interviews, online data through tweets from fans, as well as participant observation in various fan activities, I was able to look

at the narrative of how the fandom was formed and how different members of the AlDub Nation continue to work together and “perform” as a fan community even without concrete tasks, thus showing the strength of weak ties (Granovetter, 1973, 1983). This strength of the fan community is made possible because of convergence culture (Jenkins, 2006a) and persistence of affect enabling fan participation (Sandvoss, 2005; Duffett, 2013). Notions of consumption as performance and as proof of being a true member of the fan community are also identified in the AlDub Nation. Performance both in the offline and online worlds are also important in showcasing the dynamics of the fandom as well as proofs of “striving for authenticity” thus showcasing the strength of weak ties since everyone is striving to be authentic fans inside the fandom.

Fan communities, I argue, can exist and persist even though their idols or the love team either do not have any projects together or are now being paired with other celebrities. Thus, it is the nature of the community to outlive its progenitors. This is how the discourse of *walang iwanan hanggang sa dulo* [no leaving until the end] takes action which became the battle cry of members of the AlDub Nation as they continue to exist and persist over time. The AlDub Nation persists even though Alden and Maine do not have a project together, and Alden and Maine being paired to other celebrities in their respective projects. Thus, members of the AlDub Nation show strivings for authenticity through the way they form and participate as one fandom.

In conclusion, convergence culture can be used to explicate how fan communities form and maintain the dynamics between their members, both in the offline and online world. Convergence culture also enables fans to dovetail their identities as both consumer and producer and thus enable them to become active prosumers in engaging in both online and offline activities. Further studies are recommended especially in looking at other cases of different fan communities in the Philippines as well as other interest groups that convened through social media.

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Notes

¹ This paper is based on my MA Thesis entitled *(Re)Configuring the AIDub Nation: An Exploratory Study of a Fan Community*.

² Throughout its course, *Kalyserye* introduced various plot lines such as Maine's real relationship to Lola Nidora, Alden's challenges in order to meet Maine, even introducing Maine's "biological" parents and Alden's "family members". For an initial timeline of the show, see Rappler (2015b).

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