

America's Next Top Model: How do fans contribute to the decline of their favorite TV shows?

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Popular TV shows can rapidly lose much of their audience. According to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, the most devoted fans of popular TV shows could actually be contributing to their decline.

"We explored a [brand](#) that was once a global powerhouse with syndication in more than 100 countries. ANTM was well managed and had a very large and active fan base, yet the show has experienced extensive [audience](#) dissipation. We look at the influence that consumers-especially the most avid, attentive, and active [fans](#)-can play in destabilizing a popular brand," write authors Marie-Agnès Parmentier (HEC Montréal) and Eileen Fischer (York University).

America's Next Top Model (ANTM) was one of the most popular competition-based reality TV shows but has seen a steady audience decline since 2009 even as the producers have tried to re-engage fans by introducing new narratives, new judges, and new types of contestants.

The authors found that brands can be thought of as assemblages made up of various elements such as cultural narratives (the notion of meritocracy), people (the cast, viewers), tangibles (studios, sets, clothing and makeup worn by participants), and technologies of distribution (websites where fans share their thoughts and reactions to each episode). When brands are considered as assemblages, it becomes obvious that many elements are not under the brand's control and may interact in

ways that have consequences unintended by anyone associated with the brand, including producers and fans.

One negative consequence of the interaction of a brand's elements can be a loss of audience. Fans of ANTM engaged in three types of practices that can lead to a decrease in audience. Reframing is when fans decide new elements introduced to the brand are incompatible with other elements of the brand. Remixing is when fans introduce new material that contradicts or undermines elements that the brand's managers have assembled. Rejecting is when fans claim that elements introduced as replacements (new judges) are inferior. Collectively, these practices may accelerate the defection of other audience members and trigger other processes that lead to the brand's demise.

"Ironically, fans may contribute to the destabilization of a brand even as they are trying to help prevent this. Avid fans often try to attract the attention of and help correct perceived missteps made by managers of a brand they have really enjoyed. While fans can be conducive to brand value creation or co-creation, they can equally contribute to value co-destruction," the authors conclude.

More information: Marie-Agnès Parmentier and Eileen Fischer. "Things Fall Apart: The Dynamics of Brand Audience Dissipation." *Journal of Consumer Research*: February 2015.

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