

The World is Watching: An Analysis of the
Professional Wrestling Fandom in Bangladesh

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A thesis submitted to the Department of Economics and Social Sciences in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Social Sciences in Anthropology

Department of Economics and Social Sciences
Brac University
May 2022

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Approval

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Dedication

To my brother Osama,

*who instilled in me in childhood a love for
professional wrestling that burns brightly to this day.*

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Abstract

This thesis explored the professional wrestling fandom in Bangladesh to locate class divisions within the fandom that give birth to different subsets of fans known as smarks and marks. These fans and their experiences are shaped by their class and cultural capital, and they view wrestling in fundamentally different ways. Furthermore, in the current mediascape, characterized by convergence culture, the Bangladeshi middle-class fans gain access to wrestling fan spaces online, as well as access to specific wrestling discourses which further shapes how they engage with the wrestling industry. While access to these spaces has caused even greater fan divisions based on class, it has also allowed middle-class fans to become co-producers of official wrestling texts through constant engagement, negotiations, rejections, and alterations of official texts.

Keywords: Professional Wrestling, Smarks, Marks, Cultural Capital, Convergence Culture, Kayfabe, Class, Bourdieu, Henry Jenkins

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my teachers and professors for their support over the years. I am also appreciative of my family's patience. I am eternally grateful to my friends Fatimah, Adepto, and Azraf for their critiques. I am incredibly thankful to my friends Rojin, Navila, Fatimah, Sadaf, Zareef, and Nilock, for their unending support. I am also grateful to Saadman Saif, for being my wrestling partner-in-crime. Lastly, I am indebted to Zahra Mayeesha for all her help. I would not have started this, let alone finished it, if it weren't for her.

Introduction

Professional Wrestling due to its inability, or rather, unwillingness, to classify itself as either sports or theater, has been for the most part, along with its fans, ignored or looked down upon in academic studies of popular culture and its effects on consumers. Although this has been changing since the turn of the century because of the greater access to wrestling texts, fans, and performers (Castleberry et al, 2018), there are still large areas of the genre ripe for study, especially outside of the United States.

Even as Pro Wrestling continued to endure mockery for its ‘fake’ nature from a subset of the world’s population, World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE), the biggest wrestling promotion in the world, proceeded to expand its brand, reaching and converting audiences around the globe, including Bangladesh. Pro Wrestling enjoys a huge fanbase in the Indian Subcontinent, particularly in India and Bangladesh. In April 2022, WWE aired the 38th annual edition of their biggest live event, “Wrestlemania”, which aired on ‘Sony Sports Network’ in the Indian subcontinent, and boasted over 56 million viewers in India alone (India.com). This statistic does not account for how many people watched the event on WWE’s streaming site, nor how many people pirated the event. Statistics for Bangladesh are not available. Despite the vibrant and major fanbase in the region, there have been no studies of any kind on wrestling fans in Bangladesh.

This thesis explores the professional wrestling fandom in Bangladesh. It aims to show how the enjoyment and viewing, or in other words, the interpretation of wrestling is intrinsically linked to class due to the difference in the level of access to education, technology, and internet fan spaces between subsets of fans. It also attempts to show that professional wrestling fans in Bangladesh are not just passive or active members of the viewing audience, but that they are

‘productive’ fans who are in constant negotiations and collaborations with the official texts. These will be shown through a discussion on how fans participate in shaping the official texts, while looking at the unanticipated dynamics that arise between different subsets of fans due to class difference and the specific social context in Bangladesh. In essence, my thesis will use professional wrestling as a lens to highlight class differences in Bangladeshi consumers and how the current media landscape has shaped middle class Bangladeshis into co-producers of official media texts. As such, my thesis will contribute to the fields of anthropology of media, as well as fan studies.

Theoretical Framework

In order to convey the contributions of this thesis, it would be helpful to first provide an overview of the scholarly works that have been produced in the broader fields that influenced my research. The fields of cultural and media studies, as it pertains to the reception of media by an audience, were instrumental in this regard. As Toepfer (2011) aptly summarizes, the first generation of cultural and media studies theories were heavily shaped by the work of Theodore Adorno (1963) in “Culture Industry Reconsidered”. Adorno argued that consumers of media were being deceived or fooled as it was a tool used to instill social order within society through the subjugation of individual choice or thought. Seen this way, people were thought to be ‘passive’ consumers of media, unable to resist its messages.

The next generation of theorists attempted to critique this belief by claiming that consumers were not passive, but rather they were ‘active’ participants in the consumption of media. This school of thought, popularized by Stuart Hall (1980), saw audience interpretations of media as having three different possibilities: dominant readings, resistant readings, and negotiated readings. While producers of media were free to ‘encode’ whatever message they wanted to send, there was no guarantee how consumers would ‘decode’ these messages. This model of

understanding media audiences gave audiences far more agency than the previous one. The cultural context of each person would mean that messages could be interpreted in a multitude of ways (Hall, 1973).

The next advance in media theory sought to give even greater agency to audiences. Proposed by Henry Jenkins (1992) in “Textual Poachers”, audiences were theorized, not just as active, but also ‘creative’. Jenkins provided the examples of fanworks such as fanfiction of popular media to argue that consumers could now also be ‘creative producers’ (Toepfer, 2006) of media. However, these creators and creations were thought to be on the outskirts of mainstream media, and could only interact with the official narratives from the periphery (Jenkins, 1992).

As the decade passed by and technology started advancing at an unprecedented rate, it became clear to Jenkins that his conception of the creative audience struggling to interact with the mainstream audience was no longer accurate. To that end, Jenkins (2006) reconceptualized his theory by claiming that media was now in a state of ‘convergence’, where the increasing access to technology and the interconnectedness of media has led to a level of consumer participation never before seen. In this new ‘convergence culture’, media audiences are no longer interacting with official media texts from the sidelines, but are now also in the mainstream, collaborating in the process of production to the point where the line between consumers and producers have become blurred (Jenkins, 2006). The theories and concepts purported by Jenkins have not only been crucial to the advancement of media studies, but have also lent themselves to fan studies and the anthropology of media, which this thesis falls under.

Accordingly, this thesis borrows heavily from the works of Henry Jenkins. It will use the concepts of media convergence, participation culture, and transmedia storytelling to analyze wrestling fandom within the Bangladeshi context. Stuart Hall’s conceptualization of the

audience as active consumers with the ability to negotiate with media depending on their identities and social contexts will be used in situating Bangladeshi fans and their relationship to the wrestling industry in the era of globalization.

Henry Jenkins (2006) used the term convergence culture to describe the state of media today. One way of understanding convergence is the coming together of different technologies to make new technology. For example, a smartphone is a convergence of a phone, television, and computer into one device. Jenkins, however, contends that this notion of convergence is too simplistic. Instead of seeing convergence as the blending of different media technologies into one, Jenkins suggests that convergence describes a cultural shift in how the mediascape operates. He states that convergence is “the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 2).

He uses the term transmedia storytelling to describe the trend in media where one story is being told throughout different media, with each type of media contributing something different to the larger story-world. In the case of the wrestling industry, WWE is a prime example of a company utilizing transmedia storytelling. WWE airs weekly shows on television, but they also make different content such as documentaries to consumers who subscribe to WWE’s streaming network. Additionally, stories are often furthered through the use of social media such as Twitter and Instagram. All these different media are being used to create one overarching story-world, and in convergence culture “fans are encouraged to seek out connections amongst dispersed media content” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 3).

Furthermore, he offers the term participatory culture to describe the shift in the roles of media audiences. Far from being the passive audiences they were once thought to be, because of convergence culture, consumers can now directly interact and shape media content alongside producers. In addition, Jenkins claims that convergence occurs not in the application of different media, but in the “brains of individual consumers and through their social interactions with others” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 3). Thus, he believes there is a process of “collective intelligence” involved in the consumption of media now, whereby consumers from all over the world come together to share their skills and knowledge with each other through social interactions in order to consume media in a collective manner.

While a number of papers have been written about wrestling fans’ interactions and relationships with wrestlers and wrestling companies, there has been a lack of focus on the transnational aspects of wrestling fandom, despite the popularity of this genre around the world. Ien Eng (1985) produced one of the founding studies on transnational audiences through her study of Dutch audiences of an American TV show called ‘Dallas’, which was followed by Liebez and Katz (1990) studying the reception of ‘Dallas’ in four different ethnic groups in Israel. These studies showed that audiences have varied and diverse interpretations and relations with the characters and shows they consume based on their local cultural factors. It is within this transnational context of a growing mediascape (Appadurai, 1990) that this thesis is situated, in an effort to bridge the gap in studies of media and its transnational audience.

In order to understand the current state of the Bangladeshi wrestling fandom, it must be contextualized within the current mediascape. Mediascape, refers to both “the distribution of electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information” as well as “the images of the world created by these media” (Appadurai, 1990, p. 52). The 20th century has seen a radical increase in the compression of space and time in social and cultural matters (Harvey, 1989) as

well as the stretching out of social life over large distances (Giddens, 1990). This process whereby the world shrinks and becomes far more interconnected than it used to be is called globalization. The “speeding up of the flows of capital, goods, images, and ideas” and the “intensification of the links, modes of interaction, and flows that interconnect the world” as well as “the stretching of social, cultural, political, and economic practices across frontiers” means that “distant events come to have an impact on local spaces, and local developments come to have global repercussions” (Inda & Rosaldo, 2002). The authors point out that this leads to a deterritorialization of culture, meaning that cultural objects and subjects become uprooted from local spaces, and then are re-territorialized in new localities. This state of globalization raised concerns amongst anthropologists about cultural imperialism. Cultural imperialism theorists claimed that globalization resulted in a homogenization of culture due to the western world imposing its culture and values onto the rest of the world. This spread of western media to the rest of the world is one of the phenomena that was seen as a leading cause of this homogenization. It was within the context of these debates that the view of the third world as passive audiences being influenced by mass media was contested by cultural theorists such as Stuart Hall and David Morley as well as by the studies done by scholars such as Ien Ang (1985) that showed how consumers from other countries interpreted American shows based on their own local contexts.

The theories put forward in Pierre Bourdieu’s (1984) “Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste” will be essential to understand the class differences in wrestling fans. To Bourdieu, a person’s taste is a marker of their class position. He argued that this was due to the fact that a person’s taste did not develop individually in a vacuum, but rather there are dispositions within people that are instilled through socialization from a very early age. He asserts that what a person deems aesthetic is influenced by the social class that they belong to.

According to Bourdieu, different distinctions of taste help to create different social classes, and those of higher classes use the greater forms of capital they possess to legitimize their tastes as superior or commonsensical. One of the vital ways through which distinctions of taste between classes arises, is the notion of cultural capital. By cultural capital, Bourdieu means the collection of non-economic forces such as level of education, the types of school one attends, access to greater technology, as well as skills and competencies. These lead to social hierarchies where certain practices and tastes are favored over others.

Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital was used by Fiske (1992) to argue that fan cultures are subcultures that use the knowledge and expertise that they gain about their fandoms to organize into hierarchies. While this is similar to cultural capital, it differs in the sense that knowledge and expertise gained cannot be translated into economic capital. Thus, Sarah Thornton (1996) describes this kind of capital as subcultural capital. She states that fans can climb up the ranks by increasing their status within the subcultures through displays of greater knowledge and expertise on the texts of their fandom. This is in line with the online "knowledge communities" that share experiences with each other and help each other grow (Jenkins, 2006).

In their thesis discussing the discourses that are privileged by certain wrestling fans, Shane Toepfer (2006) utilizes the concept of meta-narratives in order to distinguish it from official narratives. Meta-narratives, as posited by Toepfer, are those narratives that are not part of the official narratives that are produced by wrestling promotions. They exist separate from these official narratives. He further states that fans read wrestling texts from the perspective of both these narratives simultaneously, and they privilege meta-narratives over official ones, in the sense that meta-narratives are the basis upon which fans critique, challenge, negotiate and collaborate on official narratives. Therefore, I will borrow the concept of meta-narratives to analyze Bangladeshi' fans reception of wrestling shows, and how class plays into it.

Thus, my thesis will attempt to synthesize the concepts of convergence culture, participation culture and meta-narratives, as well as the theories of Bordieu and Appadurai, to locate a transnational understanding of how Bangladeshi wrestling fans and their relations to the wrestling industry are formed in an increasingly globalized world. In doing so, my thesis will attempt to contribute to the field of media anthropology by using wrestling as a lens to show how the social realities of Bangladeshis shape their consumption of media.

Methodology

Both wrestling fans specifically, and fan studies in general face stigma within broader academia. Ethnographies of fans are often seeped in a sort of ‘moral dualism’ (Hills, 2002) where ‘good’ fans are pitted against ‘bad’ fans. Hills also notes how because of the stigma attached to certain fandoms, ethnographies that take fans’ responses at face value risk losing sight of the affect and passion that often characterizes fans, due to fans having to filter their choice in fandom through a logic of rationality. As such, an autoethnography can be a useful methodological tool to research wrestling fans and their relations to media due to autoethnography’s engagement with “laborious, honest, and nuanced self-reflection” (Manning & Adams, 2015, p. 190). I have been a fan of professional wrestling since I was four years old. I have participated in the wrestling fandom for two decades and have gone through many highs and lows of fandom. As wrestling has been my passion for so long, I have become well acquainted with wrestling discourse over the years both in Bangladesh and around the world. Furthermore, my knowledge of wrestling and its fandom has provided me tools to capture and describe the affective experience of wrestling fans. Thus, this thesis will be an autoethnographic account of wrestling fans in Bangladesh as I am describing a world that I am intimately familiar with, and belong to..

As a life-long fan of professional wrestling, I recognize that I also fall under the same categories and divisions that comprise the fandom and that, therefore, my position in writing this thesis and conducting interviews, would not be without bias. At the same time, my position as a fellow fan of wrestling has afforded me the knowledge of other fan spaces that exist within the local and global wrestling communities, and my life-long interactions with all types of fans grants me rich access to a variety of spaces, opinions and experiences of wrestling fans. It also means I am entrenched within the larger cultural and discursive practices that make up the wrestling fandom, globally and in Bangladesh.

To conduct this autoethnography, I chose to collect data through participant observation, as well as semi-structured, face-to-face in-depth interviews with 5 male respondents. I was able to find these interlocutors due to my proximity to the fandom, as they are all people that I knew beforehand due to our shared fandom. In addition, my middle class upbringing also provided me with greater access to my interlocutors.

I have chosen to use pseudonyms for my respondents, who are as follows: Shad, Akif, Anik, Rana, and Opu.

Shad and Akif are 26 years old and have both graduated with an economics undergraduate degree from BRAC University. Akif is currently working at the Daily Star newspaper as a journalist, whereas Shad is working as a sales associate at an American company. Opu is 32 years old and is working at The Business Standard as a sub-editor, after completing his studies from North South University. All three of the interlocutors have received an English medium education.

On the other hand, Rana and Anik are brothers who have received a Bengali medium education, and have only completed their studies up until class 5. Rana is 25 years old and Anik is 20 years old. They both currently aid their father in his food business as shopkeepers.

I chose these particular respondents as I believed they would illustrate the important role of class to my analysis. However, the diversity of my data is limited as it does not account for gender and ethnicity, and so analysis that foregrounds gender and ethnicity is beyond the scope of this thesis.

I also draw information from my observations of online wrestling forums and message boards within Bangladesh, as well as international ones that my respondents participate in, as social media usage is an integral part of the changing relationship between fans and producers

Kayfabe and its discontents

Understanding Kayfabe

Perhaps no other aspect of professional wrestling faces as much ridicule as the scripted nature of its events. The perception of pro wrestling as 'fake' leads its detractors to not only mock the performances masquerading as sport, but also the fans for being fooled into watching it. At the heart of this deceiving element of professional wrestling is the concept known as kayfabe. The wrestling industry, and its promotions, wrestlers, and fans are built on kayfabe. Thus, any attempts to decouple wrestling from kayfabe would morph it into something entirely different. As such, it is of crucial importance to understand kayfabe's role in the fandom of pro wrestling.

The origin of kayfabe can be traced back to professional wrestling's carnival roots. In these carnivals, promoters would schedule wrestling matches between professional strongmen for the carnival audience. In time, the promoters realized that they would be able to make more money if they could predetermine the outcome of matches, so that the more popular strongman would win. This is what gave birth to modern professional wrestling. Within this context, kayfabe can be seen as a way of tricking the crowd in an attempt to maximize crowd engagement, or profit. Indeed, one of the most prominent figures in wrestling scholarship, Sharon Mazer (1998, pp. 22-23), describes it as a "con" or "deception" and 'kayfabians' to be simply 'con-artists'.

As wrestling evolved from its carnival roots and moved on to larger stadiums as an institutionalized form of entertainment, kayfabe expanded its reach. Wrestlers were required to maintain their roles and characters they played beyond the confines of the wrestling ring. They had to keep up the act whenever they were in a group with outsiders present. To illustrate what this could mean, wrestlers who played evil characters were not allowed to mingle with wrestlers who played good characters, even outside of the shows. This was done in order to maintain the

ruse that the events that transpired during the shows were real. These acts of concealment were brought into the fold of kayfabe. In order to describe this phenomenon, scholars expand upon the definition of kayfabe to mean the “illusion of realness” (Smith, 2014, p. 68), “the fictional world of pro wrestling” (Laine, 2020, p. 192), or “the practice of sustaining in-diegesis performance into everyday life” (Litherland, 2014, p. 531).

While these ways of conceptualizing kayfabe captured the role and the actions of the producers and wrestlers well enough, they did not necessarily account for the role of the audience in relation to kayfabe. As wrestling entered the 1980s and 1990s, the rise of the internet brought with it the proliferation of news about the inner-workings of the wrestling industry. In order to maintain kayfabe, the wrestling industry had created its own parlance to conceal insider knowledge from outsiders, and these jargons were now becoming accessible to fans of wrestling who possessed the internet. As fans started gaining new knowledge about how wrestling worked behind the scenes, they became ‘in on the game’. However, if the wrestling industry existed purely because it managed to trick its audience into believing its reality completely, then a revelation of their deception to a majority of the audience would lead to a rejection of the genre. Yet, the wrestling industry is thriving, and WWE is earning more money now than ever before.

Instead of rejecting wrestling, fans who became privy to the insider knowledge used their knowledge to reframe their understanding of wrestling, and their role as fans. Now that fans knew that wrestling was predetermined, they would have to play their part in upholding kayfabe. They would essentially have to play along with the ruse. Thus, scholars have had to reconceptualize kayfabe by stating that it consists of an “engaged disbelief” (Wrenn, 2007, p. 150). Additionally, because of the role that the audience plays in maintaining kayfabe, it is now

understood to be “co-created” through “moment to moment engagement between fans and wrestlers” (Reinhard, 2019, p. 31).

Due to the important role fans play in co-creating kayfabe, DiAron M. (2022, p. 83) points out, it is a “discursive space in which wrestling promotions attempt to communicate to fans through entertainment and fans attempt to communicate with wrestling promotions about their entertainment”. Inverting Stuart Hall’s concept of encoding and decoding, M. argues that in wrestling, promotions may encode messages for fans to decode, but the opposite is also true. Fans, in turn, encode messages for promotions to decode. In fact, according to M. (2022, p. 84), “wrestling’s very foundations dictate that fans impact the product. They subsequently expect to actively contribute to story-lines”.

Indeed, the sentiment that fans should have a role in shaping the product can be seen in my interlocutors. Akif, 26, journalist, states his opinion on WWE manipulating live crowd noise for television audiences:

WWE is very famously known for not wanting to do what fans want and doing it their own way, but the whole wrestling industry is built on us fans, and viewership. If the fans don’t want something why do you keep giving it to them? When we see that they keep doing this and they keep manipulating the audience, it feels very disingenuous. We have a say in how the story should go and we’ll make our voices heard if WWE disregards us for too long.

To provide a more encapsulating concept of kayfabe, I posit that kayfabe is a discursive site where promotions, wrestlers and fans come together to contribute to the co-production of wrestling. However, in any discursive space, especially in one which can be accessed by people of different classes, ages, genders, and ethnicities from around the entire world, there will not

be a uniformity of opinions, values, and ideas. Contradictory views and desires will give rise to tensions within the discursive space between different groups of people and because kayfabe is co-produced, it can only be understood inter-relationally. It is within this context of a transnational fandom that I studied Bangladeshi fans of professional wrestling, in order to locate the tensions, fractures, and divisions. Throughout this thesis, I attempt to show that the divides that exist within the wrestling fandom in Bangladesh had arisen because of class differences between fans, and how this divide has been exacerbated by middle and upper class fans gaining access to technologies such as the internet and social media at a far more rapid rate than those of the lower classes.

History of wrestling fandom in Bangladesh

At this point, it is clear that kayfabe, as it is understood in this thesis, is not immutable. Kayfabe is a discursive space and discourses within it shift and evolve overtime. However, due to the transnational and transcultural nature of the major companies in the industry currently, different, often conflicting discourses are produced based on local factors and they all intermingle within the larger discursive space. The interactions of all these discourses from fans, wrestlers, and producers is what make up kayfabe, which directly impacts all major wrestling texts. Understanding the Bangladeshi fandom's role within this discursive space will elucidate the factors that lead to fan divides.

The wrestling fandom in Bangladesh was born in the 1990s, when the wrestling industry began to experience its biggest boom period. This boom period saw a massive increase in the circulation of wrestling shows all over the world, including Bangladesh. However, back in the early to mid-90s, WWE was not aired on TV in Bangladesh. So, those who became fans of wrestling back then, did so because they bought cassette tapes of wrestling shows from local stores. This meant that these fans were not following the product live or chronologically.

Furthermore, when television channels in Bangladesh started airing WWE shows in the late 90s, broadcasts were months behind the live shows, which meant that fans were not able to stay up-to-date. In addition to lack of access to live shows, the internet was still in its infancy in Bangladesh and most homes did not have it. If fans learned about what was happening in real time, they could only do so on hearsay from family members, relatives, or friends who had access to live updates.

It is also necessary to point out that these fans were very young. None of the respondents interviewed were above the age of ten during the 1990s, and one was born after. All these factors created a form of entertainment that was shrouded in mystery. There were no discussions about WWE being ‘fake’ or of kayfabe or any insider terms used by the industry. To these interlocutors, wrestling was not a simulated sport; it was legitimate competition. The wrestlers were not actors playing characters; rather, they were their characters. Moreover, because of the lack of access to wrestling texts, fans had to watch whatever cassettes they could get their hands on, even if they were of episodes or pay-per-views that were years apart from each other. This meant that the stories that WWE tried telling did not reach them as such, and they had to fill in the blanks with their own interpretations. Essentially, WWE encoded their texts in one manner, but due to local restraints, the way fans decoded these texts were negotiated through their own contexts. One prime example of this comes from Rana, 25, shopkeeper, who remarks, “I loved watching wrestling, but do not understand English very well, so I could not tell what the commentary was saying or the wrestlers were saying, sometimes I could figure it out, but not always.” Anik, 20, shopkeeper, reiterates the claim, “I usually don’t understand a lot of what the commentators and wrestlers talk about, but I can tell from their actions and behavior what kind of people they are.” Much of the narrative that WWE pushes is channeled through their commentary teams as well as speeches from wrestlers which

are known as ‘promos’. A language barrier would mean that much of the intended messages get lost in translation.

Around the early 2000s, the internet became more accessible to the Bangladeshi middle class. Since fans were aware that the shows they had access to were not up-to-date, those who had access to the internet started looking at spoilers so that they could stay updated on recent events in WWE. Shad, 26, sales associate, recalls, “Once the internet became a thing, I would just read about it, that okay this is what’s happening live, and this is who’s champion currently. I always used to know who was champion every single year since I was four.”

It was during these years that a certain subset of fans in Bangladesh started scouring the internet for news, those with greater access to technology and education, that the fandom started becoming fractured. Even though the internet became available in the country in the 1990s, only 0.4% of the population used it in any capacity up until 2008. By 2011, it had only grown to 3.5% (Siddiquee & Islam, 2021). While the ability to access the internet in Bangladesh in the 2000s was low, the low literacy rates and education rates meant that even many of those who could access the internet did not have the technological and language skills required to make use of it. The fandom then became divided along class lines, as middle class fans started accessing updated knowledge about wrestling through their skilful navigation of the internet, while other fans only knew what they could watch on TV. The result of this was that the internet-savvy fans had come to a stunning realization: wrestling was scripted. Thus, a portion of the Bangladeshi fandom had become what the wrestling industry refers to as ‘smarks’.

Marks and Smarks: To believe or not to believe

As I mentioned earlier, one of the primary means of engaging with kayfabe is the ‘illusion of authenticity’. The historical ways in which kayfabe rose necessitated that wrestling promotions develop their own insider terms to communicate with each other without revealing the scripted

nature of their work. Due to its roots in the carnival, wrestling promotions in America developed their own ‘carnie’ slang. These insider terms were adopted by the whole industry and became widespread within all major promotions and their wrestlers, including WWE. This slang became the argot of professional wrestling. The word kayfabe, when used by wrestlers to mean “be in character”, is an example of this argot.

The wrestling industry also has different ways of describing their fans within their argot. Fans who believe in the realness of wrestling are known as ‘marks’. With the advent of the internet, more fans of wrestling started getting exposed to the inner workings of the industry. In other words, wrestling fans started ‘smartening up’ and realizing that wrestling was heavily scripted. These people who understood that wrestling was not legitimate competition became known as ‘smarts’ in wrestling parlance. Smarts started watching wrestling only in order to deconstruct and critique the shows and characters instead of watching for entertainment purposes. Even as cultural theorists were arguing about whether consumers of media were duped or not, the wrestling industry recognized that their fans were smart enough to figure out the truth behind the veil.

As mentioned before, the discovery of wrestling as a simulation of sports did not cause all fans to abandon their fandom. On the contrary, many fans reframed their relation to wrestling and their viewing experience changed. These fans who knew about wrestling being simulated but still chose to participate in the fandom used ‘suspension of disbelief’ as their primary method of engaging with kayfabe. These fans became known as ‘smarks’: a smart mark. As smarks become educated about the inner workings of the wrestling industry—from insider terms to how matches function—their entire relationship and affective experience of wrestling undergoes a monumental shift.

A consequence of these categorizations was also the creation of hierarchy between these subsets of fans. Smarts and smarks were associated with expertise and knowledge in how wrestling shows, matches and storylines were constructed, whereas marks were associated with a “lack of knowledge, competence, and expertise (cultural capital)” (Wrenn, 2007, p. 158).

Before getting into the details of how these different categorizations manifest within fans, it is important to mention how I conceptualized the five respondents that I interviewed for this paper. Of the five interlocutors, I have designated three of them as smarks: Opu, Shad, and Akif. I designated the other two respondents as marks: Anik and Rana. The most important factor that decided their designations was the belief they held about the nature of the wrestling shows they watched. Whether they were watching a sporting competition or choreographed simulation of a fighting competition was one way of delineating this. Another way was whether they believed the characters to be playing acting roles or not. While the wrestling industry itself perpetuates these distinctions within their fans, wrestling fans who become smarks, also gain awareness of these fan categorizations and adopt these identity for themselves. For this reason, one feature I used for my designations was the respondents’ awareness of these fan categories in the first place.

Furthermore, it became clear that those who were designated as marks came from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and were characterized by relatively lower levels of formal education, English education, internet use, and blue collar jobs. Marks lacked the cultural capital that smarks possessed. The term smart did not receive any designation because while smarks showed a lot of tendencies typical of smarts, smarts are characterized by their inability to appreciate wrestling for its aesthetic qualities (Toepfer, 2006), whereas all the respondents interviewed claimed to be fans of wrestling who, on some level, enjoy what they watch as entertainment.

As people who believe in the legitimacy of the athletic competition that is portrayed by wrestling shows, marks tend to value wrestlers based on how strong they are, how skillful they are, how enjoyable they are as characters, or whether they are good people or not. In wrestling parlance, a wrestler who is playing a good person is called a 'babyface', whereas, a wrestler who is playing a bad character is called a 'heel'. Marks tend to overwhelmingly support babyfaces over heels, due to their moral superiority. Furthermore, a wrestler who wins their matches a lot would be perceived as strong or better than other wrestlers, which could also garner fan support. In that manner, if a wrestling promotion wants to increase the popularity of a certain wrestler, they would attempt to appeal to the marks by having the wrestler win matches and play a babyface character. Anik, a mark respondent, mentions:

John Cena used to be my favorite. He had a really positive attitude and would always try his hardest and find a way to win. But in later years, because he was getting old, he started losing more matches, and I lost a little interest in him. I still liked him, but there were others who I became more interested in.

Rana, the other mark respondent:

I love wrestling because it is very entertaining to watch the fights and see how amazing and strong these wrestlers are and the incredible things they can do. I love rooting for wrestlers who try to win matches fairly and with a good attitude, because a lot of times wrestlers try to win the matches and the belt by cheating or doing something bad to their opponents, and I love seeing these types of wrestlers get punished. For example, I remember that many years ago Edge would try to cheat to beat the undertaker, and he would try get his wife, who was the manager at the time, to make Undertaker's life a

living hell, but Undertaker was eventually able to get his revenge, and I really enjoyed how much he made Edge suffer.

In stark contrast, smarks tend to value the technical wrestling skills of wrestlers, and the quality of matches. The quality of a match is based on the technical prowess shown by the wrestlers during the match as well as how well the match was choreographed. Opu, smark interlocutor, states of the shift that happened once he realized wrestling was scripted:

I used to be intrigued by the characters and their rivalries, and then I became more interested in how they're presenting in the ring, what their performance is like, what shots they're calling, trying to predict the next move etc, so my viewing of wrestling changed entirely.

Akif further adds his experience of the shift that takes place:

If you were to go back to the older version of me, they would definitely not enjoy some of the wrestling I enjoy now. Back then it was all about these larger than life characters more than actual wrestling. This is why we're all fans of the undertaker. He wasn't some amazing wrestler-he was sometimes-but he wasn't always this amazing wrestler doing these amazing matches doing these amazing stories. He was his character. His character was larger than life and he had this undefeated streak at Wrestlemania and that's what we loved. But if you see what I love now... very physical, very fast paced, a lot of moves, stipulations, and spots all over the match, and that's not the sort of thing I ever enjoyed, but knowing what wrestling is, and what wrestlers put behind such matches, that is why I appreciate those kinds of matches now. so my idea of how I enjoy wrestling now has definitely changed.

In addition to this, there is also a notable difference in how smarks and marks perceive the genre of professional wrestling. Marks prefer to view wrestling closer to combat sports so for them victory and defeat carry far more meaning in terms of a person's worth as a wrestler than it does for a smark. Smarks, alternatively, view wrestling as performance art where the mix of theater and athleticism is the main selling point. As one smark respondent, Shad, says:

It is sort of like an art and I really enjoy what is being done in professional wrestling. You know, in terms of storylines, the fact that when you talk to anyone about wrestling, they'll tell you it's fake right? But it's sort of like theater, but also these wrestlers are putting their bodies on the line, because as much as it is fake and the results are predetermined and what not, they are really going out and hitting each other so there's always that risk so I think that is what makes me really love pro wrestling.

Expressing a similar sentiment, Opu states:

I enjoy it because it's a TV show for me. It's why other people watch soap operas or Netflix, but then there's this element of actual athleticism going on; it still hurts and they're still putting in the hours and training.

Three of the five respondents were also aware of different categories of wrestling fans to some extent. When asked about his understanding of the terminology, Opu states, "A mark is someone who believes in kayfabe, and smarks are people who know it's fake but like who they like." On the other hand, the respondents who were not aware of the discourse surrounding wrestling's scripted nature, could not speak of any divisions between fans that they were aware of. The terms smarks and marks were not familiar to them, and when asked about different categories of fans, mark respondent Rana said, "I know that different fans support different wrestlers, but I am not aware of any distinct categories."

So far, it is evident that the wrestling industry categorizes its fans into two main groups: smarks and marks. In Bangladesh, these categories exist because of a class divide where cultural capital in the form greater access to technology and education allows certain fans to become smarks, while others remain marks. Additionally, the descriptions provided of the three types of fans recognized by the wrestling industry as well as a large portion of the fanbase have a striking resemblance to David Morley's modification of Stuart Hall's theories which led him to conceptualize three types of ways audiences read texts: Marks have dominant readings, Smarts have oppositional reading, and Smarks have negotiated readings.

The next chapter will use Bangladeshi wrestling fans to focus on the changing media landscape and the effects of new media technologies on the consumption and production of media texts.

Evolution is a Mystery: Convergence Culture and the Changing Relationship of consumers and producers

In the previous chapter, I explained how increased access to the internet in the 2000s allowed a certain portion of the Bangladeshi wrestling fandom to discover the choreographed nature of the industry and led to the fan categories of smarks and marks to arise in the local fandom. In the two decades that have gone by since then, the technological landscape of Bangladesh has altered drastically. In 2022, over 30% of the total population of Bangladesh had access to the internet, mainly due to the increased penetration of mobile internet over the years (Kemp, 2022). In contrast, internet accessibility was less than 5% in 2012. Over 98% of the internet users in Bangladesh use some form of social media platforms. A vast majority of the internet base in Bangladesh access the internet through mobile phones and mobile data. Social media users jumped from just over 5 million in 2014 to almost 50 million at the end of 2021 (Kemp, 2022). Facebook dominates the social media market in Bangladesh with over 94% of the internet bases using it. YouTube use ranked second, and other platforms such as Twitter, Reddit, and Instagram are used by a very small portion of the internet user base (Kemp, 2022). This once again reflects the role of class in internet use in Bangladesh, as only middle class internet users use sites such as Reddit and Twitter, where much of the discourse surrounding wrestling takes place.

Social Media, smarks and the evolution of kayfabe

As Bangladesh gained increasing access to the internet, the divide between fans who are known as marks and those that are known as smarks grew larger. According to data, there were over 44 million Facebook users in Bangladesh, over 34 million YouTube users, over 4 million Instagram users, and less than 1 million Twitter and Reddit users (Kemp, 2022). Yet, 3 of my 5 interlocutors, those that were designated as smarks and belong to the middle class, claimed

that they received much of their wrestling news and consumption from Reddit, Twitter and Instagram. Opu states:

These days, because I am so busy, I do not get to watch full shows or keep up like I used to be able to. However, I frequently visit Reddit and Twitter to learn about all the new things that are happening and what people's reactions are.

Shad and Akif both also claimed to use Reddit, Instagram and Twitter as their primary means of following wrestling when they do not watch the shows. On the other hand, the respondents that were designated as marks and belong to the working class, have never heard of Reddit. They also do not have Instagram and Twitter accounts. Their primary method of consuming wrestling was through Facebook pages and WWE's official YouTube channel.

The increase in the use of technology in Bangladesh also coincided with WWE leaning into social media in an attempt at transmedia storytelling. Social media sites like Twitter and Instagram allowed wrestling companies and wrestlers to extend their characters beyond the scope of their television shows and into the world of online interaction. The possibilities of creating new stories, plotlines and characters stretched out significantly. Kayfabe entered a vast new landscape where its co-creation could take place in real time and across great distances.

So, then, it was the middle class Bangladeshi smark fans of wrestling—those who had gained knowledge of the industry at an early age—that stood to gain the most out of these developments. As the internet and social media became more and more accessible to these fans, they found themselves in online spaces where discussions of wrestling had a truly global flavor. These fans who had become smarks could now access wrestling fan communities where they were exposed to like-minded fans. In other words, the internet had provided spaces that could foster a community of smarks where they could share their knowledge, skills, and expert

opinions about the wrestling business with each other in order to learn from each other, in a phenomenon that Henry Jenkins (2006) described as collective intelligence. Furthermore, fans from these communities could utilize social media to voice their opinions directly to wrestlers and companies through Twitter and Instagram. Speaking of the important role that social media plays, Opu provides his opinion:

I think it's brought us fans closer to the action. We're watching it in real time. WWE is very tech-savvy and uses social media feuds to gauge public reactions. They test whether something will work or not, and then put it on TV, and that makes fans feel closer to wrestlers. We ask questions and express desires and wrestlers answer, so the proximity has grown a lot.

Shad reiterates this:

Before you had to tune in weekly, and whatever was happening was happening on tv, and the rest of the week was silent. And now anything can happen at any time. The secret of Kayfabe is out now, and to bring in more fans, fans who used to complain about these being fake, they brought in a lot of stuff outside the ring to make it seem realistic. We now get to know every single wrestler through social media and they now use that to make more realistic storylines inside the ring.

In contrast, mark interlocutors Rana and Anik, who do not access Twitter, Instagram, or Reddit, feel left out of a lot of wrestling content. When asked about what they think of WWE's turn to transmedia storytelling, Rana has a negative view:

These days many wrestlers start fights with each other on the internet and that spills into the shows. I can somewhat see that because on the shows WWE sometimes show us what happened among the wrestlers online, but other times they do not show it so in

detail but the wrestlers start hating each other and fighting each other on TV because of something that happened outside of TV. When this happens, I sometimes get lost because I am not aware of what is happening throughout the whole week. I like it when WWE goes into details about these things on their YouTube channels though.

Anik provides an example of how the lack of access affects him:

At this year's Wrestlemania, Sami Zayn fought Hollywood actor Johnny Knoxville but I didn't understand much of the reasons why they fought because most of their arguments happened on the internet and I did not know about them. I still enjoyed the match, but I would have liked to be able to see more of their dislike of each other.

The point that Anik makes is a salient one, because not only did the story he mentioned develop mostly on social media, it was directly affected by a Bangladeshi fan who had access to these spaces. The wrestler Sami Zayn had his actual phone number leaked online by his opponent and he received hundreds of calls on his phone. He went on to tweet:

My phone hasn't stopped in 5 days. There's a call/FaceTime/text coming in literally every second of every day. Talked to a guy from Bangladesh at 4am last night who said to 'just change my number'. I've had this number for 9 years. I'm not changing it.
JOHNNY KNOXVILLE WON'T WIN. (Zayn, 2022)

This example shows the divide that class differences can cause in our current mediascape. Those that have access to greater access to cultural capital are privy to more methods of online story-telling and can become co-producers of popular culture texts themselves.

Smarks as co-producers of kayfabe

In order to understand how the development of smarks in Bangladesh due to access to these spaces is tied to class, the notion of subcultural capital is important. In professional wrestling,

subcultural capital is achieved through the continuous process of seeking insider knowledge about the wrestling industry in order to become experts.. With the amount of information that is now available about the industry, the discourse that smarks participate in evolves into an altogether different viewing experience. This shift is caused by the smarks' development of taste that is distinct from marks. Wrestling is no longer about winning or losing matches, or being stronger and better than one's opponent within the story being portrayed, nor is it about supporting heroes and jeering villains. To smarks, wrestling becomes inextricably political. With the knowledge about insider terms and the techniques used to produce a simulation of legitimate competition, smarks enter a process of learning how the game of wrestling works, and this leads them to try to figure out the game for themselves and contribute to it (Mazer, 1998).

I used Toepfer's concept of metanarratives but placed them in the local context of the Bangladeshi fandom to argue the interpretation and collaboration of wrestling texts from the lens of meta-narratives is the domain of smarks. Due to the facts that marks in Bangladesh do not use sites like Reddit or Twitter to consume wrestling content or interact with other wrestling fans, they are not privy to the discourses that are created by these meta-narratives. These fans—while they are fully capable of negotiating and resisting wrestling texts based within local contexts—do so from the lens of official narratives of the texts.

As the data I provided on social media use in Bangladesh earlier in the chapter shows, only a small subset of the population access sites such as Reddit, Instagram and Twitter, highlighting class stratification in social media use within the country. However, these sites are also partially the spaces where the specific discourses on wrestling that smarks engage in take shape. The largest online forum on wrestling is hosted on Reddit. Named R/Squaredcircle, this subreddit had over 600,000 subscribers in early 2022 (Reddit.com). As smarks in Bangladesh started

getting involved in these online forums for wrestling news, they became members of the knowledge communities that Henry Jenkins wrote of. Crystle Martin (2017) explains:

This trajectory of learning, enculturation, and growth is a development track that professional wrestling fans embark on not in isolation but, rather, with the support of fellow fans. This type of peer mentorship originally only took place in person, and for many finding another fan to share the experience and enjoyment of professional wrestling, let alone a mentor, was difficult, especially as fans passed out of their early teen years. The Internet changed this for professional wrestling fans, connecting them across the globe.

Indeed, finding their own online communities changed how smarks interact with wrestling entirely. Shad explained:

Definitely finding a community of like-minded people to talk to and learn from changed my views drastically. Back then I used to watch match by match and just watch what I used to be shown, but now that I have more experience, when I watch something I can tell that they're showing me this because they'll show me something else in the future, there's a lot of fun in being able to guess what comes next and able to predict how things will turn out because it shows me I know how the wrestling business works intimately.

This sentiment is mirrored by Opu and Akif, both of whom claim to enjoy the “guesswork” and “correct predictions” of how stories will play out. In contrast, Rana and Anik claim that they have ideas about who might win a match, but their main enjoyment comes from “supporting our favorite characters” (Rana) and “cheering for them to win even if I think they might lose” (Anik).

Thus, for the Bangladeshi smarks who began to evaluate wrestling through the meta-narratives, a wrestler dominating a match and winning does not mean that the wrestler is a better opponent, it means that the producers want to “push” (when someone is scripted to look strong) that wrestler. If a wrestler loses their match, it is not because the wrestler was the weaker opponent, but rather it is because the producers wanted to “bury” (when a wrestler is scripted to look weak) that wrestler.

Therefore, to smarks, all production decisions are inherently political and do not necessarily reflect the actual worth of the wrestlers. For smarks, a wrestler’s worth lies not in how they are “booked” (scripted and portrayed by producers), but rather in the physical attributes, technical skills, speaking skills, work ethic and other such qualities that the actors playing the characters possess. This means that if smarks don’t like a match or a wrestler or a storyline within a wrestling show, they tend to place the blame on the producers and not the wrestlers or the matches, and demand change. In other words, due to the specific discourses that smarks privilege, they are in a constant process of resistance to and negotiation with the official texts of wrestling.

Roman Reigns: a case study

To illustrate how interpreting wrestling through meta-narratives as opposed to official narratives leads to a divided fan experience, I will take a look at the reception of WWE wrestler Roman Reigns within the Bangladesh fandom.

In the official narratives of the text, Roman Reigns was introduced in WWE in 2012 as part of a villainous (heel) mercenary group that would wreak havoc on other wrestlers through nefarious means. As wrestling characters stretch out for decades without break, they tend to change from babyfaces (good person) to heels (bad person) multiple times over their careers. Roman Reigns was no different, and he changed allegiance to become a babyface roughly 2

years after his debut. After that, he was booked (scripted) to be a very dominant character who would win a large majority of his matches regularly. He was presented as a strong and brave wrestler who would not back down from any challenge and would always rise to the occasion and win. This continued for a few years as he won multiple championships and beat multiple high profile wrestlers. However, in 2017, the actor behind the character announced that he had been fighting with cancer his whole life, and that it was now back. This meant that he would have to take a break from wrestling until he was healthy again. After many months, Reigns would return to WWE to announce that his cancer was in remission and that he was back. He started where he left off by winning dominating most of his matches until he took another break in 2020 due to the covid pandemic. When he returned again, he had changed his character to a heel. Since then he has become the longest reigning champion of WWE's main title which is called the "Universal Championship".

Speaking about his feelings toward Roman Reigns when he was presented as a babyface, Rana, mark, answers:

Roman Reigns was my favorite WWE wrestler. He was a really great wrestler and he was never afraid to fight anyone. The WWE tried very hard to make him lose his matches. They sent evil people after him, and the bosses even tried to use their power to cheat and make him lose, but he was always able to beat them. I loved when he won his first championship, and also when he won the Royal Rumble match. His victory against the Undertaker really solidified him as one of the best wrestlers ever.

Interpreting the character of Reigns from the lens of official narratives, Rana saw his years of dominance as a positive aspect, and it added to the character's appeal for him. When asked about his reaction to Reigns' cancer announcement, Anik, mark, states:

It was one of the most heart-breaking moments I've witnessed while watching wrestling. My favorite wrestler was suddenly sick, and I was scared about his health. I even posted on Facebook to ask people to pray for him. I was so happy when he returned.

As for Reigns' currently being a heel, both Rana and Anik express displeasure at the thought. To Rana, "[Reigns'] success got to his head, and he thinks he's unstoppable and can do anything now. Someone needs to teach him a lesson." From Anik's perspective, he no longer calls himself a fan of Roman Reigns because "he has betrayed everything he used to stand for."

Speaking to the smarks about their feelings on Roman's character depicts an entirely different story. From the lens of a meta-narrative, Roman Reigns is one of WWE's biggest failures. On sites such as Reddit, where smarks discuss these meta-narratives, the discussions surrounding Roman Reigns is substantially more hostile. Discourse on Reigns is focused on WWE management's desire to make Reigns their next top wrestler by any means necessary. With access to insider news, and knowledge about management's attitudes and beliefs regarding Roman's character, these smarks view him as a wrestler that is being "shoved down their throats" (Akif). They saw his presentation as a strong wrestler as a strictly negative development which was hurting other wrestlers who were better deserving of the 'push' that Reigns was receiving, due to possessing better technical skills that smarks value. As an example, Akif states:

If you know anything about wrestling fans, we rarely support wrestlers that are being pushed by the company or promotion. There is a feeling of inauthenticity attached to any wrestler that the company decides to push. I hated Roman Reigns because his speaking skills were not great and his in-ring technical skills were not great but he was

still being scripted to win all his matches. I felt like I was being spoon-fed by WWE to accept that Roman would be the future of the company.

Akif highlights why he hated Roman Reigns and he speaks as if this is a collective behavior that characterizes wrestling fans. Akif's exposure to smark communities allowed him access to meta-narratives which shaped his own views on Roman. To provide a clear example, Akif mentions that his hatred of Reigns was cemented when he watched a podcast where former WWE wrestler CM Punk aired his grievances about WWE and told a story about how he was always asked to "make Roman look strong".

Another smark, Opu shares a similar sentiment about the disingenuous feeling that comes with recognizing who the company wants fans to support:

I just don't like Roman Reigns at all, not even in his current iteration. I think wrestling is about rebellion. Characters like Brock, Rock, Austin, even Shawn, we liked these characters because they were rebels. We felt WWE didn't want us to like them so we liked them, but with Roman Reigns, you knew they were trying their level best to like them. I still feel like they never had cancer, but they used that to garner sympathy.

Remarkably, the oppositional readings that meta-narratives allow reach such levels of cynicism that smark fans such as Opu begin questioning even real life developments like Roman's cancer. To these fans, everything is a ploy to garner fan support.

However, smarks do not just oppose official narratives; they also negotiate and attempt to influence them. Due to the cultural shift that has occurred with the rise of convergence culture, middle class fans have become productive consumers of WWE. WWE's attempts at transmedia storytelling allows fans across the world to engage with their official texts and co-produced them. As smarks bring in their meta-narratives, these discourses bleed into social media such

as Twitter and even the live arenas, eventually forcing WWE to acknowledge and adapt to these meta-narratives. Thus, Roman Reigns' current character being a villainous heel is not a mere coincidence. It is WWE's attempt to appease a fanbase that has been rejecting their main attractions for years. While a large portion of WWE's fanbase, primarily marks, enjoyed Reigns on their television shows, he was routinely met with anger and rejection by the smarks—on social media as well as in live arenas. It was only after he became a heel that smarks started to like his character. As Shad says:

Roman Reigns right now is everything fans have been clamoring for, for years. WWE finally gave it to us, and it wouldn't have happened if he didn't go through such a tumultuous career where he was hated no matter what he did. He came back after beating cancer and we started booing him on his first match back! Now that they have finally been forced to turn him heel, he finally looks cool and I like watching him now.

As Bangladeshi smarks became involved in these spaces, they found a community where they could voice their concerns about wrestling, and learn from others. They found a place where they could collectively contribute to kayfabe itself. Speaking of the power of social media, Akif claims:

For the longest time WWE was the only game in the entire world. We were not seeing NJPW or other promotions, mostly because there wasn't social media, and WWE only gave you what they wanted to give you, and they would never really listen to the fans, but now seeing that fans can talk about it when they don't like something and when I don't like something, going and finding other people that agree with me, that WWE dropped the ball, it definitely feels better. It feels like I'm part of a wrestling community. and that is why I think social media is great because it makes you feel like

you belong, and it gives you a voice, and we can now directly demand the type of wrestling that we enjoy, and companies can no longer just ignore us since we can directly interact with wrestlers and stories on social media.

Indeed, Akif's point is salient, as WWE has increasingly had to adapt to the current mediascape by incorporating more and more meta-narratives to the point where kayfabe has evolved into an inextricable mix of official narratives—put forward by the textual producers—and meta-narratives which are pushed primarily by smark fans.

Conclusion

My thesis explored an autoethnography of the professional wrestling fandom in Bangladesh through the lens of Bourdieu's theories of cultural capital and taste. It showed that professional wrestling has a divided fanbase that is acknowledged by both the industry and a subset of middle and upper class fans in Bangladesh. I contended that professional wrestling is built on the notion of kayfabe, which means that producers, wrestlers and fans all collaborate on official wrestling texts together. However, I have situated my thesis in its transnational contexts, and analyzed how Henry Jenkins' notions of convergence culture has helped change how fans in Bangladesh interact with wrestling texts.

Due to greater access to social media, internet, and insider knowledge, the middle and upper class wrestling fans of Bangladesh became part of global online communities of wrestling which fundamentally shifted their understanding of wrestling and led to a divide in the fanbase between fans who believe that wrestling is scripted and those who do not. Furthermore, I have shown how, utilizing their cultural capital, middle and upper class wrestling fans have been able to enter global wrestling communities where they can directly contribute to and contest official wrestling texts. In other words, a subset of consumers have become productive consumers through their use of the internet and social media. However, this change is shaped

by the class of the consumers as only those with greater cultural and subcultural capital, have been able to access the online sites and discourses that shape the wrestling industry.

The objective of this thesis was to use wrestling fans as a lens to view the role of class in the consumption of media, especially in a transnational context. This thesis contributes to the anthropology of media by situating a global phenomenon within a local context, and uses ethnographic data to showcase how the relationship of consumers to global media is dependent on local factors and globalization. Furthermore, it used wrestling to argue that Bangladeshi consumers are not passive in their consumption of media, but rather they are active participants within the construction of media texts due to globalization of media and technology.

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