

Consumer behaviour report (the sherlock holmes brand)

Business



When Sir Arthur Conan Doyle first introduced Sherlock Holmes to the reading public in 1887, nothing could have prepared him for the fact he had created a character who was destined to become the most famous detective in the world. This British literary idol went on to break all records and has become the most frequently portrayed fictional character of all time. Today, the brand has been invented and re-invented in so many different and exotic ways that it has the potential to keep entertaining, amusing, enlightening and keeping readers, viewers and listeners of all ages engaged for a long time to come, deviating from and strengthening the original fandom, and keeping a century-old brand as alive and as unique as it was when with the publishing of *The Final Solution*, Conan Doyle killed off the famous detective and had to face eight years of intense public pressure, who took to the streets wearing black arm-bands and demanding that he bring Holmes back. Few fictional characters have risen to the prominence and longevity as the Baker Street sleuth. Like any well-crafted piece of work, Sherlock Holmes has been an inspiration in his field – informing identities of later fictional characters, from Batman to Dr. Gregory House.

Sherlock Holmes, according to *The New York Times*, is the 3rd most read publication on the planet behind the Bible and the Dictionary. There are 357 Holmes Societies around the world and thousands of dedicated Websites. Stories featuring Sherlock Holmes have been translated into 84 languages so far. As part of my study of this brand's consumer base, I have taken two modern renditions of this age-old brand: namely, a series of movies starring Robert Downey Jr. and the brilliant BBC version starring the captivating newcomer and rising star, Benedict Cumberbatch.

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BRAND RE-INVENTIONS Each age gets the Sherlock Holmes it deserves. During World War II, we got the ineffably patriotic (and anachronistic) Sherlock of Basil Rathbone; in the seventies, Nicole Williamson gave us the drug-addicted Holmes. Later still, we had the twitchily neurotic Holmes of Jeremy Brett. Each performer's portrayal (and the same is true for Watson) was informed by the form and pressure of the age in which he lived, what the society of that time valued, condemned or overlooked. However, in most renditions, Sherlock Holmes represents the following values: he is resourceful, quintessentially English, intelligent, learned, insightful and fond of challenges.

This brings us to the dilemma of Holmes in a post-literate age, and the larger question of how one adapts literature for the movies, for an audience that has never read the original. Guy Ritchie's version is an interesting contrast to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's stories. Doyle's Watson is as much in awe of Holmes as Law seems to be unamused of Downey. Their relationship, while captivating for its free portrayal of homoerotic tension and 'bromance' on a scale which was clearly not acceptable in the original texts, is not consistent with Doyle's tales. Moreover, the measure of humility Sherlock possesses in the short stories is a far cry from the Tony Stark brashness that Downey sometimes carries over from "Iron Man".

However, enough of the signature cues remain intact. In keeping with the original, the study of minute details leads to the most astute conclusions by way of logical deduction. Boredom and drug use are prevalent when there isn't an interesting case afoot. He has unparalleled efficiency in the boxing

ring, and his pipe and violin are always close at hand. However, if one is looking for some brand consistency, BBC's modernization of Sherlock provides more literal renditions of Doyle's tales with masterful parallels and analogies.

This is obvious because the creators of the show, Steven 'The Moffinator' Moffat and Mark 'Oh My Godtiss' Gatiss are hard-core Holmesians themselves. Being well-versed in the Canon and the actual literary texts and spin-offs series has ensured that the BBC series is rife with nostalgic details and tiny insights that a Holmesian/Sherlockian would truly appreciate. Although Downey's Holmes is not completely implausible, everything that surrounds him is unrelated to the genuine Sherlock. There is clearly the perceived logic on the part of filmmakers and financiers that Holmes must be "updated" for a modern audience, a crowd that apparently suffers from attention deficit disorder, who cannot tolerate a shot that lasts more than four seconds, who has no use or interest in narrative coherence, merely an appetite for action and eye candy, regardless of logic.

CONSUMER COMMUNITIES A fan, sometimes also called aficionado or supporter, is a person who is enthusiastically devoted to something, such as a band, a sports team or entertainer. Collectively, fans of a particular thing or person constitute its fanbase or fandom. They may show their enthusiasm by being members of a fan club, holding fan conventions, creating 'fanzines' (fan magazines), writing fan mail, or by promoting the object of their interest and attention. The Sherlock Holmes fanclub are generally known as the Sherlockians or the Holmesians. What is the difference between the terms

Holmesian and Sherlockian and the consumers they refer to? Since BBC's Sherlock has taken hold, the term Sherlockian has been appropriated in a way that Holmesian has not. Social media is full of people who describe themselves as Sherlockian significant number of these will have done little more than watched the recent screen adaptations, while Holmesian largely remains a term for the more scholarly devotee.

The Sherlockian fandom, defined largely by considering the movies and TV shows as canon, can be classified as "Transformational fandom".

Transformational" fandom is all about laying hands upon the source and twisting it to the fans' own purposes, whether that is to fix a disappointing issue in the source material (such as two characters not having sex, a favorite topic for fans to "fix"), or using the source material to illustrate a point, or just to have a whale of a good time. It tends to spin outward into nutty chaos at the least provocation, and while there are majority opinions vs. minority opinions, it's largely a democracy of taste; everyone has their own shot at declaring what the source material means, and at radically re-interpreting it. Today, it is this legion of fans, the ones actively looking for literary, musical and various other sources beyond the original canon, that have become the focus of marketers across the world since they have realized the importance of online forums, chat groups, fan fiction and fan art sites as potential markets to exploit. To understand the fanbase, it is essential for the marketers to understand the various types of consumer groups that exist within the fandom.

1. There are the activators who are the types of consumers who go above and beyond what the producers intend for consumers to think about their product. These players activate the social process of commercial meanings (thus enabling production – consumption). They often have an equal share of voice in regards to the product in the sense that via online means (Twitter, live interviews), the creators are often in contact with different ‘feeler fans’ around the world, who keep them updated about the perceptions and reactions of followers regarding different aspects of the show.

They follow a sort of technological tribalism (Tumblr, Twitter, Facebook, LiveJournal) which makes them libratory and unbounded and they become more than mere consumers of the product, who usually have no knowledge or interest in pursuing knowledge about the product. The activators form the dynamic side of meanings of consumption by going beyond merely consuming the final product, i. e. , the show and becoming active debaters, adulators as well as critics of episodes and other input from the creators. 2.

These are those consumers who exist as collective players in the arketplace and are termed as entrepreneurs. There is a blurring of the gap between consumers and producers as consumers take on many of the responsibilities and promotional activities of the producer by imbuing it with their own meanings and value as can be seen by the different online groups that organize group meetings on famous occasions like birthdays of characters or important dates from the stories themselves. Tribal knowledge supersedes the corporate rival of the product. There is a battle between the concepts of ‘Know-Your-Consumer’ and organizational knowledge. There are millions of

fans of Sherlock Holmes who have gone ahead and written their own versions of the story and created fan art. By writing fan fiction, discussing and dissecting the meanings and subtle undertones of dialogues and logistics of the scenes they often take out various meanings and conclusions that might have or have not been intended by the creators of the show.

These Consumer Tribes can manifest in forms of Brand Community, as can be seen in this fandom which is involved in various fields like creating and selling memorabilia, related to the show etc. rather than just watching a TV show. They are joined to each other and to the brand by a shared consciousness as is evident by the massive online following on famous social networking sites and micro-blogging sites like Tumblr. They follow certain traditions and rituals in social interactions and life that distinguish them from others. Certain phrases of greeting and quotes are used to identify members in public as are certain ways of dressing up.

Again, purists of Doyle as well as Sherlockians have a tendency to nit-pick and focus on details and theorize using any analytical and scientific tool available to them to follow the reasoning and logic of the show. For instance the plethora of Reichenbach survival theories that came up after the fake-death of Sherlock at the end of season 2 was virtually never-seen-before as internet forums and chat communities exploded with speculation which not only helped create a sort of mass hysteria and fanaticism which brought the attention of other online communities and helped attract other related fandoms centered around similar shows and movies like Doctor Who, Supernatural and the like. Neo Tribes refers to a group of consumers who

come together to take up certain identities and celebrate in a Tribe before moving on to other geographical or online locations and taking up other identities. Nowadays people belong to many tribes, and move effortlessly between them. They switch masks as they assume temporary roles and identities. A prime example that Sherlockians form new tribes can be seen after a survey of various online forums.

The Undershaw group is a community of Doyle lovers and Holmesians who came together to help preserve Conan Doyle's age-old home. There are people on Internet forums that meet and hold rallies or parties on famous occasions in the fandom-verse. Similarly, there have been various meet-up groups across the US and UK and are slowly coming up in Australia and Asia too: they regularly meet, discuss their passions, take up identities, often indulge in cosplay, debate the finer points of episodes etc. The core elements of Neo-tribalism: that people would come together to celebrate shared passions, take up certain identities and leave to inhabit some other geographical locations in the future are all present in the Sherlock Holmes fanbase. It would be remiss of me not to mention the retro community that exists within the Sherlockian fandom, the group of hard core purists and traditionalists who adhere to and believe the canon laws as laid down by Doyle, like their insistence of Sherlock Holmes' asexuality as compared to the Transformationalists who actively play around with interpretations and bring out their own versions. Companies that plan to participate in social media can benefit from the concept of tribes, as it helps to explain why people are coming together - regardless of social class, age and gender - to share a common passion or emotion.

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BRAND POPULARITY AND BEHAVIOURIAL DRIVERS “ Every generation or so some kind of cycle happens, some big book or movie begins to start the process and then others seem to follow up,” explains Scott Monty, a member of the Sherlock Holmes enthusiast group the Baker Street Irregulars. “ Sometimes there are authors and filmmakers who have been working on the idea at the same time. It may be bit of momentum that causes it or a happy coincidence, but we’ll take anything. ” Some of the behavioral drivers that have been responsible for making Sherlock Holmes this popular – 1. From scientists who created new inventions to pioneers who discovered new lands, society has always had a love-hate relationship with outlaws, the rebels who work outside of society.

Men of science and innovation have always been misunderstood and romanticized throughout history. People have both feared and hated those who’ve been ahead of their times and yet been in awe of them for their intelligence and daring. In Sherlock Holmes, audiences through the generations have found the perfect combination of scathing brilliance and a disregard of all things authoritarian. The idea of going beyond what is acceptable by the society, being a critic of the norms and traditions of society and yet ultimately working for its betterment has always been a driving force for many fictional works, right from the myth of the lone American Cowboy to the Robin Hood legend. Beating policemen and criminals at their own game helps too. “ Sherlock’s appeal is better understood in terms of autonomy and power.

He, like Jason Bourne, or the “ Ronin” Samurai of deep cinematic influence, is a highly-skilled, autonomous agent. Surrounded by corruption, some of which lies within the highest authorities in the land, he applies his skills for their own sake – reveling in the detail and challenge – while remaining acutely aware he works amongst sinister powers. The appeal of such figures is sharpest when we, en masse, sense that established power structures – politics, government, mass media, and big business – are in question. Sherlock embodies independence, profound skill and hope. He is a true Ronin”. – M.

Checkley, Guadalajara, Mexico “ It is the misapplication of factory-based, production-line efficiency to reas of life such as education, health care and correctional facilities that are flawed, not reason per se. Rational efficiency is applied in worlds of human endeavor simply because it is easier than the alternatives. Not because it is better. ” – Denis Williamson, Hong Kong “ A beautiful analogy between Holmes and how we have come to construct the human society over the past decade; as in democracy or communism, those in power try to set the ‘ true’ premises of what should be and then come to deductions not always necessarily correct. Those in power have mistaken it as their right to enforce their deductions on their societies and made it the duty of their fellow being to accept it.

” – Mohit K. , Mumbai, India 2. ‘ Brainy is the new sexy,’ says Irene Adler, a character from the BBC show. She isn’t completely right. Brainy has always been sexy, or on a broader basis, likable and attractive.

With its adaptation into modern shows, smart creators have kept the novelty of the brand alive by designing more and more ingenious ways in which Sherlock solves crimes, lifting it far above other detective and crime-based shows. Plus, unlike in crime procedurals like CSI or heart-pumping terror dramas like 24, uncanny intuition is Sherlock's main tool. In our ever-modern, tech-centric world, it's reassuring that someone without gizmos can still come to the rescue with little more than his gray matter. From RDJ's quicksilver scientific madness to Cumberbatch's use of pure logic and reasoning to baffle criminals and police, Sherlock Holmes remains the smartest, jazziest, most brilliant crime-solver in fiction. " Sherlock Holmes is more than a detective. He is a manifestation of pure dedication, discipline and passion.

In an unconventional picture of ' consultant' detective who works for his own intellectual needs, rather than social benefits of crime free state. Solving crime is his appetite. He wants criminals as much as he hates them". - Piyush Joshi, Miami, US " Partly it's his bohemian, independent nature, his willingness to step outside the rules," says Les Klinger, an expert who has published several books on Holmes. " Partly, it's his ' superhuman' qualities, the ability to focus and devote himself to his mission and to apply reason to matters in ways that others can't. I think we'd all like to believe that we can ' think' our way out of problems.

" 3. The brand of Sherlock Holmes, like the Shakespearean texts and the Greek classics, whatever form is it in, has the ring of authenticity and originality to it. Since its inception, this brand, in all its variations, has

created a legacy to rival any brands. Through the generations, masses of audiences have lapped up the tales of adventure and logic and have gone on fantastical rides as each new twist and turn took their breath away. Myths are so famous because of their long existence; the canon stories are retold and changed to fit modern perceptions better, having with them the stamp of history and the approval of the ages. So boosting the new-found mania for the detective is this historical fanbase and established pastiches in both film and literature.

4. The premise of the original stories, as well as the context in which most of the later variations have developed – where Dr. John Watson, Army Doctor and faithful companion, narrates the adventures – has always been a big draw to the crowds. Conan Doyle was prodigious, and the scores of Sherlock stories he pumped out helps satisfy the desire of modern-day storytellers who want to re-boot the series. However, in all of the portrayals of Sherlock through history it is the scenes in which we are allowed to glimpse into his mind and follow his hurtling logic that audiences are most heart-stopping gripped.

It is through Watson, the loyal companion that the everyman becomes the part of Holmes' mystery-clogged and adventurous life. Watson is the personification of the layman's desire to be a part of something larger than life, to be an observer – if not a collaborator – in the struggle against the darker, grittier underworld of society and thus his tales of being a comrade and yet regarding Holmes as a muse works on both the levels. In fact, the modern-day adaptations exploring the humane side of Holmes, opening him

up and exposing his weaknesses, is the core of what has endeared him to consumers in this relatively peaceful age where the more sensitive and diverse sensibilities are being explored. Logic is rigorous but rather limited in what it can achieve since any system to which it applies starts with axioms – supposedly self-evident truths to which logical deductions are applied. The conclusions reached are only as reliable as the axioms, which in the cases quoted are far from self-evident. The same can be said of Holmes' deductions, which are only as good as his initial assumptions.

” -David Hodgson, Kidderminster These are some of the reasons for the continued popularity of this brand years after its inception and why generations after generations of fans keep on coming back to it. BRAND EXPLOITATION It was actor Richard E. Grant, in a documentary entitled *Elementary My Dear Viewer*, who remarked that Sherlock Holmes had become a brand. Now let us talk about the various ways in which entrepreneurs and marketers have exploited the Sherlockian fandom that exists online across the world. Brands as large and encompassing of all ages like Sherlock Holmes and Harry Potter are a boon as merchandise generators.

| | As you can see, the items shown below, with the exception of the board game, hark back to the original illustrations, referring to the magnitude of the Sherlock fandom as beyond the fans of the TV series. Sherlock Cluedo, fancy dress, rubber duck and Holmes tobacco| Also, a chess set which seems to be modeled, at least for some pieces, on the Paget illustrations (this is most obvious with the Moriarty piece). | Sherlock Holmes chess set| The

tobacco is a perfect example of a product with nothing to link it to Holmes (apart from the fact that Holmes smoked) that will probably sell better purely because of the name on the tin. As is with popular series and movie franchisees, product placement has been a new addition to marketing techniques. A case in point can be seen with the deep pervasive consumer insight into the mundane aspects of the characters of Sherlock BBC.

We have various websites dedicated completely to the wardrobe of the characters, their prices, where one can buy them. In fact, the Belstaff coat worn by Benedict Cumberbatch, priced 1350 pounds, has seen an increase of 200% in the last year and a half after it was seen worn by the famous sleuth. Similarly, Westwood formal collections reported an increase in sales after the appearance of the same worn by Holmes' arch-nemesis James Moriarty. We have examples of entire Tumblr accounts dedicated to Sherlock Holmes merchandise, from clothing to fan art pieces. Since the fan base for both the RDJ films and the BBC series are highly marked by their online presence as opposed to any geographic location, in keeping with the times, marketers all over the world have taken advantage of this net-o-mania to bring their particular skill set to use. Examples of famous Sherlock fan art pieces being auctioned online, merchandise being given to contest winners of fan fiction stories and such have become common.

By tying in the love of the show/books/movies with the consumerist aspect of possessing physical reminders and mementos, the industries surrounding the brand have profited greatly by recognizing the consumer needs. For marketers, wanting to penetrate this market of hardcore fanbases, it is

essential that before members of an existing community can become part of your brand community, they have to become a member of theirs; as a person, and not as a representative of their brand. Like defining target demographics in traditional marketing, the first step is to define existing communities that share their brand's values and passion. They need to identify and get to know the key persons of that community, for example, ScopesMonkey and Reaperson are important members of the Sherlock fandom because of the popularity of the stories and the fan art that they create and share with other members. The marketers need to understand their values and what drives them to be active within the community. Another tactic can be to identify what the community is missing.

What are the common frustrations that the community suffers as a whole? What could be changed to make the community go forward? The marketers need to identify these same things for the key persons within the community. What are their dreams, things they want to achieve within the community? What keeps them from doing so? Once they understand what a community and its individuals are missing, they need to identify what they or their business can do to help. They can discuss these frustrations, problems, ideas, opportunities with the community and offer their help. From these discussions, they can go about identifying members who are motivated to participate or even lead the project. For example, a collaboration with one of the major Sherlock-dedicated Tumblr blog communities like 'the Baker Street Babes' to promote a social cause or to lead a drive with the marketer's brand company as the sponsor can bring in a lot of publicity, which will not only create awareness about your own product/service but

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also create an image of a modern, interactive brand, basically a name that keeps up with the times and is both tech-savvy and has a fun streak.

Brands whose targets are teenagers and young adults or who want to promote some form of literature or fun club can look into this. From day one on the project make sure every step is documented publicly somewhere. Be it on the project website, the community's website or the brand's website (or other channels). The story of the project should be told by a community member, whoever can be recruited. Make sure everyone who's actively involved in the project gets exposure and feel proud for participating. However, the marketers need to keep in mind that when they communicate they don't describe the project as their brand's initiative, but as a community effort of which they and their brand are part of.

Brands associated with promoting anything that the fandom considers as important will not only get a lot of good publicity by word of mouth but also garner respect in the eyes of fellow fan-members who'd listen, reblog and retweet their opinions on social media. Another important avenue, as has been seen in the past, is the sale of merchandise, memorabilia and related material to the show. One business that has really benefitted from it is the new and upcoming company Shirt Mogul, who started up their operations in January, printing T-shirts having famous show-related designs. They call them the home for the best Pop culture T-shirts and they've grown really fast, expanding from Delhi to all over the country and even shipping their products to Europe and other parts of Asia. In fact, their sales have been so phenomenal that they've recently come out with new designs, covering more

shows and becoming a favorite amongst fans of various shows in India at least. “ We are diehard fans of these shows,” says Mr.

Charanjit Singh, the co-creator of the company, “ I got the idea of doing something like this because I, as a fan, was able to recognize the demand for something like this in places like Mumbai and Delhi. ” For a mere Rs. 600, a fan is able to ship in coveted designs. Thus, for a producer or marketer to understand what a fan from a famous, thriving, historically surviving fanbase of a globally recognized brand like Sherlock Holmes wants, they need to put themselves in the consumer’s shoes and understand what is lacking in their community, what type of a consumer they are and what the company that the marketer works for, offers them. ~*~*~*~*~*

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