

Claiming the Crown — The Agency and Fandom of “The Woman King”

by

Cibonay R. Dames, M.F.A.

Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy in Communication

School of Communication and the Arts

Liberty University

2024

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Abstract

This content analysis study aimed to understand the culture-sharing pattern of *The Woman King* fans on X and the film's impact on Black popular culture. The specific problem that was addressed is the need to explore Black popular culture artifacts, such as *The Woman King*, to understand how Black culture is produced and reproduced by Blacks and the social commentary it creates. This qualitative dissertation was guided by cultural studies and fandom theories and employed a Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis (CTDA) to analyze 1,469 public posts on X during the film's opening weekend and a content analysis of the film. Results from this study indicated audience reactions showed a predominantly positive engagement, with fans celebrating the representation of Black characters, particularly Black women, fostering pride and empowerment within the Black community. However, critical discussions between fans and anti-fans underscore the complexity of audience dynamics and emphasize the importance of acknowledging dissenting voices. X served as a crucial space for Black audiences to engage, share thoughts, and build a sense of community around the film. Trending hashtags and fan rituals contribute to the film's cultural resonance, enhancing its visibility and fostering discussions that provide a holistic understanding of its impact on Black popular culture. Film discussions extended beyond reactions to explore diverse interpretations, cultural significance, and the complex relationship between media, identity, and discourse. This study contributed to the limited scholarly research on Black popular culture artifacts created for Black audiences and its Black fandom.

Keywords: Black culture, Black Twitter, Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis, cultural studies, fandom, popular culture, *The Woman King*, X

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Dedication

To the resilience of my ancestors, whose unwavering strength and determination paved the road that led me to this moment. Their sacrifices and perseverance are the foundation upon which I stand, and I honor their legacy with deep gratitude.

To my beloved grandmother, whose fervent wish for a doctor in the family stuck with me throughout my upbringing. While this journey may not have taken the medical path you envisioned, your passion for knowledge and progress is the guiding light that fueled my pursuit. In honoring your dreams, I strive to contribute to a world of understanding and discovery, carrying forward the torch that you so valiantly lit.

In loving memory of my late father, who continues to be a guiding presence in my journey. I lead with love and appreciation for the roots that anchor me and the dreams that propel me forward.

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List of Abbreviations

American Descendants of Slavery (ADOS)

African American Vernacular English (AAVE)

Computer-mediate communication (CMC)

Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis (CTDA)

Foundational Black Americans (FBA)

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)

Chapter 1: Introduction

Overview

“We fight not just for today, but for the future. We are the spear of victory. We are the blade of freedom. We are Dahomey!” (Prince-Bythewood, 2022, 1:22:35). These words were spoken by General Nanisca, leader of the Agojie, an elite force of female soldiers before their final battle against the Oyo Empire. The film, *The Woman King*, directed by Gina Prince-Bythewood and written by Maria Bello and Dana Stevens, is inspired by true historical events. Set in West Africa in 1823, the film follows the journey of the Agojie, who swear to protect the African Kingdom of Dahomey from colonization and enslavement (Prince-Bythewood, 2022). Society can learn a great deal from Nanisca and the characters in the historical drama film *The Woman King*.

Verney (2003) discusses how popular culture merits study due to its ability to provide awareness of why and how public opinion is viewed. Popular culture also gives a voice to marginalized groups dealing with oppressive conditions and limited opportunities. Blacks have uniquely influenced the richness and range of popular culture. *The Woman King* is an excellent popular culture artifact to examine as it features a predominantly Black woman cast and explores themes of gender equality, the power of women, and the resilience of African cultures in the face of colonialism. According to CNBC (2022) and Jones (2022), *The Woman King* brought in \$19 million at the domestic box office during its opening weekend, exceeding Sony’s \$12 million prediction. More than 1.4 million people saw the film in theaters during its first three days. D’Alessandro (2022) found that of the viewers, 60% were women, 59% were Black, 19% were Caucasian, 12% were Hispanic, and 10% were Asian/other. When scholars review historical and societal power dynamics, they can evaluate representation and the subtleties between subject and

object in critiquing popular culture. As media and technology expand, a plethora of new opportunities exist to interact with popular culture.

Furthermore, African Americans have faced consistent negative stereotypes in popular culture, which has impacted racial perceptions (Hooks & West, 2017; Verney, 2003). Race is central to the identity of Black Americans and affects how they connect to each other (Cox & Tamir, 2022). Black popular culture reflects the views, beliefs, orality, and daily customs of people of the African diaspora. Black culture is essential to disseminate Black thought and fostering critical dialogue as it is a place to express Black humanity and opposition (Hooks & West, 2017; Nelson, 2019). The importance Black identity plays a crucial role in shaping personal identity, influencing the strong sense of connection that Black Americans share with one another (Cox & Tamir, 2022).

This study aimed to understand the cultural behavior and language patterns of *The Woman King* fans on X, formally Twitter, and the film's impact on Black popular culture by investigating how Black culture is produced and reproduced by Blacks and the social commentary it creates in digital spaces. This research study is significant because scholars agree that public entertainment matters and plays an essential role in developing social values. Fans of popular culture are considered loyal consumers and an excellent source to study media engagement (Busse, 2009). Studying popular culture allows researchers to use a medium to explore social and theoretical questions, to gain more significant assumptions. Communication scholars should consider the implications of what Black popular cultural artifacts tell us about Black culture and how Black culture, in turn, impacts our society.

This introduction aimed to provide a framework for the research surrounding Black fandom and culture. This introduction offers a brief foundation for the problem that necessitates

the research, presents an overview of the literary context on which the research is founded, highlights the importance of the research for the specific audience, and introduces the research questions that frame the study. The contents of this introduction are organized into the following sections: background, problem statement, purpose statement, the significance of the study, research questions, definitions, and summary.

Background

Historical Perspectives

Media both determines our exposure and shapes our perception of it. Postman (1993) states, “New technologies alter the structure of our interests: the things we think about. They alter the character of our symbols: the things we think with. Moreover, they alter the nature of community: the arena in which thoughts develop” (p. 20). Postman (1993) examined how media, such as the printing press, changed the power dynamics of society through social, political, and religious ideology. McLuhan (1994, 2011) considers how the environment shapes societies’ worldview that media creates. The media individuals consume shapes their perspectives on belief systems, experiences, realities, and attitudes. Each medium creates biases that influence the culture that is present. Global media produces advertisements, news, shows, music, and movies that influence and bring people together (Lule, 2018).

As Postman (1993) feared, Frempong (2022) and Rich (2015) further that global media content is the primary source for significant cultural conversations. During Postman’s time, television was the primary media source, and he believed it was the source that society gained its understanding of the world. Media systems can undermine and uphold prejudices and inequities by shaping culture, attitudes, perceptions, and practices. Postman was concerned with the media’s power to increase people’s passivity and egoism. As receivers and senders of

information, scholars should consider the dangers of over-relying on media and new communications technologies and societies' inability to use discernment when consuming media.

The media landscape is increasingly more fragmented and influential, which has created a complex impact on contemporary popular culture. Nelson-Field and Riebe (2011) discuss how new communication and media technologies have incomparable content options and give audiences greater control over their media consumption. As the media landscape shifts, this fragmentation provides a broader range of sources for entertainment, news, information, and content, which all shape an individual's worldview. Media proliferation, primarily driven by technology, fragments an audience's attention across diverse channels and outlets. Cicchini et al. (2022) and Riles et al. (2018) find that audiences have substantial power to tailor their media consumption, which varies across media platforms. Social media influence's opinion formation through a user's network, preferences, and populated content tailored by ever-changing algorithms.

Media fragmentation and polarization create an opportunity for consumers to have a choice in how and when they interact with brands, in which they may seek out media that aligns with their needs, interests, and cultural preferences (Riles et al., 2018; Steppat et al., 2022). Hobbs (2022) notes that post-truth epistemologies consider how appeals to emotional and personal beliefs are more impactful and influential in shaping public opinion than information and facts. Hobbs credits the changes of influence to the increasing distrust of institutions and the control that algorithms have on media exposure and persuasion. Brands need to reach these consumers across various touchpoints, and these advertisers select media channels based on their ability to reach specific target audiences effectively (Nelson-Field & Riebe, 2011; Webster & Ksiazek, 2012). Although the media landscape influences culture, culture also influences how we react.

Over the past 100 years, the representation of Blacks in the media has changed significantly. Popular culture has historically portrayed Blacks as ugly, illiterate, dangerous, and uncivilized, causing poor attitudes and reinforced stereotypes toward them (González-Velázquez et al., 2020). Lemons (1977) analyzed popular culture from the 1880s to 1920s that exhibited Black stereotypes. America's first nationally popular form of entertainment was the Minstrel show, which resulted in two classic stereotypes of Blacks, Zip Coon, and Jim Crow. Black characters such as Uncle Tom, Aunt Jemima, Preacher Brown, Sambo, and the ol' mammy became a part of popular culture at the start of the twentieth century.

Other common stereotypes identified by Lemons (1977) depicted were the Negro servant and maid. These caricatures depicted negative stereotypes but were perceived as humorous and overshadowed the degrading depiction of Blacks. The depictions spread to advertisements, songs, children's books, cartoons, and postcards. Companies implemented them into product trademarks such as Uncle Ben's Rice, Aunt Jemima baking mixes, and the Black cook on Cream of Wheat. During this period, society negatively stereotyped Blacks as lazy, stupid, ugly, promiscuous, and dishonest watermelon-eating chicken thieves.

Between 1900 and 1920, Blacks tried to reclaim their dignity, be accepted, and assert their recognition in the United States through positive stereotypes. Black entertainers stopped wearing blackface makeup during their performances, which aided in the change of attitudes by Americans through innovations in popular culture and Black protests to improve Black stereotypes (Lemons, 1977). According to Sewell (2013), the realization of the mammy figure during slavery can be attributed to the endemic nature of gender oppression and the domestication of Black women to serve whites. In the 1940s and 1950s, the mammy caricature controlled American television. The 1950s and 1960s transformed the representation of Blacks in

the media due to the Civil Rights movement. Media coverage began to highlight Black struggles and the need for equality while portraying them as violent. Furthermore, the Black Power Movement of the 1960s and 1970s emphasized more positive aspects of Black culture by showing them as powerful and encouraged them to celebrate their customs and tradition.

In the past few decades, their representation and portrayal in the media have begun to improve, showcasing them as hard-working and intelligent with comparable professions to whites. These positive representations can reduce prejudice and promote social change (González-Velázquez et al., 2020). Everett (2014) credits the appearance of Black films during the silent-film era despite their difficulty to produce. Due to technical innovation and changes in social power, there has been a cyclical change in Black film. Black film provides unique aesthetics, production, distribution, audiences, and economic resources. Since the silent-film era, Black film has reemerged in the sound-era race films by Black indies, the 1970s blaxploitation films, 1990s New Jack cinema, and the internet.

Today, the representation of Blacks in media is more subtle and diverse than in the past. There are now many popular television shows and films featuring Black actors and actresses in lead roles, and the news media is increasingly featuring stories that showcase the experiences of Black people. Over the years, Black American entertainment has significantly shaped the cultural landscape and pushed boundaries within the entertainment industry. The film *Black Panther* is a prominent and influential recent example of Blacks in media. Asante and Nziba Pindi (2020) analyzed *Black Panther* and how it represents how the Black world and consciousness can exist outside coloniality. Black viewers have been able to view themselves in the movie through shared experiences of Blacks. Despite this, negative stereotypes persist in the media.

In *The sociological souls of Black folk: Essays*, Du Bois and Wortham (2011) wrote a series of essays regarding the African American experience in the 19th century and their community's experience of double consciousness and life within the veil. Du Bois was one of the first sociologists to start documenting Black popular culture, which he referred to as Negro amusement. Du Bois understood that over time, the necessity to know the routine, process, and degree of amusement because of its increased importance to their welfare. Furthermore, he contemplated Blacks' attitudes toward amusement and where they seek amusement (Du Bois & Wortham, 2011; Nelson, 2019).

Black narratives result from historical and cultural traditions passed down over time that reflect important values and ideals (Roberts, 2009). These narratives include traditional Black rhetoric rooted in the oral tradition of the Black community. Examining cultural artifacts provide insight into the tradition, meaning, and value of Black narratives and the factors that have influenced their transformation over time. Black communities have been a safe space for Blacks to come together to genuinely discuss social, cultural, and political life without influence from the norms of the dominant white society (Florini, 2015).

Atay (2019) notes that digital platforms and social media sites drive convergence culture as content flows across different platforms, and users search for the experiences and entertainment they want. Life now and in the future will continue to include communication technologies. When minorities and other marginalized groups gain access to these new technologies, they can actively express themselves, share their stories, and exert control over how and in what way they are presented in mainstream culture. This convergent culture creates a media ecology where information is shared rapidly with large groups of people. Moreover,

individuals share communications and learn about global political, environmental, and social events.

Online messages and postings are becoming more popular as a form of activism to highlight discrimination, sexism, racism, ableism, and criticize government and business entities. Online social networks are forming to challenge the stigmas and injustices faced in society, thereby creating a larger platform for oppressed people and groups to be visible and heard. This new media environment creates a space of empowerment and understanding (Cristiano, 2019). At the turn of the twenty-first century, there was a significant increase in the influence of Black narratives appearing in popular culture through leveraging digital media, creating accessible sequestered spaces. Black culture, when presented in new digital technologies and social media, has significantly altered media industries' business models and content. These Black cultural productions play a role in shaping Black consciousness. The meanings developed from these artifacts influence constructed meanings and how consumers view themselves in relation to the Black community (Everett, 2014; Fox et al., 2020).

Social Contexts

Research conducted by Cox and Tamir (2022) shows that race is central to identity for Black Americans and affects how they connect to each other. Throughout history, popular culture has depicted many stereotypic representations of Blacks (Steele, 2016). Popular culture teaches viewers others' beliefs and influences the construction of our identities (González-Velázquez et al., 2020). Hall (1993) discusses popular cultures' role in the reflection, experiences, and traditions of those in power in society. Stereotypes and negatively biased depictions often misrepresent Blacks' representation at the individual, family, communal, and societal levels. Exclusion from the leading majority or primary culture is believed to be the cause

of these representations. The primary culture includes European ideologies, heritage, expressions, and rhetoric.

Parental figures actively form the initial influence on identity during childhood. As they reach adolescence, peers and the media begin to have a more significant imprint through social interactions and self-comparison (Mullikin, 2006). Popular culture artifacts such as literature, film, and television are a perspective of how audiences understand and accept their lives (Edgar & Toone, 2019). Popular culture actively constructs identity by providing positive and negative reinforcement of identity, beliefs, attitudes, personality, and behavior (González-Velázquez et al., 2020). Cox and Tamir (2022) found that in spite of their backgrounds, 76% of Black Americans believe that being Black is extremely or very important to how they think about themselves. Furthermore, 52% of Black Americans feel connected when something happens to a Black person as it also affects what happens in their own lives.

Dale et al. (2020) and González-Velázquez et al. (2020) studies found the harmful effects of stereotypes in the media. Negative media representation lowers the sense of control, self-esteem, and self-concept of those who identify with groups portrayed negatively in the media. Alternately, the leading majority experiences a greater sense of control, self-esteem, and valuation of self-concept. Stereotypical representation of marginalized or disadvantaged ethnic groups in popular culture artifacts leave viewers who identify with that group with feelings of shame and resentment. The leading majority may also have increased negative attitudes toward marginalized groups. Positive or counter-stereotypical portrayals of marginalized groups can also decrease prejudicious attitudes from the leading majority. Werder (2009) discusses media effects theories that focus on media audiences and the impact of media on them. As such, scholars should consider alternative ways to combat the effects of stereotypes in the media.

Cartier (2014) speaks to Black characters' ability in media to create ideological power, which leads to possibilities for Black audiences. The engagement and imagining of Black audiences with Black characters can include fantasy projection and the personification of a communal sense of self. Blacks' representation and roles in media can be a source of heroism and liberation on and off-screen, which often has been denied. Blackness still carries a negative connotation. While navigating and claiming their space in media, Black creators face difficulty in portraying their authentic selves based on a Eurocentric lens, as it conflicts with their own identity and expression. Humanity has not fully accepted Blacks as members of a society that affords them equal access to attainment, as representation in media has not reached that point. Black viewers of popular culture often search popular culture artifacts for representation that reflects Blacks' lived experiences and combats negative stereotypes.

Steele (2016) highlights the oral roots of Blacks and how online spaces help shape their identities. Black spaces communicate and share knowledge using rhetorical strategies of Black oral culture. Black rhetorical strategies sometimes include the utilization of Black humor and folktales. The environments focus on the significance of the Black experience and maintain their self-respect when faced with oppression. Social networking sites and online spaces create secure places for Blacks that mimic barbershops and churches. Historically, barbershops and churches have been a protected space for Blacks to share and appraise culture, uphold their community, and foster justice (Du Bois & Wortham, 2011). Chinedu Nweke (2020) stresses that those who are a part of the African diaspora in the United States struggle with their identity due to the media's role in interpreting it. Social media offers a more significant opportunity to find and embrace their identity. Black spaces in the digital realm can continue to be an arena of participation to maintain cultural traditions and highlight acts of resistance.

Lee (2017) considered the impact of hashtags related to Black culture and society on social media sites such as X. Black Twitter is an environment on X where Blacks can freely express their emotions and thoughts. Feldman et al. (2019) state that X is one of the fastest-growing tools in the mobile media ecology. The use of hashtags is critical for creating awareness, sharing experiences, and building a safe space, even if the content may challenge the ideologies of the dominant culture. Despite the progression of positive representation of Blacks in media, Blacks remain underrepresented and undervalued in society. Technology affords Blacks control of their cultural beliefs, narratives, and history without outside influence from dominant cultures.

Theoretical Framework

Theories generally consist of concepts and explanations of observed phenomena and are intended to frame the subject of focus. All theories must have grounds in philosophical underpinnings of epistemology (knowledge), ontology (existence), or axiology (value). Additionally, theories should simplify experiences and facts into adaptable views (Littlejohn, 2009). Scholars view communication theories in the context of the human perspective of communication between other humans, objects, or technology. The increased focus on communication reflects new technologies and their influence on society as a unifying element of life. Despite the activity type, the communication perspective is reflexive (Pearce, 1989).

Communication theories support different facets of the human experience in day-to-day life. R. T. Craig (1999) believes the field of communication should be based on the similarities and differences among theories and managing these relationships and comparisons through research. Communication theories assist scholars in offering methodological solutions approached from different outlooks to communication problems through research frameworks

and data evaluation techniques drawn from different disciplines. Scholars study communication at the micro and macro levels by assessing media and its influence on society. Society comprises of collective morals, customs, and laws that form and develop. Communication theories provide two approaches when considering societal beliefs: modernism and postmodernism.

Postmodernists believe that the realities of society are constantly created, recreated, and developed through language and other forms of communication and are most appropriate for this study (R. T. Craig, 1999).

Social Constructivist Philosophical Worldview

Social constructivism is the philosophical worldview most appropriate for this field of interest due to its interpretive framework that provides a solid grounding for qualitative research. Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Creswell and Poth (2018) position social constructivism researchers as those who believe that individuals look for an understanding of the world through the communities in which they live and work. Subjective meanings of their experiences — these individuals develop meanings directed toward certain things or objects. Constructing these subjective meanings and symbolic representations generates different possibilities and levels of consciousness and empowers us to avoid cross-cultural barriers. These various meanings provide researchers insight into the broad complexities of Blacks outlooks. A critical stance is needed to understand how social processes affect individual versions of reality (Burr, 2015).

Culture strongly influences individuals' views of the world (Crotty, 1998). Burr (2015) and Fosnot (2005) found that those who share a culture and language use that language to reproduce varying nonlinear thought processes and worldviews. Individuals who share the same culture are influenced by their previous cultural knowledge as their reality evolves, and their interpretations of their interactions frame their thoughts. People culturally represent the meanings

of their experiences through various forms such as symbolism, music, storytelling, film, language, and art. The various shared experiences allow individuals to explore each other's understanding. How these meanings are represented is influenced by the mediums used to communicate them to the community. Social media creates an interactive learning environment where Blacks can explore Black popular culture artifacts and share their subjective meanings. Blacks also can interact with others to further form and negotiate their meanings by navigating through socially constructed historical and cultural norms, thus creating new meanings.

Sociocultural Communication Tradition

R. T. Craig (1999) organized communication theories into seven traditions providing different communication viewpoints, including rhetorical, semiotic, phenomenological, cybernetic, sociopsychological, sociocultural, and critical. With the sociocultural tradition, the evolution of social order is the foundation based on its context, as it is produced and reproduced given the variations in social action and culture. In accordance with this tradition, people typically perceive communication as a symbolic process that involves shared sociocultural patterns. Typical day-to-day interactions reproduce the current sociocultural order. The reflexivity of how social order is created, understood, and transformed alludes to the dependency on established communal cultural patterns and social constructs. Carey (2008) lends support to the efforts aimed at studying these symbolic processes as publicly observable activities, which enable us to comprehend how knowledge of attitudes is historically constructed.

R. T. Craig (1999) identifies the inability to balance the multifaceted correlation between the production and reproduction of social life as the central problem of sociocultural theory, particularly in subcultures such as the Black community. The sociocultural theory asserts that individuals are transformed from their culturally diverse social environments but still maintain

their reality of personal identity. It considers the gaps in sociocultural diversity and relativity concerning sociocultural change. Sociocultural theory can address problems resulting from technological changes, traditional social order, and globalization. As media continues to alter shared rituals and members' expectations, new meanings and means of communication are produced. The sociocultural theory is significant because it recognizes the influences of cultural dependence and diversity, the acknowledgment and consideration of value, and the emphasis on collective responsibility in communication practices.

Cultural Studies

The first theory guiding this study is cultural studies, in which Stuart Hall is credited for shifting the focus from popular culture to the functions and effects of media (Chávez, 2009). Chávez (2009) defines cultural studies as an interdisciplinary academic field that uses early Marxist and structuralist perspectives to investigate culture and high culture's political economy, including fine and performing arts and literature. Cultural studies now focus on ordinary and popular culture. Communication is the foundation of creating, reinforcing, and reproducing culture. With contemporary cultural studies, professors such as Stuart Hall began noticing a disconnect between themselves, their knowledge, and their student's culture. Lawson-Borders (2018) highlights Hall's contribution to a transcontinental view of culture and how it is influenced and intertwined with various facets of life. As a result, issues of race, identity, and how media influence culture are significant to those outside of high culture and marginalized groups.

Within cultural studies, Chávez (2009) and Jenkins (2013) note that language is imperative to understanding culture. Nonlinguistic signs such as images and film can be analyzed to identify and reinforce social meanings and cultural myths. With cultural studies, a text can

refer to any cultural artifact that requires reading or interpretation. Texts have a variety of meanings depending on the audience, their contexts, and their use. As such, the primary methodology for cultural studies is a textual analysis. Cultural studies scholars consider how internalized ideologies from language and texts affect people's sense of self in a particular cultural space. Cultural studies expose historical and contemporary audiences' relationship to mass media and its effect on day-to-day life. Who someone is and how they should be is a product of various cultural processes and their relationship to a particular text. Mass media has grown from maintaining the ideology of those in power; texts are now more than just extensions of the author's meanings and can be read and understood by users in multiple ways.

Media Effects

Communication technologies blur the boundaries between socioeconomic levels, religion, race, and culture by empowering users to reach and influence others further distances quicker with less effort (Pearce, 1989). Werder (2009) believes that media effects capture inquiry at the intersection of media audiences and their effects. Media effects studies of the early 20th century focused on the direct effects model and, in 1940, transitioned to the limited effects model. With the direct effects model, due to technological advances and the production of popular culture reaching the masses, audiences were believed to focus on the same messages and have the same responses that the sender intended. According to the limited effects model, scholars believe that the media has little effect on the audience because individuals can control the media messages they consume and how they interpret them. The introduction of new media technologies has led to the expansion of media effects research.

McLuhan (2011) understood that new media had transformed our world into a global village, connecting humanity across time and space. As the environment becomes more reliant

on technology, there have been dynamic shifts in communication, culture, and society. As scholars become more aware of media effects, we learn about individuals' modes of perception and how they can be used to predict and control behavior. Similarly to Ellul and Postman, McLuhan realized that with new media, the old mediums become reformed, which creates new human environments that actively shape people. As new technology becomes an extension of one or more of our senses, it will integrate those senses with the social world. Society's dominant technology is a direct reflection of developed cultural patterns. The more society relies on technology, the more conservative and reactionary people become to problems brought on by the global village (McLuhan, 1994).

Fandom

One example of the cumulative effects of media today is fandom, which is the second theory guiding this study. According to Busse (2009), fans may have a fascination with, interest in, or emotionally invested in a popular culture artifact or media text. Fandom started with sports-club fans and transitioned to science fiction associations – much of the recent fan studies focus on fannish behavior and has become a significant force in popular culture. The rise of digital technologies has led to an exponential growth in fandom, as the internet has increased the number of media viewers and the platforms where they can invest in various forms of media and entertainment. Fans have the increased ability to access popular culture artifacts, connect and communicate with other fans, and create their own fan content. The twenty-first century saw a shift in the influence of Black culture on popular culture through narratives across multiple platforms, adaptations, new fan communities, and diverse viewers (Everett, 2014).

Busse (2009) highlights the role of film, and media scholars have focused on the relationship between these media texts and their audiences and viewed fans as readers. Media

studies scholars are increasingly exploring fans' engagement with media texts due to the convergence of the industry and its audience. Media industries have recognized the importance of their viewers and fans as loyal consumers and their marketing potential across multiple platforms and viral marketing with user-generated content. Fans increased online presence, media engagement, and generated content has shifted media research to audiences, fandom, and their subculture communities.

Media fans are at the center of producers and consumers of media content for scholars. Busse (2009), Hobbs (2022), and Jenkins (2013) found that while fans have traditionally played a central role in shaping the popularity, reception, and discourse around media, the increase of algorithmic systems has introduced a new dynamic in the media landscape. Algorithms have become influential in mediating our interactions with media content on digital platforms. These algorithms utilize data, user preferences, and behavioral patterns to curate personalized recommendations, shaping the content users are exposed to and influencing their consumption habits. In this sense, algorithms have gained considerable power in determining what content reaches audiences and how it is prioritized and distributed. This shift has implications for both producers and consumers of media. This algorithmic filtering can create echo chambers, reinforcing existing beliefs and preferences rather than fostering exploration and critical engagement with a wide range of content. While media fans still hold significance in generating buzz, participating in fan communities, and contributing to the media discourse, algorithms' influence on content discovery and distribution is significant.

Introduction to the Problem

Smith-Shomade et al. (2012) highlight that media created for Black audiences is significantly understudied. The interpretation of television shows and films, especially their

Black representation, is unique to Black audiences. At its conception and currently, academia has significantly understudied Black fandom, constructing fandom as predominantly white and thereby overlooking and marginalizing groups such as Black fans (Florini, 2019). In recent years, Black fandom on social media has become more profound, creating a sense of community that scholars should explore (Everett, 2014).

Problem Statement

The specific problem to be addressed is the need to explore Black popular culture artifacts, such as *The Woman King*, to understand how Black culture is produced and reproduced by Blacks and the social commentary it creates. In a recent study, Cox and Tamir (2022) found that race is central to identity for Black Americans and affects how they connect. Despite their backgrounds, 76% of Black Americans believe being Black is extremely or very important to how they think about themselves. Furthermore, 52% of Black Americans feel connected when something happens to a Black person; it also affects what happens in their own lives. Ruddock (2017) supports studying public entertainment because it plays a significant role in developing social values.

With the limited recent research surrounding Black popular culture, themes of representation, well-being, empowerment, and the importance of Blacks creating their own narratives to counteract the problematic and historically stereotypical depiction are revealed (Asante & Nziba Pindi, 2020; Everett, 2014; González-Velázquez et al., 2020; Martin, 2019). A significant research gap exists between Black fandom and the social commentary created by Black popular culture on social media and the potential utilization of this cultural form (Bernabo, 2019). Hooks and West (2017) uphold that Black popular culture is vital for disseminating Black

thought and creating spaces for critical dialogues. How Black popular culture matters and what influences Blacks in digital spaces requires further research.

Purpose Statement

This qualitative content analysis study aimed to understand *The Woman King* fans' cultural behavior and language patterns on social networking sites and the film's impact on Black popular culture. At this stage in the research, *The Woman King* fans were generally defined as viewers and fans of the film, *The Woman King*, who posted about the film on social media during its opening weekend. Cultural studies and fandom were the communication theories to guide future dissertation research focusing on the film, *The Woman King*, and its fans. The first theory that guided this study was cultural studies, in which Stuart Hall is credited for shifting the focus from popular culture to the functions and effects of media. Culture studies supported this study as it concerns media and how it produces and reproduces culture. Cultural studies scholars are interested in analyzing the media artifact and how its audiences use it culturally and historically (Chávez, 2009).

The second theory that guided this study is fandom, where media fans are at the center of producer and consumer of media content. A contemporary fandom theorist is Henry Jenkins, who focused on film and media viewers' engagement and the social structures and cultural practices created by viewers (Busse, 2009; Jenkins, 2013). Utilizing cultural studies and fandom assisted communication scholars in uncovering how Black culture is produced and reproduced by Blacks and the social commentary it creates in digital spaces.

Significance of Study

Black popular culture is central to sharing Black thoughts, culture, and experiences (Nelson, 2019). This study contributed to the limited scholarly research on Black popular culture

artifacts created for Black audiences and its Black fandom. The Black cultural artifact that was studied is *The Woman King*. 1.4 million people saw *The Woman King* in theaters during its first three days (CNBC, 2022). D'Alessandro (2022) found that 60% were women, 59% were Black, 19% were Caucasian, 12% were Hispanic, and 10% were Asian/other. The themes in this film that are important to the Black community include gender equality, the power of women, and the resilience of African cultures in the face of colonialism. Furthermore, a significant research gap exists in the exploration of the social commentary surrounding Black popular culture on social media and the potential utilization of this cultural form (Bernabo, 2019). Communication scholars will have an increased understanding of how Blacks produce and reproduce Black culture and the social commentary and fandom it creates in digital spaces.

This research project is significant because scholars agree that popular culture matters and plays a significant role in developing social values. However, further detailed analysis is necessary to determine how it matters, to what extent it influences, and what actions should be taken regarding this power (Ruddock, 2017). This significance is especially true considering the increase in the influence of Black popular culture. To support and implement studies focusing on Black Americans, researchers should align themselves with the population being studied and embrace their worldview, which includes their language, culture, identity, and purpose (Lawson-Borders, 2018). Studies such as these can help demonstrate how Black representation affects audiences and how it can inspire and influence other marginalized groups.

Research Questions

The proposed content analysis study aimed to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How are Black culture and representation currently being displayed in media?

The media initially portrayed Blacks in a negative light. The media depicted Blacks as lazy, stupid, ugly, promiscuous, and dishonest watermelon-eating chicken thieves (Lemons, 1977). Although the media now has played an essential role in bringing attention to the struggles of Black people, it continues to perpetuate negative stereotypes and underrepresent and misrepresent them. The twenty-first century has seen a shift in the influence of Black popular culture artifacts produced by media industries and fans (Everett, 2014). This research question provided insight into how a Black popular culture artifact, such as *The Woman King*, made by and for Blacks, represents Black culture.

RQ2: How does social media commentary about *The Woman King* film influence Black culture?

To understand the relationship between Black everyday life and experiences, studying this relationship and their online discourse can create a unique, alternate public communal space (Steele, 2016). These online spaces provide a space for Blacks to return to their oral communicative roots and have been a popular space to share knowledge on cultural and social happenings (Roberts, 2009). Black experiences and commonplaces semblances Black linguistics and aesthetic (Florini, 2019). This research question is paramount to understanding how Blacks produce and reproduce Black culture and the social commentary it creates.

RQ3: In Black communities, how does social media commentary affect the fandom of *The Woman King* film?

Audience discussions surrounding films are not new. Still, using X to expand popular culture artifacts provides a broader interpretation of television and films role in cultural and societal issues and social media engagement (Bernabo, 2019). Black fans have drawn on the benefits of digital media with their own carefully curated hashtags for live posting to engage in culturally generated fan practices centered around Black experiences through Black cultural lenses (Florini, 2019). This research question aimed to understand social media's role in Black fandom.

Definitions

Key terms pertinent to the background and understanding of the study are listed and defined below for clarity.

Black culture – or African American culture is a diverse and rich cumulation of passed-down generational beliefs, customs, and traditions rooted in the history of and shaped by the experiences of Black Americans (Du Bois & Wortham, 2011).

Black popular culture – or African American popular culture primarily created and produced by descendants of the African diaspora in the United States. This popular culture differs in beliefs, values, rhetoric, and norms. It provides a sense of identity, joy, and entertainment through artifacts and practices (Hall, 1993; Nelson, 2019).

Double consciousness – having to view oneself and self-worth through someone else's eyes (Du Bois & Wortham, 2011).

Fandom – or fan culture, is a community of individuals passionate about a popular

culture artifact such as television shows, films, video games, and books. These individuals often discuss and share their passion for a particular piece of media and often create their own related fan content (Busse, 2009).

Popular culture – visual, auditory, or performative artifacts that actualize or signify positive gratification. They may include artifacts such as television shows, films, video games, and books. These artifacts are constructed from the principles and customs, whether real or imagined, of the culture that experiences them (Nelson, 2019).

The Woman King fans – generally defined as engaged viewers and fans of the film, *The Woman King*, who posted about the show during its opening weekend. These fans may be fascinated with, interested in, or emotionally invested in *The Woman King* (Busse, 2009).

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative content analysis study was to understand the culture-sharing pattern of *The Woman King* fans on social networking sites such as X and the film's impact on Black popular culture. The specific problem that was addressed is the need to explore Black popular culture artifacts, such as *The Woman King*, to understand how Black culture is produced and reproduced by Blacks and the social commentary it creates. Chapter 1 provided a framework for the research surrounding Black fandom and culture. An overview of the context of the literature in which the research is founded was presented. Additionally, the research framed by the research questions was introduced. Chapter 2 will provide a review of pertinent literature, including an overview, situation of the sociocultural communication tradition, theoretical framework, and related literature.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview

Studying Black popular culture provides researchers with an approach to analyzing theoretical questions and how society functions on a smaller scale through its consumption and fandom, leading to more significant assumptions about Black culture. The specific problem to be addressed is the need to explore Black popular culture artifacts, such as *The Woman King*, to understand how Black culture is produced and reproduced by Blacks and the social commentary it creates. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a framework and background for the research and establish its significance based on the demonstrated problem gleaned from the literature. Additionally, what is known, what is not known, and how this study will address the gaps in literature is discussed. This literature review comprises the following sections: situation to the sociocultural communication tradition; the theoretical framework framed by the social constructivist philosophical worldview (media ecology, cultural studies, and fandom); related literature (which includes the two theories that guided this study, cultural studies and fandom); and a summary.

Situation to the Sociocultural Communication Tradition

R. T. Craig (1999) proclaims that a sociocultural milieu is sustained by symbolic codes, wherein communication broadly demonstrates how social order is produced, understood, continued, and translated into specific interactions. Since the 19th century, under the intellectual traditions of sociology and anthropology and the effects of semiotic thought, the sociocultural communication tradition has represented the discovery of communication. Under this tradition, the foundation lies in the evolution of social order, and communication theories present a symbolic process that actively produces and reproduces shared sociocultural patterns.

Communication is not limited to the transmission of messages; due to the dynamic nature of culture, sociocultural factors influence communication patterns and the construction of social meanings. The sociocultural communication tradition focuses on common problems and beliefs people encounter in their everyday lives, its attention to social issues, and the overall view that society is created and constructed through communication (R. T. Craig, 2007).

Pioneers in the sociocultural tradition, linguist Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf believed the native language habits and structure of a cultural group determines their worldview, shapes what individuals think and do, and influences their reality (Kay & Kempton, 1984). The sociocultural theory grew from the work of psychologist Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky (1978) emphasized the social origins of language and thinking and suggested how culture contributes to developmental changes in each person's nature. Vygotsky discovered that as children grow and develop their knowledge and understanding of the world, they actively integrate their boundaries with socially acceptable symbolic values, beliefs, and cultural knowledge. This integration expands their awareness of reality into their consciousness. People actively change and adapt to varied cultural and historical contexts. Furthermore, language can be a model to assess the relationship between learning, development, and the environment in which it occurs.

Contemporary sociocultural tradition scholars credit language's substantial power (Griffin et al., 2018). Carey (2009) and Griffin et al. (2018) believe that scholars should consider how humans create and view symbols that they create to communicate their ideas to understand societal order and influences. Words are essential in shaping reality and creating a shared culture; symbols frame and communicate thoughts while considering practices, objects, and institutions. Carbaugh (2005) and Rothenbuhler (1993) found that sociocultural variations in public discourse fundamentally differ depending on the cultural context and require an

understanding of their cultural context to determine meaning. Engaging in meaningful symbolic activities helps them understand where to situate themselves in relation to their communities. Conversations exhibit expressions of symbolic meanings. Inversely, in culture, there are symbolic interactions through dialogue.

A sociocultural view of language in Black culture provides insight into how their distinctive dialect reflects their cultural experiences. Lanehart (2001) considers how languages reflect the sociocultural and historical contexts of people. Some Blacks speak African American Vernacular English (AAVE), actively utilizing a distinct set of phonological and syntactic rules, as well as a semantic structure that continually develops (Bailey, 2001; Mufwene, 2001). Through communication, reality is constructed, sustained, restored, and transformed (Carey, 2009). Bailey (2001) highlights that AAVE has frequently been perceived as an inadequate form of White speech. When co-constructed social worlds collide, the sociocultural tradition aids in understanding cultural gaps between those with different backgrounds (Griffin et al., 2018).

Saint Laurent (2021) found that theories that stem from sociocultural tradition also center around establishing and negotiating identities through exchanges across social groups and cultures. Oneself of identity combines social, communal, and cultural influences. Culture provides unique meanings to how people think and behave. Culture fulfills multiple roles, prescriptive practices, and a tool to challenge and produce new practices. It is essential to note the holistic approach that necessitates sociocultural work due to the significance of context and culture. Saint Laurent (2021) identifies three assumptions to the sociocultural approach: “1) the interdependence between person and culture; 2) intersubjectivity as constitutive of the self; and 3) the self as a developing agent” (p. 6).

The sociocultural approach to communication focuses on the connection between communication, culture, and society to have a sound understanding of communication processes and their role in shaping social and cultural realities (Gergen, 2009). When implementing a sociocultural approach to communication theories, Griffin et al. (2018) believe it should address how we understand, make meaning of, and develop norms, roles, and rules in communicating. The sociocultural tradition is founded on the premise that as people communicate and interact within groups, communities, and cultures, they actively produce and reproduce culture. Many assume that words merely reflect what exists, but reality is not an objective set of prearranged precursors. According to the sociocultural tradition, reality is actively socially created through communication and language. Anyiwo et al. (2018) and Briggs et al. (2023) consider the importance of racial socialization, racial identity, and racial discrimination in factoring Black youths' understanding of their social awareness and identity, which affects their consciousness and responses. The oppressive experience of Blacks throughout history has resulted in the development of unique forms of expression, perspectives, and cultural practices. During the communication process, these power dynamics can be examined, thus reinforcing or challenging their imbalances (Gudykunst, 2004).

Carey (2009), Jan et al. (2017), and Sundin and Johannisson (2005) reflect on the ritual view of communication. The ritual view of communication actively concentrates on upholding and preserving the continuity of society over time rather than simply transmitting messages across distance. It is concerned with symbolically expressing communal beliefs rather than merely conveying information. Ritual views suggest that communication processes can only fully be understood when viewed in a ritualistic way of communicating and establishing society. Conflict within sociocultural systems can arise with the decline of these shared meanings within

rituals, customs, and traditions. Sociocultural change over time can also create issues by reducing the common values and patterns that serve as the foundation for social interaction, resulting in less engagement with one another.

Carey (2009) and McLuhan (1994) agree that the communication medium determines social order. Media and technology greatly influence how society is structured, reflecting the values and beliefs of that cultural community. The sociocultural communication tradition offers a framework for understanding the cultural context of communication through film and social media channels. Fiske (2010) and Hall (2004) assert that popular culture reflects societal beliefs, values, and norms and is also a means of constructing social meanings through communication. Varying cultures, such as Black culture, create and consume media differently and have a variable contextual cultural framework for understanding and developing meanings. Blacks' representations in media are not a passive reflection but an active process of contextual meaning-making where audiences interpret messages based on their own social and cultural experiences. Scholars should consider how Black popular culture reflects and constructs social meanings.

To further expand on the reproduction of culture, R. T. Craig (1999) alludes to the contradictory nature of the reflexivity of this practice. The existing shared cultural knowledge and influence of social constructs profoundly affect daily interactions, thus showcasing the reproduction of the existing sociocultural order. In the sociocultural tradition, balancing agency and structure in the cocreation of social life may be challenging. Communication problems are related to the gaps between sociocultural diversity and relativity, and change that occur over time — limiting shared patterns, expectations, and communication rules. The sociocultural tradition challenges assumptions such as validating other identities and the importance of cultural differences. Further, scholars against the sociocultural theory proclaim that it underestimates the

role of social actors and the flexibility of cultural patterns and social structures (R. T. Craig, 2007).

The sociocultural tradition supports the concept of individuals being a reflection of their social environments. R. T. Craig (1999) asserts that different social groups cultivate distinctive customs, habits, and worldviews. Through the sociocultural tradition, it is imperative to acknowledge the importance of cultural diversity and dependence and understand that society has more influence and responsibility than an individual. Ethnography situates itself with the sociocultural approach by observing how social groups construct meaning through their etymological activities, and any intervention attempts can have unintended consequences. Social changes and technological changes can collapse traditional social orders, disrupt interactions, and create new meanings and means of communication. More minor aspects of communication forms in specific social groups, such as words, their definitions, and the implications of their responses, can provide insight into the larger context of this population.

Black popular culture, including films like *The Woman King* and social media platforms like X, are important sites for expressing and negotiating Black cultural identity. These cultural forms provide opportunities for black people to assert their voices and perspectives, challenge stereotypes and representations, and build community. Understanding the cultural context of Black popular culture is essential for effective communication with individuals from the Black community. The sociocultural tradition is a valuable framework for understanding the complex ways in which Black culture is shaped by media consumption and reflected in fandom.

Theoretical Framework

Social Constructivist Philosophical Worldview

Crotty (1998) defines constructivists as “. . . the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of the interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (Constructionism: The Making of Meaning section). Jean Piaget first introduced constructivism; according to Campos (2009), was interested in understanding how humans know the world and how they gain and process knowledge in social environments. Piaget held that the process of knowing is a result of the assimilation and accommodation of biological processes that lead to adaption. These biological stages align with symbolic processes that aid in people understanding their world. Once individuals attain this understanding, they cannot unlearn it.

Various social phenomena focus on the meaning-making of activities of individuals and their groups. Sociocultural processes embed ways of meaning-making that are distinctive to time and place, validating and acknowledging the worthiness of each worldview (Crotty, 1998; Lock & Strong, 2012). Campos (2009) identified several elements of constructivism, highlighting language as an integral part of communication construction, crucial for understanding reality. Furthermore, individuals view communication as a reflexive process, where they can only understand meaning from previous communications that lead to various constructs of reality. Therefore, researchers need to study the discourse produced to understand it because individuals create meanings, and we cannot consider truth as objective or subjective because it depends on their unique engagements in the world (Crotty, 1998).

In approaching a study from a social constructivist worldview, Creswell and Creswell (2018), Creswell and Poth (2018), and Crotty (1998) note that the researcher is interested in understanding the world in which they live and work. These subjective meanings rely on social and historical events and are shaped by the cultural norms of individuals. The researcher intends to interpret their subjects' meanings of their world. When developing a study, researchers should ensure that the questions posed are broad and open-ended to better understand how people interact and what they say in different settings. Researchers concentrate on the perspectives of their participants and examine how these perspectives are formed through their interactions. By focusing on how participants socially construct meaning, researchers can generate theories or inductively understand patterns of meaning. A researcher's interpretations of the study are influenced by their personal cultural and historical background and experiences. Therefore, it's essential for the researcher to acknowledge and consider this potential influence.

In cultural and social communities of discourse, members in these groups involved in meaning-making and their knowledge should be considered evolving, progressive, nonobjective, viable constructed reasonings. Furthermore, Creswell and Creswell (2018), Creswell and Poth (2018), and Crotty (1998) discuss the ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological beliefs of constructivism. Ontologically, the nature of reality is an individual's lived experiences and interactions with others construct multiple realities. Epistemologically, the reality is known through the co-construction of the researcher and the subjects' distinct experiences. Axiologically, the unique role of values is honored and negotiated among individuals. Methodologically, researchers can generate emergent ideas through observations, interviews, and inductively analyzing texts.

Society's cultural aspects deal with reconstructing how realities are created and preserved, considering their objectivity, interpreting individuals' viewpoints of reality, and understanding how subjectivity arises from this objectivated reality. The result of complex, intersubjective, and cultural processes creates “. . . subjectively meaningful activity ultimately brings forth socially objectivated facts” (Pfadenhauer, 2019, p. 66). We should view culture as the source of human thought. Important symbols, customs, and traditions from various cultural groups provide an understanding of human behavior (Crotty, 1998). As technology changes, Stabile and Ershler (2015) find that social media provides insight into individuals actively constructing knowledge through an interactive process influenced by the environment in which it takes place. Tools, symbols in social activity, and discourse alter the construction of reality.

Social constructivists consider how individuals understand the communities in which they live and work and the role that culture shapes how society is viewed (Crotty, 1998). Lock and Strong (2012) highlight the focus of social constructivists' defining the sociocultural process to produce the dialogues that people understand themselves through symbolic interaction within social groups. These various views and meanings allow researchers to realize the complexities of Black culture and how it is produced and reproduced by Black Americans. This viewpoint is applicable because studying Black fans on social media sites such as X provides a communal space to explore Black cultural artifacts through interacting with others and navigating through historical and cultural norms to construct new meanings to their identity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, Constructivist Worldviews section).

Researchers must acknowledge cultural inheritance's limiting and oppressive influences on a study (Crotty, 1998). Furthermore, Creswell and Creswell (2018), Crotty (1998), Griffin et al. (2018), Postman (1993), and Strate (1999) support the assertion social constructivist

worldview emphasizes the co-construction of reality through social interactions and cultural contexts. By recognizing the potential biases embedded in cultural inheritance, researchers can strive for a more inclusive and comprehensive analysis of their study subjects, fostering a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives and experiences. Media ecology also offers profound insights into how media and communication technologies shape our perceptions, values, and social systems. Media ecology provides a framework for understanding the intricate relationship between society, technology, and communication. Media ecology encourages a critical examination of the interdependencies and feedback loops between media, culture, and society, highlighting the need to consider the cultural contexts and inheritances that shape media production, consumption, and effects.

Media Ecology

As the landscape of communication and technology evolves, media ecology provides a vital lens through which to understand the influence of media. Strate (1999), one of the founders of the Media Ecology Association, defines media ecology as “. . . the study of media environments, the idea that technology and techniques, modes of information, and codes of communication play a leading role in human affairs” (p. 1). Griffin et al. (2018) highlight how media ecology is an appropriate approach to studying the complexity of media environments created by different communication mediums. How individuals interact with these various media forms influences experiences and societal culture, altering our world. As technology changes, individuals actively alter the symbolic environments that are socially constructed. Consequently, media play a transformative role beyond message delivery, reshaping the human experience. When considering the agent of change in a society, it is essential to recognize that the media landscape and culture play significant roles. Studying communication media ecologically

provides a broad perspective on the effects of human value, perception, and feeling, allowing it to be fully understood.

Ellul (1964), Griffin et al. (2018), and Postman (1993) discuss the power of media and how media functions as socially constructed symbolic environments, which alter human senses as extensions of the central nervous system and determine their fate. Symbolic environments reflect a social and cultural change that influences experiences, behavior, perceptions, and attitudes. The more exposure an individual has to a particular medium, the more vulnerable they become to its environmental and long-term impact. Throughout history, significant periods have marked the creation of symbolic environments as a result of new literacy, print, and electronic technologies. Each new technology transforms what is already present and competes with older technologies for attentiveness, time, respect, and power resulting in threatened institutions and cultures in a predicament.

At the cultural level, Ellul (1964), Griffin et al. (2018), and Postman (1993) find that this veneration of technology shows that technology provides satisfaction, authorization, and orders to users. Culture shapes and interprets the symbolic environments through values, norms, and practices that influence the created content, its consumption, and its attributed meanings. Thus, altering the social order and promptly disbanding traditional beliefs. Characteristics of the global village have created a foundation for media ecology. Turner and West (2020) identified three assumptions of media ecology: media are infused in every act and action in society, media fixing our perceptions and organizing our experiences, and media tying the world together.

Media are Infused in Every Act and Action in Society. As technology advances, the global village has created an environment where media is accessible anytime and place. People imprint media in every aspect of life by utilizing mobile devices and high-speed internet to

communicate messages. Both media institutions and consuming audiences influence the streamed broadcasting of radio and television, podcasts, the user-generated content on social media and blogs (Nelson-Field & Riebe, 2011). These technologies are becoming cheaper and more accessible.

McLuhan (2011) and Ong (2002) consider how influential writing is to cultures. The technology of writing created a literate environment in which the writer and reader could be separated from the text, creating a medium that could always be accessible. Before writing, people lived in an acoustic space that was limiting, aimless, and full of emotion. Writing produced a structured, balanced, and ordered environment. Writing has paved the way for other technologies, such as print and computers, to move society from orality to visual spaces.

Additionally, McLuhan (2011) and Ong (2002) found that literacy created a space for people to learn independently and become independent thinkers. Culture determines what is considered relevant, meaningful, and acceptable within a society, shaping the choices and preferences of individuals and communities (J. B. Cole, 2014; Hall, 1993). Ellul (1964) considers this a technological society, where technology is taking over the traditional values of every society and creating a monolithic world culture. A global village is where multiple things happen simultaneously, and society can no longer take one thing at a time (McLuhan, 2010).

Media Fix our Perceptions and Organize our Experiences. Media shapes our exposure and influences how we perceive it. Postman (1993) states, “New technologies alter the structure of our interests: the things we think about. They alter the character of our symbols: the things we think with. Moreover, they alter the nature of community: the arena in which thoughts develop” (p. 20). Postman (1993) examined how media, such as the printing press, changed the power dynamics of society through social, political, and religious ideology. McLuhan (1994, 2011)

considers how the environment shapes societies' worldview that media creates. What people watch, see, and interact with manipulates our views on our belief systems, experiences, realities, and attitudes. Each medium creates biases that influence the culture in which it is present. Changes in the media landscape can shape cultural attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, while culture, in turn, shapes the media landscape by determining the demand and reception of media content (J. B. Cole, 2014; Hall, 1993).

Global media produces advertisements, news, shows, music, and films that unite people (Lule, 2018). Postman (1993) also viewed the culture change when television and film produced the dominant form of media, shifting the focus on entertainment. Ellul (1964) further discusses how the environment is affecting people's livelihoods, habits, and homes, which are becoming more mechanized. Now, with digital media, scholars see how the instant accessibility of information and answers changes the importance and use of media.

Media Tie the World Together. Media connects us; as technology advances, there are more means and opportunities to connect people across time and space. The global village creates an ecosystem in which economic, social, political, and cultural systems are merging and being influenced by one another. Production, trade, religion, education, and skill development are affected. Government administrations, groups, companies, and individuals have created and implemented media tactics to globalize the world (Lule, 2018). Hakanen (2007) reflects on McLuhan's beliefs on communication technologies causing social change, principally at the individual level. Technology influences history in two ways, "First, we have seen that technologies define the era and epochs of linear history. Second, technological determinism can be used to describe a given time and to determine the social conditions and movements of the given time" (p. 54).

An individual's impact on society is increasing due to electronic media's continuous and instantaneous nature. The digital age has created a wireless global village that provides personalized content that has altered public discourse (Griffin et al., 2018). Culture and media ecology are significantly intertwined, as both shape and influence each other in complex ways. Media ecology studies media systems and their impact on society, while culture encompasses the beliefs, values, practices, and shared meanings that characterize a particular group or society.

Cultural Studies

In general, cultural theories are concerned with how societal institutions, such as the media, have a connection between the creation and reproduction of culture (Chávez, 2009). Chávez (2009) discusses how cultural theorists focus on how media interconnect and interrelate with different factors of historical and social happenings and how to dismantle dominant ideologies. In cultural studies, researchers can examine a specific artifact or practice to gain a better understanding of a set of cultural practices. Aligning with the postmodern tradition, researchers express a concern with how culture changes through the reflection of diverse language and symbolic forms.

Additionally, Chávez (2009) found that cultural studies scholars focused on hegemonic ideologies that depict capitalism are interested in changing Western society from the view of culture itself. Recognizing societal inconsistencies and providing interpretations of this change can accomplish this social reform. Researchers can examine ideology and theory as fluctuating practices of expression within cultures, influenced by semantic, stylistic, and environmental differences (Carey, 2009). Additionally, the semiology tradition has influenced our understanding of how media functions in shaping public knowledge and how meaning is constructed.

Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams, two working-class intellectuals, according to Chávez (2009), Hall (2007), and Morley (2015), are recognized for the creation of cultural studies. In Richard Hoggart's *Uses of Literacy* and Raymond Williams's *The Long Revolution*, they focused on the adult experience of working-class white men in England in the post-war period. These texts laid the foundation for studying the influence and impact of popular culture on people elsewhere in the contemporary world and strayed away from the elitist intellectual positions and study of high culture in which Stuart Hall followed suit. Hall and Morley (2019) consider Hall's critique of Hoggart's contribution to the field of cultural studies and his persistence that different cultures have their internal logic, which has presented valued methodological and theoretical understandings into inquiries of cultural power. Hall supports Hoggart's assertion that audiences bring their own unique cultures and values when consuming media.

Cultural studies seek to understand human behaviors, not predict or explain them (Carey, 2009). Griffin et al. (2018) and Hall and Morley (2019) compare Hall's emphasis on the significance of popular culture to other cultural studies theorists. Hall views popular culture as the site of a power struggle between those with and without power. Texts and textuality show the importance of language as a source of meaning, cultural influence, and source of identity. Hall utilized textual analysis to study media and identify cultural meanings through this. As a critical interpretive approach, cultural studies interested in reforming society produce a new understanding of people, clarifying the scholars' values, aesthetic appeal, and communal agreement. Some critics argue that Hall's approach was too focused on textual analysis and did not sufficiently address the material realities of culture.

Scholars credit Stuart Hall with transitioning from the study of popular culture to focusing on the functions and effects of media on the relationship between culture and power. According to Griffin et al. (2018) and Jackson and Givens (2006), Hall's cultural studies work embraces culturalism and structuralism approaches and is rooted in a broad Marxist interpretation that money is power. Three Marxists' ideology and hegemony perspectives influenced Hall's theoretical framework: (a) a culture's economic forces control what cultural artifacts are produced and disbursed; (b) the collective social consciousness of people who engage in everyday practices and cultural patterns develops culture; and (c) dominant culture establishes culture in that everyday experiences are a subconscious effect of cultural production. Furthermore, the semiology tradition has influenced our understanding of how media functions in shaping public knowledge and how individuals create meaning. Mass communication is central to cultural studies because of the media's power in distributing dominant ideologies.

As Griffin et al. (2018) explained, one of Hall's aims was to expose societal power imbalances. Hall asserts that mass media maintains the ideology of those already in power and may exploit the poor and powerless. Corporately controlled media dominates the discourse and frames the interpretation of current events. Despite this, media audiences can resist hegemony. Hegemony is not exercised in the economic and administrative fields alone but encompasses the critical domains of cultural, moral, ethical, and intellectual leadership. Hall (2004, 2007) found that most people are oblivious to their own ideologies, which are the mental frameworks established through language and concepts that different social groups make meaning through discourse and to make sense of their world. Hall highlights the semiotics, semantic, and discursive nature of media and the effects of culture on it. Hall's work in cultural studies focused on articulating against oppression while relating subjugation with various media representations.

Scholars should recognize the cultural context in which mass communication exists and acknowledge the role of corporate control in it.

Hall's work has been instrumental in highlighting the role of race, representation, and identity in shaping our understanding of the world and the media's influence on culture. Jackson and Givens (2006) and Lawson-Borders (2018) examine Hall's encoding and decoding model, which emphasizes the importance of understanding how cultural messages are constructed, circulated, and interpreted. Hall held that media institutions encode dominant ideologies into their stories. Audiences shape the decoding of cultural messages based on their cultural backgrounds and experiences. The selection of news is influenced by cultural factors such as the news source, objectivity, ethnocentrism, and democratic process. Cultural processes and representations shape and reflect an individual's understanding of their identity. Media viewers are adept at distinguishing the realities of the world and where they fit in. Culture influences many aspects of daily life through interactions and development. However, Hall's work has also faced critiques from scholars who argue that his focus on representation and identity may limit the scope of cultural studies.

In contemporary cultural studies, there is still a political interest in the ownership of media industry shares. Hall and Morley (2019) and Morley (2015) emphasize that media reflects more than just economics; in addition to class, issues of race, gender, and sexuality are complicit in determining the nature of culture and are essential in their representation and meaning. Fictional media's role is just as important as news and current events in societal culture. Furthermore, researchers should study technology as part of the culture from which it emerges. Brock (2020) found that new media and internet research have affected cultural studies from this perspective when examining texts, identity, and the audience's reception. There are limitations

when critically analyzing communication and media's commodification, oppression, or resistance. Cultural studies in digital spaces have not focused on the importance of race in internet culture and its relationship to offline identities.

Fandom

According to Busse (2009), a fan may have an appeal, interest, or emotional investment in a specific subject, engage in leisure activities that are often communal, and participate in amateur activities. Fandom started with sports-club fans and then transitioned to science fiction associations. Film and media fan studies typically focus on the relationship between media and their audiences. Henry Jenkins is a seminal researcher in contemporary fan studies, positioning media fans as exemplary audiences. Fans create interpretive communities that center around a specific media text because they have a high level of audience engagement and critically and creatively interact with the media text.

Fandoms differ from fans in that they claim a shared identity and a collective culture with other fans. These fandoms cultivate “. . . distinctive patterns of interpretation, modes of social interaction, and forms of cultural production which emerged from the community's shared passions and interests” (Jenkins, 2018, p. 16). According to Hellekson and Busse (2014), fan studies offer insight into audience responses and the content the fans create. Fan studies also tie in media studies and cultural studies and draw from ethnography, communication, and internet studies.

The development of fan studies has been classified into three waves, as Gray et al. (2017) demonstrated, with varying aims, theoretical reference points, and methodological positionings. Scholars in early fan studies were concerned with questions of power and representation. Popular mass media was a place of power struggles against media producers and industries by

disempowered fans due to their gender, race, class, or age. With works from John Fiske and Henry Jenkins, we can view it as a form of activist research, as fans were seen as interpretive communities that defended their subcultures. The second wave of fan studies emphasized the social and cultural hierarchies within fan cultures and subcultures. Fandom studies focused on who was a fan, what they consumed, and how, as a continuation of broader social inequalities. Individual fan objects and fan practices surrounding it allowed scholars to compare certain studies and outcomes. The third wave of fan studies provides new insight into modern life due to social, cultural, and economic changes. Furthermore, there is now a duality of community and identity. Beyond popular culture, everyday communication and consumption provide insights into identity, self-conception concerning society, the use of mediated texts, and digital cultures.

Jenkins (2013; 2018) identified five core and interconnected dimensions of fandom. First, fandom involves a particular mode of reception. Fans may view media multiple times to examine meaningful details and to better understand the narrative. While viewing media text, fans watch with undivided attention while maintaining an emotional connection and critical stance. This reception time may also include social interaction with other fans to develop meaning through sharing, articulation, and debating the text. Second, fandom involves a particular set of critical and interpretive practices. Fans must learn the communities preferred approach if interacting with the text. Beyond the explicitly presented information, fans must construct meanings that require a deeper level of understanding to resolve gaps and connect the show to their lives. Third, fandom constitutes a base for consumer activism. Networks and producers receive feedback from fans, giving more power to fan communities and their influence on the text. Fourth, fandom possesses specific forms of cultural production, aesthetic traditions, and practices. Fans create art that aligns with the fan communities' interest in producing new folk culture. Fan-created content

poses challenges for copyrights and narratives held by media industries. Finally, fandom functions as an alternative social community. Fan culture uses popular culture to create a utopian space to build an alternative culture.

Hellekson and Busse (2014), affirmative fans and transformative fans. Affirmative fans collect, view, and interact with texts to converse, examine, and criticize them. Affirmative fans tend to be more casual viewers. Transformative fans create fan art through stories, cosplay, and art. Scholars actively focus their efforts on transformative fans in the academic interest of fandom, recognizing their heightened emotional investment and their ability to create artifacts that can be thoroughly examined, thereby offering unique and diverse insights. Transformative fans tend to be more critical of the texts they consume and create.

Recent fan studies have focused on fannish behavior due to an increase in audience engagement with media convergence (Busse, 2009; Gray et al., 2017). The concept of fandom has become more common as more technological, social, and cultural changes have occurred. Gray et al. (2017) found that telecommunication providers are incentivized to gain controlling stakes in content rights and production with the increased digital distribution channel for entertainment. Preserving the voices of diverse fans and their experiences and creating a broader cultural understanding in these different fan communities remains a challenge. Lam et al. (2022) agree that diverse perspectives are crucial to fan studies because it affords the needed articulation to understand the complex transcultural and individual factors. Diversity remains a meaningful conversation between scholars in fan studies because, as a field, there is a struggle to participate in discussions about race.

Related Literature

Popular Culture

Popular culture is a dynamic and ever-changing phenomenon that encompasses cultural practices, attitudes, and behaviors and reflects the experiences, traditions, and social needs that are popular among people (Roberts, 2009). In this context, Carey (2009) states that popular is the object or practice consumed, and culture is the expressed artifacts with meanings. Popular culture can include various forms of entertainment, such as music, fashion, film, television, and literature. Additionally, Nelson (2019) delineated the four defining characteristics of popular culture in the past, present, and future:

(1) actualizes, engenders, or signifies pleasure and good; (2) is based on the beliefs, values, and norms (real or imagined) of the people who experience it; (3) is expressed in visible, audible, and performative artifacts (icons and personas) and practices (arts and rituals); and (4) groups, organizations, and institutions situate popular culture within gendered, racialized, political, and economic contexts. (p. 1)

Producers create popular culture for mass consumption, situating it between high culture and folk culture. Hall (1993) and Lemons (1977) explain that it is an excellent way to learn what people think, feel, and fantasize about. Although commodified and stereotyped, popular culture reflects society's values, tastes, and interests, and it has the power to shape and influence society's norms, values, and beliefs. Consumers of popular culture use this space to navigate who they are and the truths of their experiences. Popular culture is a space where people are imagined and represented to themselves as an individual and to their audiences. Strinati (2004) finds that communication research, communication technologies, and media are significant parts of inquiry because they catalyze popular culture's success.

To illustrate, González-Velázquez et al. (2020) popular culture plays a role in the social construction of identity. Popular culture can be a place to learn about other people's beliefs. With this feedback, they can construct their identities through the text and subsequent face-to-face and digital interactions. It also provides insight into how society understands and accepts them – and how they accept themselves. These exchanges set the stage for expectations in different social groups and cultures. Sewell (2013) recognizes the influences of new media and technological changes. This form of technology provides an unparalleled opportunity to interact with popular culture and socialize with individuals outside their immediate physical location. Black fandom is a distinct and vibrant cultural form that has played an essential role in shaping popular culture. Black fans engage with popular culture uniquely, often using it as a platform for social and political activism.

Televisions and Film

Bernabo (2019) found that television and film provide a wealth of meanings that motivate audiences to reflect on and consider their own views on social and political matters outside of the monolithic singular dominant ideology. Television and film have been a dominant medium for entertainment and information for decades and has played a crucial role in shaping popular culture. Hall (1993), Lee (2017), and Sewell (2013) agree that television and film are channels that efficiently distribute dominant values and mainstream ideology. The media influences our identities through television and film by shaping how we are represented. Our understanding of race, ethnicity, gender, class, history, masculine, feminine, rural, and urban is shaped and spread by media. Stereotypes and opinions about marginalized groups are shown and reinforced through television and film. While there have been significant improvements in the representation of Black characters on television and film, there is still much work to be done to ensure the full

representation of Black voices and perspectives. Studies on television, film, and race show that television and film are crucial to continuous meaning-making and central to American culture. As such, the study of popular culture among Black communities has been of growing interest in recent years.

Television and film have been a powerful medium for Black audiences, providing them with a platform to see themselves represented on screen and engage with cultural and political issues that affect their lives. Blacks' representation at the individual, family, communal, and societal levels, according to Hall (1993) and Sewell (2013), is often misrepresented. It is believed that these representations stem from the exclusion of Black voices from the main cultural realm. Historically, the racist and discriminatory nature of characterizing Blacks in the media continues to persist.

Even today, in alignment with Hall (1993) and Sewell (2013), there persists a tendency to compare Blacks to European ideologies, cultures, and organizations, while the rich diasporic heritage of their own cultural background is often overlooked or undervalued. Expressions, hairstyles, rhetoric, and ideologies are all distinguishable points. Some scholars argue that Black audiences are passive media consumers, and the dominant cultural narratives and representations shape their viewing habits. Alternately, other scholars contend that Black audiences actively negotiate and resist dominant narratives and derive their own cultural meanings and pleasures from television and film (Brock, 2020).

Media Effects

Werder (2009) discusses media effects theories focusing on media audiences and the impact of media on them. Media effects studies of the early 20th focused on the direct effects model and, in 1940, transitioned to the limited effects model. Understanding the potential impact

of media on Black fandom is an essential area of study, as it can shed light on how media representations of Black people can shape audience perceptions and attitudes. Hakanen (2007) believes that each communication technology will govern the atmosphere of knowledge over time. The concept of technological determinism believes that communication technologies are the focal point and foundational element in determining history, interaction, perception, and social change. As media viewers, this places individuals at the mercy of mass media when experiencing and interacting in life. Mass media, presented through communication technologies, are crucial to determining the future of society as it expands. This expansion brings about increases in political influence and growth in knowledge. Thus, generating effective systems of information exchange and mass communication.

Du Bois' double consciousness, as discussed in Du Bois and Wortham (2011), reveals the conflicting identities of Blacks shaped by multiple discourses of the Black community and the hegemony of White ideology. Some scholars argue that media representations can significantly impact audience attitudes, perpetuating negative stereotypes and contributing to social inequality. For example, Brock (2012), Dyer (2017), and Morrison (1993) expand on this notion in the belief that White identity is the default and standard indicator of what being civilized should represent, while others, Black identity is constrained and extended as a result of negative stereotypes. Historically and even today, Steele (2016) finds many stereotypic representations of Blacks in popular culture, resulting in them remaining undervalued and underrepresented in society.

Other scholars, however, have argued that media effects are more complex and that audiences have agency in interpreting media content. With the increase and availability of resources through technology, Steele (2016) positions this perspective suggests that audiences

can resist dominant media narratives and derive their own meanings from media content. For example, Black audiences may create or engage in counternarratives that challenge negative stereotypes and present alternative perspectives through narratives, histories, and cultural beliefs without the influence of a Eurocentric lens and framework. These changes will bring solidarity, hope, and resistance to Black communities. Mullikin (2006) found that peers and the media play a more influential role through social interactions and self-comparison. Combatting negative stereotypes of racial and ethnic minorities in media has been challenging, Dale et al. (2020), Dixon (2019), Mastro and Tukachinsky (2011), Oliver et al. (2015), and Ramasubramanian and Oliver (2007) find that this is difficult for content creators. Representing these marginalized communities positively and respectfully is necessary for other groups to have less discriminatory thoughts concerning minorities.

Literature focusing on audiences of color is scarce; Coleman (2010), Edgar and Toone (2019), Smith-Shomade (2012), Squires and Haggins (2012), and Warner (2015b) understand the need to study how Black audiences view and interpret Black representation in television and film. Having an inspiring and enriching representation of Blacks in the media can empower Blacks and help break down stereotypes to gain support from other groups. While there is some argument over the magnitude to which media representations can influence audience attitudes, media content plays a substantial role in shaping cultural attitudes and beliefs. More research is needed to explore the experiences of marginalized Black audiences and better understand how media literacy can empower audiences to resist harmful media narratives.

Black Culture

The study of Black culture is vital for understanding how Black people have created and expressed their cultural identities and the broader historical, social, and political contexts that

have shaped those identities. According to Roberts (2009), the idea of tabula rasa is how the traumatic effects of enslavement on Blacks are harrowing enough to wipe clean their memories of a previous cultural heritage. Furthermore, Brown (2013) found that slavery limited those of African descent to practicing and passing down their cultural traditions, values, and beliefs.

Black churches are more than places of worship; Du Bois and Wortham (2011) found that historically, it has been the epicenter of Blacks' social, intellectual, and religious life. Churches, in addition to being a place of worship, have been a source of entertainment through music, conversation, education, relaxation, and a place to learn about historical and social happenings. As culture and technology have changed over the years, it has had to compete with mainstream forms of entertainment. M. L. Craig (2002), Edgar and Toone (2019), and Lofton and Davis (2015) share the importance of private spaces for Black people and how they have historically been a refuge to nurture cultural pride and resilience. In addition to churches, spaces such as barber and beauty shops were safe spaces from violence and the White gaze and a place for Black communities to share and appraise culture, uphold their community, and foster justice (Harris-Perry, 2004; Mills, 2013; Scott, 1990).

Since the Black liberation movement, Cole (2014) finds there has been an increased focus on being Black and an increased awareness of the Black subculture. Black subculture actively incorporates elements drawn from American popular culture, shares values to varying degrees with marginalized groups, and possesses unique components that are specific to the Black community. Furthermore, Cole believes that soul and style are essential themes in the Black subculture. While mainstream media has often appropriated Black cultural forms, such as hip-hop or jazz, Scafidi (2005) argues that this can lead to the erasure of Black cultural identity and the commodification of Black culture for profit. Others, however, contend that Black cultural

forms can resist appropriation and serve as a form of cultural resistance to dominant cultural narratives through distinct traditions in music, art, literature, religion, and food (Brown, 2013; Davis, 2018).

Black Oral Culture

For slaveholders to maintain control, Brown (2013) discusses how formal education, including reading, was prohibited. As a result, Blacks had to rely on and maintain a strong oral tradition. Oral culture refers to transmitting knowledge, stories, and cultural practices through spoken words rather than written texts. These oral traditions were the primary and often only method to preserve history, share traditions, educate, and inspire each other. Florini (2019) and Lawson-Borders (2018) discuss the messages of faith, anguish, adoration, hate, victory, defeat, life, and death through prayers, songs, symbols, music, arts, and religious artifacts. AAVE is an integral part of Black oral culture, reflecting distinct linguistic patterns and communication styles within the African American community. Many Blacks speak AAVE in the United States of its own distinctive grammar construction, word choice, pronunciation, and use of slang, which sets it apart from other varieties of English.

While mainstream cultural production has often marginalized Black oral culture, some scholars actively argue that it can serve as a powerful form of resistance against dominant cultural narratives. Blacks can now return to their oral communicative roots, which Steele (2016) believes has shaped their identity in online spaces. Black spaces communicate and share knowledge using rhetorical strategies of Black oral culture. Black rhetorical strategies actively employ Black humor and folktales as effective means of communication and expression. The environments focus on the significance of the Black experience and maintain their self-respect when faced with oppression. Social networking sites and online spaces create secure places for

Blacks that mimic barbershops and churches. For Blacks, these spaces have acted as a place to share and critique culture, reinforce their community, and promote justice. Steele discovered that traditional Black rhetorical strategies, including the utilization of Black humor and folktales are used.

The reliance on participation is essential to maintain oral and cultural traditions and acts of resistance in apolitical spaces. Florini (2015, 2017), Fox et al. (2020), Giroux (2011), and Tiffe and Hoffmann (2017) found similar results with podcasts, which has opened space for the Black community to use a wide variety of discursive cultures that involves heavy use of Black cultural commonplaces within. Podcasts are a unique medium; they afford conversations and analyses that counteract societal norms when approaching, contributing to, and understanding racial discourse. Podcasts can provide knowledge surrounding history, trends, culture, identity, and racial experiences. To reach a larger audience and for listeners to understand, they must have appropriate cultural and communication competencies.

Black Popular Culture

Black popular culture reflects the Black experience and has contributed to the distinct construction of Black identity. Hooks and West (2017) and Nelson (2019) discuss the importance of Black popular culture, a form of popular culture, in sharing Black thoughts and initiating critical dialogue. Black popular culture's defining characteristics are the beliefs, values, orality, musicality, and norms of people of Africana descent. Hall (1993), a cultural theorist, suggests Black popular culture:

. . . has come to signify the black community, where these traditions were kept, and whose struggles survive in the persistence of the black experience (the historical experience of black people in the diaspora), of the black aesthetic (the distinctive cultural

repertoires out of which popular representations were made), and of the black counternarratives they have struggled to voice. (p. 8)

Cartier (2014), Edgar and Toone (2019), Smith-Shomade (2012), and Squires and Haggins (2012) find that Black popular culture influences mainstream popular culture due to the popularity of musical influences of hip-hop, jazz, and R&B. Cartier (2014) furthers this by sharing that Black culture is viewed as cool, where people want to possess the vitality and originality of Blackness, but not deal with the discomfort, discrimination, and struggle of being Black. Black popular culture has increasingly become a profitable industry, with record labels, film studios, and fashion brands seeking to capitalize on the popularity of Black cultural expressions.

Everett (2014) considers Black popular culture a distinct and vibrant cultural form that has significantly shaped American popular culture. It encompasses various cultural expressions, including music, dance, film, television, literature, and fashion. Asante and Nziba Pindi (2020) and Fox et al. (2020) found that some Black popular culture artifacts are significant because they shape the collective Black consciousness. Black popular culture has played a critical role in Blacks' cultural and political empowerment, challenging the dominant cultural narratives and stereotypes that have historically marginalized them. To illustrate, in music, Beyoncé represents determination and success, and her work and lifestyle are a frame of reference for members of the Black community. The film *Black Panther* has become one of the most popular movies in Hollywood with a predominantly Black cast while presenting universal concerns of power, pride, and humanity for Blacks.

The twenty-first century significantly increased the influence of Black culture; Everett (2014) and Fox et al. (2020) found that this resulted from media industries leveraging and using

digital media and communication technology's participatory nature. This phenomenon has opened the reach of Black discourse and the meaning of being Black in popular culture to a broad and diverse audience. Furthermore, Black audiences have changed popular culture due to their demands for representation in entertainment news and reporting. Entertainment, activism, and criticism have brought progressive discourse across cultural boundaries.

While this has increased visibility and recognition for Black artists and cultural products, it has also raised concerns about cultural appropriation, exploitation, and the erasure of Black voices and perspectives. Studying Black popular culture provides insights into how Black audiences negotiate their cultural identities and the meanings they derive from them within the context of mainstream media. More research is needed to explore the experiences and perspectives of marginalized groups within Black communities and better understand the intersectional dimensions of Black popular culture.

Technology as a Means of Communication

Communication technologies blur the boundaries between socio-economic levels, religion, race, and culture by, according to Ellul (1964) and Ong (2002), empowering users to reach and influence others across greater distances more quickly and with less effort. As technology grows and expands, it competes with previous forms of technology and challenges current worldviews. Living in a media-saturated world that Atay (2019) affirms impacts and alters an individual's experiences and realities. Technology has increased the reach and flow of information, affecting what people think and speak about and how these thoughts are expressed and developed in different spaces. The more dependence society has on media and technology, the more their lives are mediated. Scholars should consider that with increased technology use, we are partly offline, partly mediated, and partially digital.

Ellul (1964) and Ong (2002) also recognize the social, political, economic, and religious changes at the individual and societal level due to the power of technology and its influence in transforming human consciousness and reality. Media can influence actions and thoughts and change society and culture over time. Technology has also allowed users to be active participants in how media is used and increased the user's dependency on it. Ong (2002) focuses on exploring the correlation between the introduction of technology and its impact on human thought, behavior, knowing, and communication.

The Global Village

In our contemporary society, characterized by a multitude of new communication media, channels, and co-viewing, we actively inhabit a global village, as categorized by Marshall McLuhan, where humanity is interconnected across time and space. In the global village, every event has a domino effect on future events. There is a strong correlation and occurrence between communication technology and human interaction, perception, and understanding. In *The Second Media Age*, Poster (1995) considers the political and cultural effects as communication technologies advance. With the introduction of satellites and computers, he believed the second age of mass media would simultaneously create a communication system with multiple producers, distributors, and consumers. Communication scholars should have a strong foundation in media ecology to understand how media, technology, and communication affect and influence the human environment, perceptions, values, and beliefs in our lives to support future communication research.

The global village emerged due to telegraphic communication that instantaneously provided information. Three trends that define the global village include decentralization, the dominance of information-producing software over hardware, and the shift from a goal-chasing

culture to a role-playing culture (McLuhan, 2010). The global village has created a culture that Ong (2002) describes as secondary orality, in which individuals feel they should be socially sensitive and self-conscious. Secondary orality cultures are distinguished by their dependence on technology. Ong understood McLuhan's stance on the medium is the message, noting the shift from orality in print to electronic media. This mediated connectedness across communities has brought some complexity to the world. The increase in the audiences' reliance on technology is needed to be conscious of the world around them, creating what Ellul (1964) would consider an inhuman atmosphere.

There are varying opinions on the relevance and validity of the concept of McLuhan's global village in recent research. A. Jan et al. (2020), Rheingold (2000), and Sokolowski and Ershova (2022) still find relevance to McLuhan's idea of the global village in the digital age because communication technologies increasingly allow people to be involved with others' lives. With the advancements in communications technologies such as the internet and social media, there is increasing interconnectedness and interdependence among individuals and societies regardless of region, religion, ethnicity, color, race, and caste, creating rapid information sharing and fostering global conversations.

Alternately, some scholars have criticized the global village in contemporary communications studies. Goggin (2012), Hobbs (2022), Rich (2015), and Riles et al. (2018) agree that although digital technologies have enhanced connectivity across time and space, the global village has also caused fragmentation that contributes to the polarization of viewpoints rather than fostering a truly global village. The viral spread of false information and the manipulation of social media for political purposes have highlighted the challenges and risks

associated with the global village in the age of social media. Information overload has reinforced existing social and political divisions.

Additionally, Atay (2019), Bastos (2021), Couldry and Hepp (2013), Lule (2018), and Webster and Ksiazek (2012) consider privacy concerns, the algorithmic bias that reinforces existing beliefs and limited exposure to diverse perspectives and insularity, and the digital divide, which challenge the notion of a unified global village. Sokolowski and Ershova (2022) further that the global village places a large emphasis on the role of media in shaping society without considering political and economic factors. There continue to be disparities in access to information and technological resources, resulting in digital divides, especially among marginalized groups. As new technologies evolve, social dynamics and perspectives of the global village may change.

Computer-mediated Communication

Historically, communication has been associated with the connections through routes, roads, and rivers before being used to describe the movement of information. The transportation of information through electronic means has transformed human communication and reliance on communication technologies (McLuhan, 1994). Ong (2002) considers how, at the primary level, human communication requires anticipated feedback. When humans communicate, they need to function in both the sender and receiver roles, thus, highlighting the intersubjective nature of communication. The increased use of technology influences the human senses and creates new ways of perception and interaction, creating new forms of interpersonal relationships (McLuhan, 2010).

Ellul (1964), McLuhan (2010), and Ong (2002) reveal communication technologies' ability to extend and modify human consciousness and bypass verbal communication.

Communication technologies have mental and social effects on users that are not always initially understood. The way knowledge is communicated, whether through speech, writing, or digital media, actively shapes the human essence and brings about changes in the thought process. “The use of a technology can enrich the human psyche, enlarge the human spirit, intensify its interior life. But to understand what it is, which means to understand it in relation to its past, to orality . . .” (Ong, 2002, p. 82).

Ellis (2009) focuses on how the world is not being experienced and interacted with directly but through communication mediums. Communication mediums filter and structure our perceptions and understanding of what we know and how we know it. With new communication technologies, there is an increased speed at which information is shared and stored. Electronic media has changed the boundaries of human life and their views of society, its expansion, and its values. McLuhan (2010) and Postman (1993) also recognized that these technologies actively transformed the ways in which humans perceive and comprehend knowledge and truth, ultimately influencing their perspectives on the world and what it entails. As our communication tools are shaped, we are also simultaneously shaped by them. As communication technology influences our thought process, we become conditioned to their influences and fall into their ideological bias.

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) consists of communication channels mediated by digital technology. With the advancement in technology, Holmes (2009a) and Walther (1996) found that it led to the creation of additional forms of new media reality. CMC actively transforms the spatial, temporal, and social contexts of communication. CMC has dramatically influenced the expansion and upkeep of interpersonal relationships. Forms of CMC include chat rooms, blogs, social media, emails, and other simulated worlds because it focuses on mediating

communication, not information or entertainment. These forms of communication can be synchronous, asynchronous, one-to-one, one-to-many, or many-to-many when sharing video, audio, imagery, and text on the web and other virtual environments. Scholars need to consider how they examine new technologies by utilizing frameworks that were originally designed for older technologies, as well as the impact of multimodal relationships, when studying interpersonal communications.

When considering communication research surrounding CMC, Holmes (2009) identified the two primary directions scholars have taken. One includes focusing on the user as an extension of relationships and how CMC mediates face-to-face communication. Secondly, avatar research does not consider the external environments of CMC but how online identities provide a space for neutral connections without gender, age, sex, class, or ethnicity being a factor. There is great value in studying online behavior without comparing it to offline behavior. There are several theories that scholars can apply to the communication study concentration of CMC, which include the new medium theory, uses and gratification theory, and the social information processing theory.

Digital Divide. By framing the environment of media, scholars enable themselves to consider the contexts in which communication is processed and how the medium of the message influences its interpretation. (Gamaleri, 2019). Atay (2019) notes that there is still a digital divide in lower-income areas and developing countries despite cheaper technological devices. As access to these new technologies is gained by minorities and other marginalized groups, they are empowered to express themselves, share their stories, and have greater control over how they are presented in mainstream culture. This convergent culture creates a media ecology where information is shared rapidly with large groups of people.

Moreover, Atay (2019) asserts that individuals share communications and learn about global political, environmental, and social events. Online messages and postings are becoming more popular as a form of activism to highlight discrimination, sexism, racism, and ableism and criticize government and business entities. Online social networks are forming to challenge the stigmas and injustices faced in society, creating a larger platform for oppressed people and groups to be visible and heard. This new media environment creates a space of empowerment and understanding (Cristiano, 2019).

Convergence Culture. Due to digitalization and convergence, Everett (2003) and Holmes (2009b) assert that new media has exposed ritual approaches to communication. Media today is ritualized because it becomes habitual; its ritual and integration depend on what medium is used. Collaboration is unnecessary as a shared ritual because users interact with the medium. With the ritual approach, the attachment to different media exposes their use outside of trends and the consistency it provides compared to a relationship with other individuals.

Atay (2019) examines how generational differences influence media ecology. Generation X are heavy consumers of electronic media because of the internet, while millennials born into digital media technologies live in a media-saturated and consumeristic culture. Millennials are the driving force behind social activism and cyberculture on new media technologies. Media mediates our identities, are experiences online and in person differ. Digital platforms and social media sites drive convergence culture as content flows across different platforms, and users search for the experiences and entertainment they want. Communication technologies will continue to be a part of everyday life and the future.

Holmes (2009b) and Jenkins (2006) find that the effects and rapid changes in telecommunication, media, and computers can make it challenging to study various media

environments thoroughly. It can be difficult to record the convergences between these new media platforms. The flow of content across multiple platforms and industries and the power of media audiences are unpredictable across the intersection of old and new media. Consumer participation creates a cultural shift as they make networks and pursue information from media content. No specific methodology has been presented to examine the convergences between old and new media. Additionally, extensive resources are needed to assess this field accurately. Even still, the new medium theory contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of communication studies by addressing the transition from previous forms of broadcast media to new networked forms of electronic media, its effects on traditional media, and its creation of new media environments.

Participatory Culture. The inception of personal devices such as smartphones, tablets, and personal computers, according to Holmes (2005) and Jenkins (2006b), has widened the scope of various media with different levels of reach. These new forms of media have created a network society that has produced individualized levels of interaction and acquiring information and knowledge. Holmes (2005) highlights the interactivity brought on by the second media age. The first media age, classified as broadcast media, centers on one-way communication, is predisposed to state control, reflects inequality, separates participants, and significantly influences consciousness.

The second media age, as described by Holmes (2005), distinguishes itself by being decentered, facilitating two-way communication, eluding state control, and democratizing the process by fostering universal citizenship. Moreover, it enables participants to retain their individuality, significantly influences individual experiences of space and time, and enhances personal experiences. Through changing audiences and consumers with increased interactivity

and activity participation, this interactivity has formed a new consciousness of personal communication.

Everett (2003) and Holmes (2009b) agree that the transformative capabilities of digital media can critique, recode, and restructure the epistemological classifications of what is real or imaginary, what is time or space, and what is analog or digital. Due to digitalization and convergence, new media has exposed ritual approaches to communication. Media today is ritualized because it becomes habitual; its ritual and integration depend on what medium it is. Collaboration is unnecessary as a shared ritual because users interact with the medium. With the ritual approach, the attachment to different media exposes their use outside of trends and the consistency it provides compared to a relationship with other individuals.

Social Media

Communication technologies such as social media have influenced how society communicates and makes an impression on thoughts, actions, and beliefs (Ong, 2002). According to Manson and Cordovés (2018), technological advances across various media platforms have broken national and global boundaries and transformed how we collaborate and learn. People now have more access to different customs, principles, and philosophies. Online communities have allowed individuals to explore and participate in various religious and spiritual positions. These communities also provide an alternate space for discovering, developing, and expressing different spiritual and religious practices.

According to Brock (2012, 2020) and Florini (2015), Black online culture is more easily accessible and visualized through blogs, messaging services, and social media platforms. Social media provides resources essential to Black online identity to support themselves, their community, and how they are viewed outside their community. Today, due to algorithms specific

to each platform and searchable hashtags, Black identity is more visible across these digital spaces. Lee (2017) furthers the need for digital spaces to inspire and uplift the Black community. Social media platforms are more than a social space; they can also be used to counter oppressive narratives. Like popular culture, social media's powerful nature can influence society's mindsets and views on marginalized populations.

Cole et al. (2017) and Watkins (2018) examined the social mobility and opportunity the digital media ecology provides. As marginalized groups utilize the digital world, scholars should be aware of the different environments, use of, participation in, and practices of its use across various demographics. Social relationships can develop when social media is used strategically, especially for those who typically have trouble with in-person social support. Social support in person and mediated communication channels were also connected to depressive thoughts and feelings. It was found that social networking sites can also be a form of social support. Social relationships can develop when social media is used strategically, especially for those who typically have trouble with in-person social support.

Chinedu Nweke (2020) and Everett (2014) stress that those who are a part of the African diaspora in the United States struggle with their identity due to the media's role in interpreting it. Social media offers a more significant opportunity to find and embrace their individuality. Black spaces in the digital real can continue to be an arena of participation to maintain cultural traditions and highlight acts of resistance. Black media moguls such as Oprah Winfrey, Spike Lee, Tyler Perry, and Reverend T. D. Jakes have taken advantage of the internet and social media to create “. . . powerful cultural feedback loops, using them to solidify their own media brands while simultaneously recoding and innovating twenty-first-century black cultural productions, including transmedia narratives and adaptations, for new markets, new fan

communities, and expanding multicultural audiences” (Everett, 2014, p. 129). Brock (2020) furthers Du Bois’ double consciousness in that it “. . . expresses Blackness as a discursive, informational identity, flitting back and forth in the virtual space between a Black communal context and a white supremacist categorial context” (p. 23). This digital double consciousness adds a layer of complexity to Black identity due to virtual online spaces.

X. Since its launch in 2006, Brock (2012) and Weller (2014) considered how X has evolved from a niche social media platform to a daily site of mass phenomenon for entertainment, marketing, debates, crisis communication, community organization, and cultural contribution. X allows its users to share short messages called posts, up to 280 characters, and follow updates for specific user profiles or keywords through hashtags. X differs from other social media platforms in that the posts are the site’s focal point. Scholars have historically used X to study it as a social media platform, a microblogging space, and a messaging application that alludes to being culturally neutral. Bernabo (2019), Bonilla and Rosa (2015), LeFebvre and Armstrong (2018), and Maragh (2016) agree that X has been a prevalent platform for discussing social issues, activism, and examining live media events.

Having a public profile on X allows viewers to participate actively in live posting and conversations surrounding shared cultures (Florini, 2019; Williams & Gonlin, 2017). Many studies on X examine it from a political lens, but scholars can expand on its use with mass media. Bernabo (2019), Cameron and Geidner (2014), Larsson and Moe (2012), and Maragh (2016) discuss how online interactions and entertainment programming viewing create a symbiotic social co-viewing experience without being physically present. Much of the research surrounding co-viewing focuses on political debates, sports, and reality shows, not scripted programming. As television shows and films are streamed, viewers post and read comments

about the show in real time, and producers can gain insight from their audiences. This dual screen creates a unique environment where media viewers use social media to reinterpret the film through collective and engaging conversations to critique various meanings.

Black Twitter. Lee (2017) and Brock (2020) considered the impact of hashtags related to Black culture and society on social media sites, such as X, and created a space called Black Twitter. Black Twitter is an environment on X where Blacks can freely express their emotions and thoughts, conduct Black discourse, and build a digital community around Black culture. De Kosnik and Feldman (2019) note that Black Twitter is a space where people are “. . . expressing solidarity, sharing information, and organizing politically for African Americans and their allies. Through hashtag after hashtag, Black Twitter raised awareness of the prevalence and danger of racism and sexism occurring throughout the United States” (p. 7). Clark (2014) outlined six steps that demonstrate what is needed for the establishment of Black Twitter:

1) self-selection by users who 2) identify as Black and/or are connected to issues of concern among Black communities. It moves from the individual level of personal communities to collective action among thematic nodes via the 3) performance of communicative acts that are 4) affirmed online and 5) re-affirmed offline, leading to 6) vindication of the network’s power through media coverage, attempted replication of the phenomenon within other demographic groups, and the creation of hashtags that serve as mediators of Black culture in the virtual and physical worlds. (p. 87)

De Kosnik and Feldman (2019) and Brock (2009, 2020) believe that X is one of the fastest-growing tools of the mobile media ecology and the most publicly available space showcasing an extensive Black digital existence. The use of hashtags is critical in creating awareness, and the ability to share experiences and build a safe space, even if the content may

challenge the ideologies of the dominant culture. Yet media researchers have not been interested in how users conduct digital practices. Social networking sites have heightened social movements such as Black Lives Matter, but participation on Black Twitter requires a profound knowledge of Black culture and commonplaces. Keeping this digital practice in mind, the same vantage point can be used to examine Black popular culture artifacts in digital spaces.

Through X's trending topics and the commonality of publicly available posts, Black discourse is easily searchable and visible to different cultures (Brock, 2009, 2012). Brock (2020) and Lee (2017), Black Twitter is a user-generated source of Black cultural identity being learned, reclaimed, and conveyed through the cultural discourses about Black day-to-day life. Additionally, Black Twitter has been a space that undermines implicit and explicit bias in mainstream news. Klassen and Fiesler (2022) found that scholars have used Black Twitter data to better understand the community through a theoretical framework, examine how they respond to media, and understand Black discourse and semiotics.

Black Fandom

Fandom constructs itself as White, perpetuating a narrative that centers on Whiteness (Gatson & Reid, 2011; Wanzo, 2015). Florini (2014) and Hampton (2010) found that Black fans face unique challenges because of the limiting positive representation in popular culture and the lack of Black fan spaces. Fan consumption typically occurs when popular culture artifacts reflect the viewers' concerns, values, and ideologies. As a result of the state of fan studies, Florini (2019), Wanzo (2015), and Warner (2015a) found that Black fandom is grossly understudied and often disregarded by mainstream fan communities, media industries, and scholars. Despite this, fandom has played a significant role in Black communities. It has created an opportunity for athletes, celebrities, film, and television to share and celebrate Black culture, pride, and success.

In addition to fandom being an act of resistance, Black fans of the digital age have created a counterpart culturally significant fannish behavior that claims their own normativity and asserts their presence. These fan spaces include Black dialects and cultural commonplaces that influence identity construction.

Black Twitter has been a way to challenge implicit and explicit bias, but it can also make this platform home space visible to other cultural groups (Florini, 2019; Lee, 2017). To illustrate, Florini (2019) observed Black Game of Thrones fans on X. Florini found that fans used AAVE iterations of the show to create nonstandard hashtags to post live. Using alternative hashtags to show official hashtags helped mitigate the vulnerability from the outside gaze, but it also created a unique Black fan space. Additionally, Black fans interpret the show through Black cultural lenses to intertwine themes on the show to play and interact with Black aesthetics, social practices, and experiences. Williams and Gonlin (2017) also studied Black fans on X and found it was a space to share their experiences. These practices enable Blacks to engage in fan practices and construct and maintain Black individual and collective identities without subjecting themselves to potential harassment (Florini, 2014; Nunley, 2011; Wanzo, 2015).

Summary

Social media and Black popular culture are dynamic and interconnected phenomena that have transformed how people interact, communicate, and consume culture. Despite Black popular culture being a substantial part of the expression of cultural thought, particularly concerning Black fandom on social media, a significant gap in current literature and research endures. This gap in Black fandom is well documented, and *The Woman King* is a compelling example of the power of how Black popular culture shapes cultural behavior and language patterns among its fans. The study of *The Woman King*'s impact on Black popular culture offers

valuable insights into how popular culture and social media can be harnessed to challenge dominant cultural narratives and empower marginalized communities. This popular culture artifact is noteworthy because it has challenged traditional stereotypes in the Black community and has become a platform for Blacks to discuss important issues while representing their culture from their lens and share these views more quickly and to a larger audience.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Overview

This qualitative content analysis study aimed to understand the cultural behavior and language patterns of *The Woman King* fans on X and the film's impact on Black popular culture by investigating how Black culture is produced and reproduced by Blacks and the social commentary it creates in digital spaces. In this chapter, the procedures, research design, and analysis for the research will be presented and covered in detail in their respective sections. The contents of this methodology chapter are organized into the following sections: research method and design (which includes the research questions, setting, participants, and procedures), researcher's role, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness (which includes the credibility, dependability and confirmability, and transferability), ethical considerations, and summary. The purpose of this chapter is to provide information on what occurred during the execution of research.

Research Method and Design

The study actively approaches from a social constructivism philosophical worldview, which serves as an interpretive framework to build upon and analyze the subject matter. Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Creswell and Poth (2018) identify the need for individuals to make sense of their world. Their experiences and interactions help develop complex subjective meanings of particular objects. Researchers actively focus on participants' socially and historically influenced views due to the multiple meanings that can be created in the study. An investigator can then create an inductive pattern of meaning co-constructed from emergent ideas about the subject's social reality. Social constructivism's interpretive nature aligns with the

interest surrounding the production and reproduction of Black culture, lending itself to a qualitative methodological foundation.

The Qualitative Paradigm

A qualitative methodological foundation is the most appropriate inquiry for this ethnographic research design. When studying a group, exploration is needed to identify variables that may be difficult to measure or hear suppressed expressions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) and Creswell (2013) situate qualitative research as making the world visible and transforming it through interpretive and naturalistic material practices. Qualitative research is an approach that starts with assumptions and uses an interpretive framework, such as social constructivism, to inform studies that address the meaning the individuals or groups attribute to human or social phenomena. This inquiry actively adopts an inductive approach to research, prioritizing the exploration of individual meanings by utilizing emerging questions and procedures, and finding ways to report and address their inherent complexities.

In lieu of using existing research from other studies or preidentified information from related literature, Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Creswell and Poth (2018) agree that qualitative methods are fitting to explore unique problems that necessitate an involved comprehensive understanding of the issue. The qualitative research process is emergent; thus, researchers should be mindful that the different phases of the research process may shift after observation and data collection begin. For instance, the research questions and data collection methods undergo changes to accommodate the evolving nature of the study, including shifts in the individuals being studied or the study site. These adjustments are necessary to account for best practices when engaging with participants and learning about their multiple perspectives and meanings.

Creswell (2013) and Creswell and Poth (2018) note that qualitative researchers conduct their studies and collect data in natural settings to make sense of the phenomena occurring and the meanings people bring to them. These detailed meanings provide a level of authenticity that surpasses what is typically found in the literature, as they are established through direct observation of specific contexts. Conducting studies in their naturally occurring setting provides an additional level of context-dependent understanding; what people say or do is influenced by where it occurs. Qualitative researchers need to be conscious and sensitive to the people and places they are studying. Contextual features, such as social, political, and historical experiences, influence a participant's understanding. During this research process, the participants' meanings are the focus, and researchers should be careful not to be influenced by literature or their understanding of the meaning. Qualitative research empowers individuals to share their experiences and shape meanings while minimizing the power dynamics that frequently occur between researchers and participants.

During the qualitative research process, Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Creswell and Poth (2018) identify the need for multiple data sources. These multiple data sources provide a holistic account by recording various viewpoints, recognizing the myriad of situational factors that connect in distinct ways, and outlining the complex picture that develops. Data types are open-ended and may include observations, documents, interviews, audiovisual artifacts, and new and emergent sources such as social networking interactions. These forms of data are not constrained by predetermined scales or instruments, allowing the free flow of information from participants. Researchers are responsible for observing behavior, examining documents, or interviewing participants. Researchers may utilize a protocol to record the data as a vital instrument of the study, but ultimately, they are responsible for gathering and interpreting it.

Additionally, Creswell (2013), Creswell and Creswell (2018), and Creswell and Poth (2018) found that in qualitative studies, researchers utilize inductive and deductive reasoning as they work through multiple levels of abstraction during data analysis to establish codes, patterns, or themes built from specific details that are progressively organized and grouped to more general conceptualization. During this iterative process, the researcher engages in inductive comparisons of the data to establish themes. Subsequently, the researcher deductively reviews these themes against all sources of data to provide robust support for the interpretations made. The data collection, analysis, and reporting stages may be intertwined as these activities are integral. Researchers can also include and collaborate with participants directly to prepare for the study or interpret the results. To illustrate, participants can review research questions or participate in the data analysis phase to assist in theme building.

Creswell (2013), Creswell and Creswell (2018), and Creswell and Poth (2018) report that the phenomena can be represented through a variety of mediums, including field notes, interviews, visual documents, and recordings. Qualitative research affords a flexible writing style and structure to communicate stories or poems without being restricted by more formal academic writing structures. The findings of the study should include themes developed from the voices and diverse views of participants. The picture developed reflects life and the happenings in the real world. The qualitative report actively includes the researcher's reflexivity, which encompasses acknowledging how their background, culture, and experiences may shape the study and influence their understanding of the meanings created.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Creswell and Poth (2018) find many distinctions between the qualitative and quantitative methodological foundation and the basic philosophical assumptions researchers bring to the study. Quantitative methods are not considered appropriate

because research problems are framed primarily in numerical terms. Quantitative experiments use close-ended questions to deductively evaluate objective theories focused on factors and the relationship among variables that may influence an outcome. Research designs in quantitative studies can include experimental designs and non-experimental designs.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Creswell and Poth (2018) further elaborate on the methodologies used in quantitative research. Experimental researchers assess a precise treatment that impacts a result by providing it to one group and withholding it from another to determine how both groups scored on an outcome. Experimental research can be conducted through true experiments, where subjects are randomly assigned to treatment conditions, or through quasi-experiments that employ nonrandomized assignments. Quasi-experiments may include single-subject designs within their methodology.

Non-experimental research designs such as surveys, as noted by Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Creswell and Poth (2018), result in a numerical description of a population's trends, viewpoints, or beliefs by studying a sample of that population. Longitudinal designs, another non-experimental research design, use using questionnaires or structured interviews as a data collection method resulting in generalizations about a sample from a population. Data is collected quantitatively through the use of instruments, enabling the analysis of numerical results using statistical procedures. The final report showcases the findings and follows a structured format that includes an introduction, literature review, theoretical framework, methodology, results, and discussion sections.

Qualitative studies, as emphasized by Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Creswell and Poth (2018), can be helpful in further investigating quantitative research to describe connections in theories and models better and provide contextual depth of insight. Theories excel in

identifying trends and relationships but do not provide any additional information or insight into why these trends and relationships occur (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This qualitative study aimed to understand the cultural behavior and language patterns of a culture-sharing group, *The Woman King* fans, at a set site, X. Cultural studies and fandom were the theories guiding this study. The researcher was interested in learning more about the experiences, reactions, and contexts of *The Woman King* fans' thoughts, responses, interactions, and behavior on X. This level of research required using words and open-ended research questions and responses to investigate *The Woman King* fans' multiple perspectives and meanings, how Blacks produce and reproduce Black culture, and the social commentary it creates in digital spaces.

Ethnography

As a design inquiry, Coffey (2018), Creswell and Creswell (2018), and Creswell and Poth (2018) state that ethnographers are interested in exploring shared patterns of behavior and language of a larger group of individuals involved in a grounded study over a prolonged period. Ethnographies are great research designs for exploratory and discovery topics. As such, an ethnographic research design is appropriate as a foundation for this study because it provides an understanding of meaning. The settings of an intact cultural group are referred to as fields in ethnographic research. A field of study can be a physical location, a formal setting, or a social or cultural space in which researchers immerse themselves in. Scientific approaches to ethnography have expanded to theoretical orientations such as critical theory and cultural studies, which has led to pluralistic approaches.

Ethnography has many forms, including autoethnography, visual ethnography, and digital ethnography. When utilizing ethnography as a design method, Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Creswell and Poth (2018) note that the researcher must identify and deduce the beliefs,

behaviors, values, and language patterns. While studying a culture-sharing group, ethnography can be both a process and an outcome that results in a constructed written product of that research. Ethnographers are concerned with social behaviors such as the interactions among culture-sharing group members, their actions, and the developed language. Data is collected until there is a clear understanding of the cultural group.

There are several features of ethnography that Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Creswell and Poth (2018) have noted as essential. Primarily, ethnographies create a comprehensive and complete depiction of a particular cultural group. During the observation process, the researcher actively ensures to be mindful of patterns in the group's mental activities and how they are expressed. Through extensive fieldwork, data is collected from observations, interviews, and artifacts. Researchers identify any cultural themes, issues, or theories that can be used to study this group, aiding them in focusing their attention and framing their research. From an emic perspective, the participants' outlook is the researcher's focus during the data analysis stage. Appropriate cultural interpretation of the group is generated from analyzing multiple patterns across the data and the researcher provides direct quotes and synthesizes them to produce a cultural interpretation. The investigation will reveal how the culture-sharing group works and an understanding of the member's way of life.

One challenge for ethnographic research observed by Creswell and Poth (2018) is understanding concepts related to cultural exploration, such as cultural anthropology and social-cultural systems. Elements of culture comprise the populations' decision-making process, their actions, and what they say. While conducting fieldwork, ethnographers must be sensitive to the individuals and the site being studied. Ethnographies have provided substantial insight and understanding of communication phenomena and the rich presence of cultural life and

representation online. Using ethnography as a research design foundation for content analysis can enrich the analysis process by providing a deeper understanding of the social and cultural context surrounding the content under study.

Content Analysis

Content analysis, as defined by Krippendorff (2019), Popping (2017), and Riffe et al. (2019) involves the systematic examination of imaging, video, audio, and textual content and reducing it into a standardized set of symbols that can be statistically manipulated, without necessarily adopting the viewpoint of the author or user. This allows for the identification of characteristics such as presence, intensity, or frequency, facilitating replicable and valid inferences about the content's context. As an empirically grounded method, is both exploratory and predictive in nature to understand the contents significance to individuals, their effects, and the conveyed information's implications. This approach allows researchers to uncover the meanings embedded within the content and explore the complex interplay between content, culture, and society.

Furthermore, Faggiano (2023), Popping (2017), and Riffe et al. (2019) considers the benefit of a thematic approach to content analysis. Researchers examining messages often employ the thematic approach to identify specific themes within texts. This involves using dictionaries to guide the identification of relevant themes and their frequency of occurrence. While software aids in identifying search entries, human interpretation is often needed to determine intended meanings. Thematic content analysis focuses on broader concepts and allows researchers to explore the prominence and co-occurrence of themes in texts. This method is valuable for understanding cultural shifts and can reveal associations among themes. However, ambiguity in language poses challenges, especially regarding semantic ambiguity, which arises

from unclear meanings based on informal usage or context-specific expressions. Despite these challenges, thematic content analysis remains a valuable tool for qualitative research, facilitating the development of detailed descriptions.

Ardévol (2012) asserts that studies of the Internet utilized online methods to learn about the social conditions, social interaction, and signifying cultural practices of subjects through computer-mediated communication, specifically online spaces. Faggiano (2023), Krippendorff (2019), and Popping (2017) consider conceptual changes in understanding communication. Contemporary content analysis has evolved beyond traditional understandings of symbols, contents, and intents, influenced by shifts in the concept of communication, advancements in media technologies, and cultural interpretations of significance. Messages have become a metaphorical container of meaning, facilitating the transportation of meanings from one place to another. Each medium has limitations that shape the forms and volumes of messages it can convey. A content analysis is a useful tool for studying social and culture on the Internet as interactive and simultaneous communication increases. The social interactions in cyberspace have shaped contemporary content analysis and provides a unique perspective of independent cultures and connections outside the physical world.

Content analysts are now confronted with broader contexts as their focus expands from small collections of printed messages to encompass systems and electronic texts and images circulating in their environments (Krippendorff, 2019). Coleman (2010), Garcia et al. (2009), and Hine (2017) find that online spaces have unquestionably become a significant site that reflects everyday experiences. Qualitative research highlights the distinctness and diversity of participant observation in online spaces. As an object of study, the Internet intertwines as an

artifact, tool, and study environment. When using the Internet as a field to conduct research, it becomes a source of textual and visual data.

Coleman (2010), Garcia et al. (2009), and Hine (2017) note that content within communications is not inherently fixed; individuals often interpret texts differently. The intentions of message senders may differ from how recipients perceive those messages. Content analysts are tasked with predicting or inferring unobservable phenomena, a primary reason for employing content analysis (Krippendorff, 2019). Documenting this textual and visual data will yield a large number of records that should be analyzed and coded to provide insight into varying meanings of online activities.

Krippendorff (2019) outlines key components of a content analysis: a body of text as the initial data for analysis, a defined research question driving the analysis, a chosen context within which to interpret the text, an analytical construct operationalizing the context, and inferences aimed at answering the research question, representing the fundamental achievement of the study. Context serves as a constructed framework, shaping the conceptual environment and situational significance of a text within content analysis. According to Giglietto et al. (2012) and Hine (2017), social media platforms provide a unique space and offer a distinct opportunity for online research to study different cultural realities and statistical and computational methodologies. Each social media sites offer unique views. Social media sites like X initially used computational methods due to their large-scale data. Qualitative approaches accompany the gradual exploration of how large-scale patterns develop, their meaning to participants, and the emerging cultural functions that form within them.

A content analysis offers insights into the content produced and shared online.

Ethnographic content analysis prioritizes an emic approach focusing on indigenous perspectives

rather than interpretations imposed by the analyst's theoretical framework (Popping, 2017; Riffe et al., 2019). Therefore, a content analysis study is most appropriate to recognize *The Woman King* fans' social activity and linguistic patterns on X. Social media is a part of society's lived realities and has influenced ideas and concepts surrounding identity, culture, and community meaning and construction. Additionally, social media provides a space for social interactions, reflecting cultures, and a commonplace for commentary regarding cultural artifacts such as films. To support interpretations, qualitative content analysts integrate quotes and literature to contextualize texts, employ parallelisms, triangulate data, and identify metaphors (Krippendorff, 2019).

Research Design

The purpose of this content analysis study surrounding the understanding of the culture-sharing cultural behavior and language pattern of *The Woman King* fans on X required the unobtrusive collection and Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis (CTDA) of public posts on X made about the film during its opening weekend and a content analysis of the film to uncover the film's impact on Black popular culture. There were elements of fandom, participatory culture, and media convergence that were explored in this study from the analysis of the symbolic and written text, audiovisual, and digital materials through a critical constructivist framework paradigm.

Here the researcher was a crucial component in data collection from multiple sources to make objective inferences on both apparent and underlying meanings. With this emergent design, the data was collected in its natural setting on X. This study included public posts; however, posts that had been deleted or were posted from private accounts were not included in the data collection process. Public social media posts used as data empowered the researcher to

access unrestricted communal thoughts so they could be inductively reviewed, organized, and coded through cultural studies and fandom lenses. Posts that were from suspected bot or spam accounts that met the search criteria were flagged.

Through this data collection method, researchers have insight into the language and words of participants unique to X. Scholars defined and deduced views, behaviors, morals, and language patterns. Themes were developed to understand the culture-sharing pattern of *The Woman King* fans and the potential factors that influence how Black culture is produced and reproduced by Blacks and the social commentary it created. The researcher focused on the participant's outlook from an emic perspective and directly provide these quotes, then synthesized the data to create a cultural interpretation. Representation data such as oral stories, literature, and digital artifacts were collected and examined to determine patterns. As a method, the way data is structured and collected during the research process was an appropriate structure to build off.

Given the analysis of the methodologies used in previous studies concerning fandom on X, the researcher used a CTDA of posts as a methodological toolkit and a conceptual framework built on a content analysis foundation to make observations and deduce the results (Brock, 2012, 2018). Brock (2018) provides the following definition of CTDA:

... a multimodal analytic technique for the investigation of Internet and digital phenomena, artifacts, and culture. It integrates an analysis of the technological artifact and user discourse, framed by cultural theory, to unpack semiotic and material connections between form, function, belief, and meaning of information and communication technologies (ICTs). (p. 1)

As a methodology, CTDA has not been widely used. However, its prescriptive nature and application make it most suitable to investigate digital media discourse utilizing a qualitative content analysis to evaluate technologies as an accumulation of artifacts, practices, and cultural beliefs critically (Brock, 2012, 2018). Additionally, Littlejohn et al. (2017b) affirms understanding semiotics, the study of signs and symbols and how they function and are interpreted, is crucial. Signs and symbols can represent thoughts, feelings, situations, things, and circumstances outside of themselves. These relationships are an important part of communication to improve the shared understanding between language, society, and culture. Thus, aiding in the understanding of how messages come to have meaning.

The main data for this study was collected from posts containing keywords such as TheWomanKing, WomanKingMovie, WomanKing, and BoycottWomanKing. Through identifying and developing common themes from a fandom and cultural studies lens, this form of data incorporates shared thoughts that are inductively assessed, systematized, and coded. The researcher must realize the themes shown in *The Woman King* film and be objective in discussing the connotations and denotations and the theme's relation to posts about it. Additionally, the discovered data is contextual, so the researcher must respect varying viewpoints and subjective truths using the CTDA and content analysis. The writer also collected secondary data from other resources, such as books, journals, and theses related to this study's application.

Research Questions

RQ1: How are Black culture and representation currently being displayed in media?

Based on the discourse of posts surrounding *The Woman King* during the film's opening weekend, researchers can identify patterns and trends in how Black culture and representation

are being discussed. These can be compared to the film's relevant connotations and denotations to gain insights into the dynamics of the discussion. This method can involve examining the language and tone used to describe *The Woman King*, the topics, and the most frequently discussed themes. By analyzing the discourse of posts, researchers can gain insights into the ways in which Black culture is being portrayed in *The Woman King* and how these representations are being received and interpreted by different audiences.

RQ2: How does social media commentary about *The Woman King* film influence Black culture?

Through the discourse analysis of posts, researchers can examine the ways in which social media commentary about Black culture is shaping perceptions and attitudes toward Black individuals and communities. This method can involve analyzing the language and tone used to describe posts related to *The Woman King*, as well as the types of narratives and stereotypes that are being perpetuated through social media discourse. By analyzing the discourse of posts, researchers can identify the ways in which social media commentary is influencing public opinion and shaping perceptions of Black culture.

RQ3: In Black communities, how does social media commentary affect the fandom of *The Woman King* film?

Engagement was examined through the discourse of posts and their number of reposts, replies, and likes; researchers can identify patterns and trends in how social media commentary is contributing to the creation and perpetuation of fandom within Black communities. This method can involve examining the language and tone used to describe fandom and how fans engage with and respond to Black cultural products and representations in *The Woman King*. By analyzing the discourse of posts, researchers can gain insights into the ways in which social

media commentary is contributing to the creation of fan communities and how these communities are shaping perceptions of Black culture.

Setting

X

The field site for this study was X (<https://twitter.com/>). This information network utilizes short messages, including photos, videos, and links, to communicate with people worldwide. The setting of this inquiry is defined based on the research topic. X promotes serving the public conversation by providing a free and safe space for expression and talk and describes itself as "... what's happening and what people are talking about right now" (*About Twitter*, n.d., para. 1). X is an appropriate site because it a popular social networking site that allows for co-viewing, where users participate in second-screening practices and connect with others in real-time to discuss what they are watching (Nee & Barker, 2020; Pittman & Tefertiller, 2015). Additionally, Highfield et al. (2013) and Negrete and McManus (2021) have found that X is predominantly used as a technology and tool for shared fandom during media broadcasts. As media is streamed and television shows and films are broadcasted, X users have a space to share media and text as it unfolds live.

A Pew Research Center study found that 29% of Black U.S. adults have used X, compared to the 23% average (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). Auxier (2020) found that Black social media users are 60% more likely to say that social media is important to them personally for finding other people who share their views about important issues and social media is essential to them for getting involved with political or social issues that are important to them. With the creation of hashtags that provide commentary on Black culture and society, a subculture on X, Black Twitter, has been formed (Lee, 2017). Thus, X is an excellent platform to study because it

connects minorities, encourages self-expression, raises awareness of social issues, and offers counternarratives for marginalized groups (Pastel, 2019).

Film

The Woman King is the Black cultural artifact selected for analysis to understand how Black culture is produced and reproduced by Blacks along with the social commentary it creates in digital spaces. According to CNBC (2022), more than 1.4 million people saw the film in theaters during its first three days. *The Woman King* also won 26 awards out of 115 nominations. Most notably, it won Best Picture and Best Director for the 2023 African-American Film Critics Association Award and Movie of the Year for the 2023 AFI Awards (IMDb, 2023). As mentioned by Le Roux (2023), as a director, Gina Prince-Bythewood provided a voice for young Black girls in *The Woman King* by creating a story that they could identify. This contribution has helped break trends of undervaluing Black female artists. *The Woman King* showcases Black dark-skinned women as powerful through their battle skills and agency, contributing to its noted success. *The Woman King* confirms that ". . . visual narratives play a crucial role in shaping cultural beliefs and attitudes about race" (para. 11).

In an interview with Deadline, as explained by Jackson (2022), Prince-Bythewood discusses the film and furthers her determination to affirm that stories focusing on powerful and dynamic Black women are worthy of being seen in Hollywood. Gina Prince-Bythewood states:

I think it's a story that needs to be told over and over and over again. I think there is, I would not say a dearth, but there are no films that tell us about our history beyond enslavement in this country. Everything we learn starts there. And there's so much more history that we need to be in touch with that we're not. And it's just such a mystery to so many, and we need that. We need to be able to see ourselves as heroic or as kings or as

queens and women kings; we're missing that. And so those stories need to be told.

Historical epics are great because they take you into a world and culture you may not be a part of, but you can connect with those characters. The world needs to do that with people that look like us. This took seven years to make, and I mean, *Black Panther* opened the door for this, which is beautiful. And I think these films should just keep building on each other, and the success of those will beget more stories that need to be told. (Jackson, 2022, para. 10)

Jackson (2022) and Weaver (2022) attest that bringing *The Woman King* to fruition was difficult. The success of the film *Black Panther* receives credit for paving the way for *The Woman King* to be produced after a seven-year development process. Moreover, Lucas (2022), NYFA (2022), and Wilkes (2022) discuss the many obstacles faced during that period. Initially, production studios refused to fund an action movie rooted in African history from a feminist perspective and with dark-skinned actors in the lead roles. *The Woman King's* storyline challenged White and male-dominated storytelling. American films rarely carefully consider non-Western cultures, and enabling colorism in casting would have sacrificed the authenticity and integrity of the film. With the success of *Black Panther* in 2008 and the voice of fans who recognized that the Agojie inspired Wakanda's Dora Milaje warriors, there was a shift in support. *The Woman King* is groundbreaking for the future of equity in cinema and the importance and power of representation through the commitment to hiring predominantly Black women and women of color on camera and behind the scenes.

Participants

The participants in this study were fans of *The Woman King* who posted about the film during its opening weekend on X. Participants were the creators of posts that include content

such as text, images, or videos. These posts served as the source of the data that was analyzed to explore fandom and Black culture. There was no direct contact or involvement with participants in this study; instead, pre-existing historical posts were used as the primary source of data. The researcher had no set number of posts for the CTDA to review. Instead, the researcher gathered a sampling of posts selected from *The Woman King*'s opening weekend by using curated key search terms until data saturation occurred. Participants must have used at least one of the keywords in their posts: TheWomanKing, WomanKingMovie, WomanKing, and BoycottWomanKing. For the content analysis of the film concerning the posts, the researcher used the full film as the basis for their analysis. The problem and purpose statements and research questions directly dictated the number of secondary resources needed for this analysis.

Procedures

X's advanced search page (<https://twitter.com/search-advanced>) was utilized to collect all public posts containing at least one of the key search terms associated with viewing *The Woman King* film during its opening weekend. The researcher started with keywords such as TheWomanKing, WomanKingMovie, WomanKing, and BoycottWomanKing to identify additional keywords to perform this CTDA and become more familiar with the participant's language. In the "Any of these words" field, the researcher entered the keywords "TheWomanKing WomanKingMovie WomanKing BoycottWomanKing." The "Language" field is set to any language, and the "Filters" included replies and original posts and posts with links. In the "Dates" section, the date range selected were the first two days of the film's opening weekend. For example, if the first two days of the opening weekend was from September 16, 2022, to September 17, 2022, you would select "From" September 16, 2022, and "To" September 17, 2022. Posts were captured from 6:00 p.m. UTC to 7:59 p.m. UTC on Friday, September 16th,

2022, and Saturday, September 17th, 2022. Subsequent posts after the opening weekend to develop insights and themes further were not needed.

The researcher ensured that all digital audiovisual materials collected from posts were public, therefore not requiring informed consent. The federal regulations at 45 CFR 46.102 Protection of Human Subjects (2018) define a human subject as a living person whom the researcher interacts with through communication or interpersonal contact or produces identifiable private information. Studies that use social media to obtain public data are not considered human subject research (Fiesler & Proferes, 2018; Vitak et al., 2017). X is publicly available, and no log-in is required to access the site; the researcher is not interacting with any posters, information collected is not identifiable, or if it is identifiable, it is publicly available, and the disclosure of data cannot place subjects at risk. Nonetheless, the researcher was committed to adhering to ethical guidelines for social media research.

Only posts meeting the selection criterion aligned with this study were captured and analyzed. The researcher documented these posts using the categories outlined in the *Sample Coding Sheet to Document Posts Related to The Woman King*, as provided in the Appendix. The researcher conducted a CTDA on the collected posts to analyze the language, discourse, and rhetorical devices utilized in the posts. This analysis aimed to identify and extract themes relevant to the study. A thematic approach to identify and analyze the themes present in the posts related to the film was employed. This approach allowed for a systematic examination of the content to uncover recurring patterns, ideas, and topics within the collected posts.

The researcher created a list of codes to facilitate the capturing and categorization of the identified themes in the collected posts. These codes served as labels or descriptors that help organize and classify the data based on the specific themes that emerge during the analysis

process. The context in which the posts were posted, as well as any relevant contextual factors that may influence the interpretation of the data was captured. The findings concerning the research questions and their relationship to a broader cultural discourse surrounding Black thoughts, culture, experiences, and fandom were interpreted. The written report included the findings and pertinent quotes and screenshots to support the analysis. Finally, the implications of our findings for future research and understanding of the film's cultural significance was discussed.

The researcher collected and analyzed content related to *The Woman King*, categorized the collected materials, and engaged in a discussion to interpret their meanings. This content analysis involved examining various sources such as articles, reviews, interviews, and other relevant materials that provided insights into the film. By systematically analyzing the content, the researcher aimed to understand the themes, messages, and cultural significance of *The Woman King* and its potential influence on the discussions and perceptions reflected in the analyzed posts. The themes could be in the form of visual or auditory elements. The artifact was viewed in its entirety to study the symbolism, meanings, and overall theme.

To unpack and identify various cultural signs present in the film, multiple viewings of *The Woman King* were conducted. By closely examining the visual and narrative elements, symbols, dialogue, and character portrayals, the researcher aimed to identify and analyze the cultural meanings embedded within the artifact. This process provided valuable insights into how *The Woman King* represents and portrays Black culture, challenges dominant narratives, and contributes to the overall discourse surrounding Black representation in popular media. These themes were documented using the *Sample Table to Document Signs from the Content Analysis of The Woman King* found in the Appendix.

The identified themes from the content analysis of *The Woman King* were cross-referenced with collected posts and secondary data sources such as books and articles. This approach allowed for a comprehensive exploration and analysis of the themes and their resonance across different sources. By integrating multiple perspectives and sources of information, the study aimed to provide a nuanced understanding of how *The Woman King* and its related discourse on social media intersect with broader cultural themes and discussions within the field. For each sign, the signifier and the signified was identified and reflected on so the denotation and connotation were revealed. After reviewing the full film of *The Woman King*, relevant aspects were coded based on predetermined categories, leading to the identification of themes. The researcher presented and discussed the identified signs and themes derived from the analysis of *The Woman King*. These findings were presented in the form of a comprehensive discussion, where the researcher delved into the meanings, implications, and cultural significance of these signs and themes.

Researcher's Role

Creswell and Creswell (2018) identify the researcher as a critical instrument in qualitative research. As a qualitative researcher in this study, I collect multiple forms of data directly by examining digital audiovisual material, such as posts, and then interpret them. Throughout the study, the researcher focused on the participants' meanings. Content analysis methods draw on the researcher's experience as an observer; working inductively, the researcher builds patterns and themes. As a Black woman conducting this study on the film *The Woman King*, I acknowledge that my background, culture, and lived experiences may play a role in defining the interpretations of themes developed from the data. The researcher has casually watched *The*

Woman King and has seen commentary on social media channels such as Facebook and Instagram regarding the film before this study, but not X.

Additionally, the researcher is familiar with Black culture and Black popular culture. Given the researcher's background and experiences, it may have shaped the researcher's interpretation during the study. However, I strived to approach the study with reflexivity, recognizing the potential impact of my own biases and actively worked to mitigate them. To ensure that the analysis remains objective, I engaged in ongoing critical self-reflection, questioned my assumptions, and considered alternative interpretations of the data.

Data Collection

The researcher started with keywords such as TheWomanKing, WomanKingMovie, WomanKing, and BoycottWomanKing to identify additional keywords to perform this CTDA and became more familiar with the participant's language. In the "Any of these words" field, the researcher entered the keywords "TheWomanKing WomanKingMovie WomanKing BoycottWomanKing." The "Language" field was set to any language, and the "Filters" included replies and original posts and posts with links. In the "Dates" section, select the date range for the opening weekend. For example, if the first two days of the opening weekend was from September 16, 2022, to September 17, 2022, you would select "From" September 16, 2022, and "To" September 17, 2022. Posts were captured from 6:00 p.m. UTC to 7:59 p.m. UTC on Friday, September 16th, 2022, and Saturday, September 17th, 2022. These selected dates capture the real-time engagement and cultural production of Black fandom. Subsequent posts after the opening weekend to develop insights and themes further were not needed.

Selected posts were entered into Airtable (<https://airtable.com/>), an online database system for further analysis and documented using the categories from the *Sample Coding Sheet*

to *Document Posts Related to The Woman King* found in the Appendix. To capture these themes, the researcher created a list of codes that assisted in systematically categorizing and organizing the data. The context of the posts as well as any relevant contextual factors that provided additional insight into the meaning and intention behind the posts was documented. The data was cleaned by removing duplicate, unrelated, or unauthentic posts that did not contribute to answering the research question. The themes from *The Woman King* film were documented using the *Sample Table to Document Signs from the Content Analysis of The Woman King* found in the Appendix, and the timestamp of its occurrence was included. These themes were also cross-referenced with the posts collected and supporting secondary data such as books and articles to help support the significance of them. For each theme, the signifier and the signified was identified and reflected on so the denotation and connotation were revealed. After the film was reviewed, signs were coded, and themes were identified. The signs and themes were represented in a discussion.

Data Analysis

This CTDA focused on answering the defined research questions by identifying and developing common themes from the selected relevant posts. The data was winnowed and digitally coded to aggregate data into a small number of themes that related directly to the study's research question. To organize and prepare the data for analysis, posts were manually scanned, and applicable posts were documented and sorted in Airtable. Once a post was selected for coding, all analytic data was recorded in a manual coding form to provide a general idea of the data and a chance to reflect on its overall meaning. All available data points were obtained from public information on X's advanced search. As a result, the following data was collected:

- Bookmarks – a feature that allows users to save posts on a timeline for easy access.
- Hashtag – a word or phrase that is followed by the # symbol. When a hashtag is clicked, the user will see other posts containing the same keyword or topic.
- ID – a unique number assigned to each post collected.
- Like – when a X user taps the heart icon on a post to show appreciation for it.
- Mention – when another X account is mentioned in a post by including the @ sign followed directly by their username.
- Profile – a profile on X that displays the user’s information they choose to share publicly, including their posts and username.
- Repost – when a user shares another account’s post to their followers by clicking the repost button. It is often used to share information while retaining original attribution.
- Reply – a response to another user’s post. Users can reply by clicking the reply icon next to the post they want to respond to. A post indicates the total number of replies it has received.
- Timestamp – the date and time a post was posted on X. This information can be found in the detail view of a post.
- Post – a post on X that may contain photos, GIFs, videos, and text up to 280 characters. Posts are shown in X timelines and can be embedded on other websites.
- Quote post – when users add their own comments, photos, or a GIF before reposting someone’s post to their followers.

- URL – a uniform resource locator is a web address that points to a unique page on the internet.
- Username – or handle, is the name displayed that is unique to each account; it is a personal identifier displayed on a X profile page. It is always preceded by the @ symbol.

An analysis of themes related to the posts about *The Woman King* film was documented. The data was reviewed inductively and deductively, and themes were notated to understand the meaning of crucial phrases personally and what they meant to the film's fans. The data was coded, and a description for each theme was generated. This data was showcased using tables and figures. Notes were taken to identify additional patterns and discovered themes. Additional evaluation determined alternate connections in these groups concerning their identity. When analyzing this data, it was essential to report multiple perspectives and identify various factors to create a holistic account. This method allowed the researcher to tie these themes together to show their relationship to Black culture and the Black community. Additional reference material from published sources, such as secondary data, were used to develop a complete explanation and understanding of the results that signifies the cultural group. The initial draft was returned to the dissertation committee; they were asked to verify that all bases are covered and accurately presented. If discrepancies were noted, the parameters for analysis were modified as needed.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of a study addresses credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Creswell and Creswell (2018), Creswell and Poth (2018), and Terrell (2016) confirm that validity and reliability are vital in ensuring researchers are conducting quality qualitative research. Qualitative validation approaches ensure the researcher confirms accuracy

by using specific procedures to ensure consistency from all viewpoints. Validation techniques from a researcher's perspective include clarifying the bias the researcher brings to the study, repeated artifact analyses, engaging in reflexivity to determine potential researcher bias, triangulating different data sources to confirm themes, and repeating and presenting negative or discrepant information in the study. Researchers should be continuously involved in a qualitative research study and use rich, detailed accounts. With reliability, qualitative research is improved through detailed notes and recordings. Verifying that the artifacts were transcribed correctly and are error-free can also ensure reliability.

Credibility

When establishing credibility, Terrell (2016) affirms that the researcher's study results are believable and authentic from the participants' perspective and accurately describe their reality. There is a high dependency on the level of detail documented and the researcher's analytical ability. Triangulation is a necessary step in this process.

Dependability and Confirmability

Terrell (2016) finds that researchers must be able to consistently replicate the results of the study to determine its dependability. Dependability and confirmability can be accomplished by the dissertation committee reviewing, inspecting, and assessing the research process and methodology for the accuracy of the results. Confirmability is achieved through the researcher discussing how they remained unbiased during the study and how it is an accurate representation of the participants. A research design was provided to replicate the study, and documents were provided to support the conclusions drawn.

Transferability

Additionally, transferability is important; Terrell (2016) shares that it demonstrates that the research findings can be applied to other studies. A robust description is provided to support the data collected and themes determined. In doing so, the results can provide insight into similar research studies surrounding this culture-sharing group.

Ethical Considerations

There are several ethical concerns that Creswell (2013) and Hine (2017) identify with conducting a content analysis. Before conducting the study, the standards of professional associations should be reviewed, and the code of ethics understood. Participants may not be aware that researchers can potentially use the information that they share on social media. Researchers should consider if they need to make their presence known if they are not interacting with those being observed directly. Still, the participant's privacy and autonomy should be protected. Only public posts were used, and no information collected reveal any personally identifiable information.

Researchers need to be sensitive to their needs when studying marginalized people and respect potential power imbalances. The researcher should be transparent about any affiliations or interests that may influence the study and take steps to minimize the impact of these factors on the research process and findings and co-constructors of knowledge. Additionally, the researcher's presence may bias the responses, so it is essential to note this in the study. The guidelines allow for collecting and analyzing valid data and, ultimately, developing a sound dissertation report that reports multiple perspectives, contrary findings, and other summary presentations. The data collected will be stored for at least five years.

Summary

To summarize, this qualitative content analysis study aimed to understand the cultural behavior and language patterns of *The Woman King* fans on X and the film's impact on Black popular culture by investigating how Black culture is produced and reproduced by Blacks along with the social commentary it creates in digital spaces. This chapter discussed information on what occurred during the execution of research. The procedures, research design, and analysis for the proposed research were covered in detail in their respective sections. This methodology provided a robust framework for analyzing *The Woman King* fans' cultural behavior and language patterns on X and the film's impact on Black popular culture. It allows for an in-depth exploration of how media shapes cultural practices and norms and how it is received and interpreted by audiences, particularly Blacks. The results of this study were useful for understanding the impact of popular culture on Black identity and for informing future research on the subject.

Chapter 4: Results

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative content analysis study was to understand the cultural behavior and language patterns of *The Woman King* fans on X and the film's impact on Black popular culture. In this chapter, I provide a detailed overview of participants and report results from captured posts on X based on Brock's (2012, 2018) CTDA multimodal analytic technique and a content analysis of the film. First, I report the findings of analyzing X and its users from a CTDA framework. Second, I report findings from the discourse analysis of posts related to *The Woman King* film and cross-reference the identified themes with the content analysis of the film that reflects the research questions and relates to cultural studies and fandom theories. The purpose of this chapter is to present the results of the data analysis. In doing so, this chapter reveals how *The Woman King* represents and portrays Black culture, challenges dominant narratives, and contributes to the overall discourse surrounding Black representation in popular media.

Participants

The participants in this study were fans of *The Woman King* who posted about the film during its opening weekend on X. Participants were the creators of posts that included content such as text, images, or videos. These posts served as the source of the data analyzed that explored fandom and Black culture. The purposive sampling included 1,469 relevant posts ($\mu = 1,469$) captured from 6:00 p.m. UTC to 7:59 p.m. UTC on Friday, September 16th, 2022, and Saturday, September 17th, 2022, during the opening weekend of *The Woman King* by using curated key search terms. Participants used at least one of the keywords in their posts: TheWomanKing, WomanKingMovie, WomanKing, and BoycottWomanKing. For the content

analysis of the film concerning the posts, the researcher used the full film as the basis for the analysis. Table 1 contains quantitative data collected showcasing the frequency which each keyword was used. Of the relevant posts, TheWomanKing was used most frequently in 38.6% ($\mu = 567$) of posts, BoycottWomanKing in 34.1% ($\mu = 501$), WomanKingMovie in 24.6% ($\mu = 361$), and WomanKing in 10.9% ($\mu = 160$).

Table 1

Quantitative Data – Frequency of Keyword

Keywords	Frequency
BoycottWomanKing	501
TheWomanKing	567
WomanKing	160
WomanKingMovie	361

The researcher created a list of codes in association with *The Woman King* to identify themes in the collected posts. These codes served as descriptors that helped organize and classify the data to develop themes that emerged during the analysis process. Table 2 contains quantitative data collected showcasing the frequency which each code was used.

Table 2

Quantitative Data – Frequency of each Code

Code	Frequency
ADOS	88
Against	389
Awards	32
Breonna Taylor	9
Cast	345
Conversation	238
Emoji	276
Emotion	91
Gender	184
GIF	103

Code	Frequency
Going to movie	131
History	329
Holocaust	21
Likes movie	397
Meme	13
Picture	167
Political	56
Pop culture	234
Race	299
Religion	8
Review	27
See it yourself	163
Slavery	295
Support	799
Trolls	55
Undecided	51
Video	27

A content analysis of the full film recorded signs in *The Woman King*. These signs served as additional context for the identified posts. Table 3 contains qualitative data collected showcasing 53 signs found in *The Woman King* film. The time, signifier signified, and sign are presented.

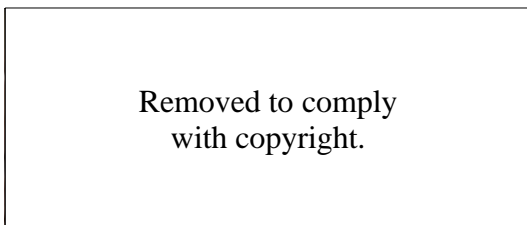
Table 3

Signs from the Content Analysis of The Woman King

Sign 1 (Time: 00:01:18)	
1. Signifier	2. Signified
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 20px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;"> <p>Removed to comply with copyright.</p> </div>	<p>The text provides the context of the movie setting.</p>
3. Sign – West Africa, 1823. King Ghezo of the Dahomey, an African Kingdom, battles against raids from the Oyo Empire and the Mahi people who aim to sell captives to European slavers. The Dahomey use the Agojie, female soldiers to fight against Oyo’s guns and horses.	

Sign 2 (Time: 00:05:05)

1. Signifier



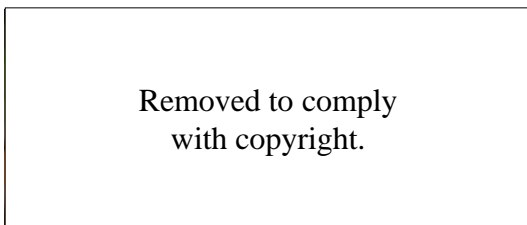
2. Signified

A handmade doll is placed on top of a deceased Agojie warrior.

3. Sign – Covering the bodies of fallen Agojie warriors after an attack and placing a human figurine on them shows that the Agojie care about each other.

Sign 3 (Time: 00:10:36)

1. Signifier



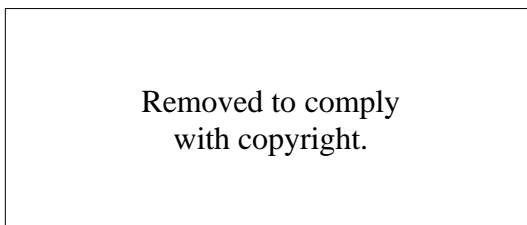
2. Signified

Nawi pushes her match that her parents found for her to marry.

3. Sign – Nawi is viewed as worthless by potential suitors and has trouble finding a match because does not want to marry someone old or abusive. This was the last straw for Nawi's father, so he gave her to the king.

Sign 4 (Time: 00:12:31)

1. Signifier



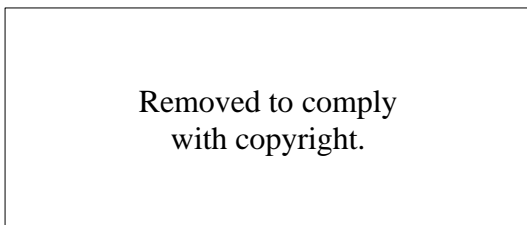
2. Signified

Skulls appear on stakes inside the palace of the Dahomey kingdom.

3. Sign – Some men who raided the Dahomey kingdom were killed and others were sold in Ouidah.

Sign 5 (Time: 00:14:31)

1. Signifier



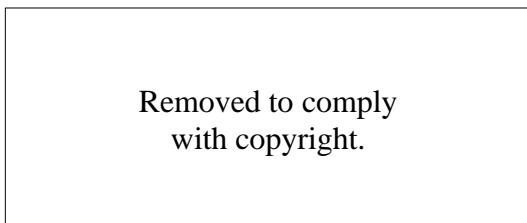
2. Signified

The Oyo discover that their captives are gone, and Mahi comrades are killed.

3. Sign – General Oba Ade of the Oyo Empire explains to his soldiers that King Ghezo is growing too bold by letting women lead attacks.

Sign 6 (Time: 00:16:31)

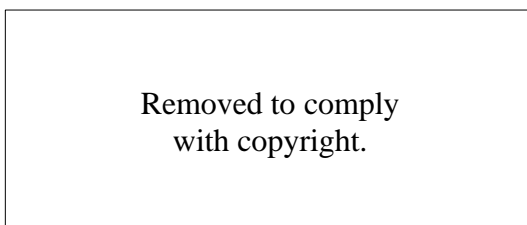
1. Signifier

2. Signified
Nanisca explains that the Dahomey empire was only prospering because of the slave trade.

3. Sign – King Ghezo discusses with his counsel how to handle living under the fear of the Oyo Empire which has broken the peace between them. Nanisca shares that slavery is slowly killing them. She further questions why they continue to sell their captives for more weapons. She suggests they sell more gold and palm oil.

Sign 7 (Time: 00:19:39)

1. Signifier



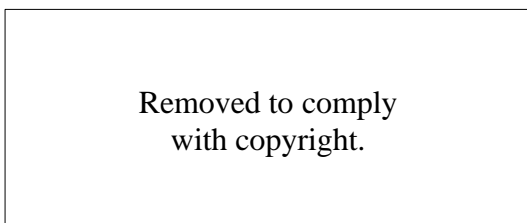
2. Signified

Some of the captured Mahi women are leaving.

3. Sign – Nawi tries to hold her head high while General Nanisca explains the rules of joining the King's guard, "We fight, or we die. We fight for Dahomey, for our sisters, for our great king. You will be revered. You will be paid for your work. Your opinions will be heard. No tribe or kingdom in all of Africa shares this privilege. For this honor, we live out our lives in these palace walls. We take no husband. We will bear no children." Giving the captured Mahi women a choice to stay and fight or leave.

Sign 8 (Time: 00:23:01)

1. Signifier



2. Signified

The new trainees of the king's guard who remained prepared for bed.

3. Sign – Nawi asks the women why they stayed. Fumbe is worried because she is not a soldier, but she does not have anywhere else to go. Ode, from the Mahi village, stated, "Here, I will be the hunter, not prey."

Sign 9 (Time: 00:27:01)

1. Signifier



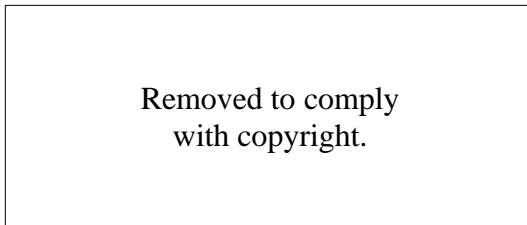
2. Signified

Nawi is out of breath and struggles to keep up with the rest of the trainees.

3. Sign – Izogie gives Nawi tough love as she struggles through some of the training to join of the king’s guard.

Sign 10 (Time: 00:27:12)

1. Signifier



2. Signified

Izogie rubs palm oil all over her body.

3. Sign – Palm oil is rubbed all over her body in preparation to fight so she is slippery, and her skin is protected.

Sign 11 (Time: 00:27:57)

1. Signifier



2. Signified

Nawi shoots the musket and bumps into a male soldier.

3. Sign – Nawi gives a flirty smile to the male soldier even though it is against the rules.

Sign 12 (Time: 00:29:23)

1. Signifier



2. Signified

The trainees walk together and discuss the skills they have learned.

3. Sign – Nawi shares her admiration for Izogie’s strength and fierceness.

Sign 13 (Time: 00:30:06)

1. Signifier



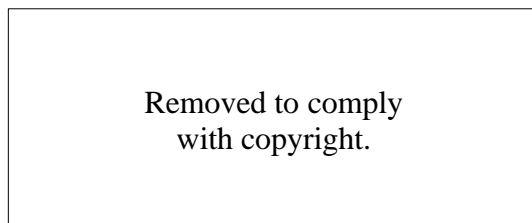
2. Signified

Nawi confesses and apologizes for causing an explosion of some of the training equipment as a joke.

3. Sign – Nanisca inquired about how she created an explosion with the gunpowder. She also confronts Nawi about flirting with the men in the infantry. Nanisca threatens to put Nawi out because she is not disciplined.

Sign 14 (Time: 00:32:16)

1. Signifier



2. Signified

Amenza confronts girls from different tribes who are bickering.

3. Sign – Amenza shares that she was once a captive and affirms the sisterhood of the Ajogie, “If you make it through the final test, you are one of us.”

Sign 15 (Time: 00:33:43)

1. Signifier



2. Signified

Izogie asks Nawi why she always challenges Nanisca.

3. Sign – Nawi is worried that if she isn't outspoken, she will not be noticed by Nanisca. Izogie explains that Nanisca is worried about the world and one day may be the kpojito, the woman king. King Ghezo believes in the tradition of the twin Gods, Mawu and Lisa.

Sign 16 (Time: 00:35:14)

1. Signifier



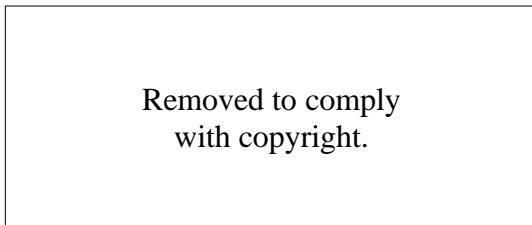
2. Signified

Amenza comforts Nanisca after she awakes from a nightmare.

3. Sign – Nanisca dreams of being in the jungle and being watched by an angry beast. Amenza views this dream as a warning and consults Legba, a deity, which reveals enemies are gathering and something from her past. Nanisca is advised to go to the altar to leave gifts for the dead.

Sign 17 (Time: 00:39:30)

1. Signifier



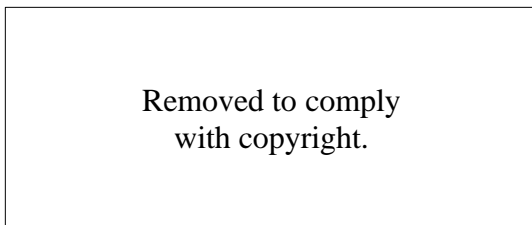
2. Signified

Nanisca is assaulted by Oba Ade.

3. Sign – During the tribute to the Oyo Empire, Nanisca has a flashback when she sees General Oba Ade. General Oba Ade confronts King Ghezo about the small tribute he presented due to the Oyo Empire raiding one of their villages. General Oba Ade then requests 40 Agojie from King Ghezo to make up for it or lose access to the port in Oudiah for trade.

Sign 18 (Time: 00:42:45)

1. Signifier



2. Signified

Nanisca visits the altar and has flashbacks of her assault.

3. Sign – Nanisca realizes that Amenza's revelation was right.

Sign 19 (Time: 00:44:054)

1. Signifier



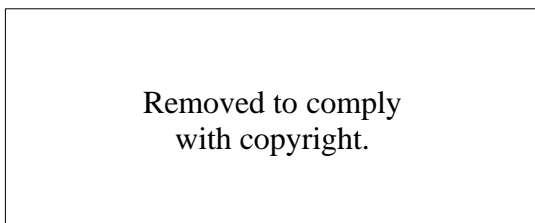
2. Signified

Malik sees the horrid condition of the slaves at the port of Ouidah.

3. Sign – Malik has just arrived at the port of Ouidah with Portuguese slave traders. He was excited to arrive until he saw the auction area of the city.

Sign 20 (Time: 00:46:05)

1. Signifier



2. Signified

Heads roll out of a woven basket.

3. Sign – Nanisca arrives at the port of Ouidah as Malik watches in awe, to bring tribute to General Oba Ade. General Oba Ade announces that Agojie women soldiers are against the Gods. Nanisca reveals the tribute are the severed heads of Oyo men before they retreat a sign declaring war. Nanisca stays behind to fight General Oba Ade.

Sign 21 (Time: 00:48:47)

1. Signifier



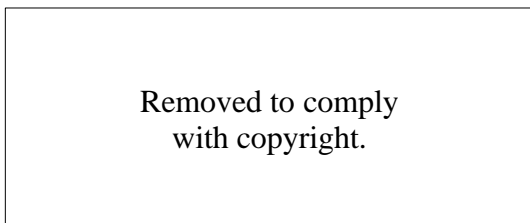
2. Signified

Nanisca squeezes Nawi's cheeks as she scolds her.

3. Sign – Nawi gets reprimanded for not following Nanisca's orders to retreat to the boat. Instead, she stays behind and traps the Oyo soldiers behind the gate. Still, Nanisca is upset that she did not obey orders and risked being captured. Nanisca emphasizes that Agojie needs to stick together, when they act alone, they are weak. Amenza confronts Nanisca privately about not following the plan. Nanisca states she planned to take General Oba Ade's head.

Sign 22 (Time: 00:51:48)

1. Signifier



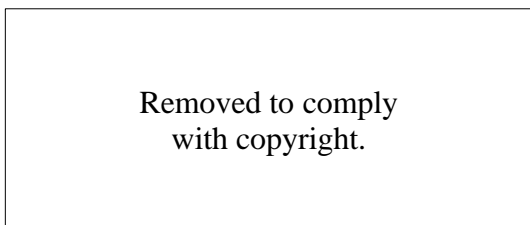
2. Signified

Nanisca brings King Ghezo to a field that produces thousands of barrels of palm oil.

3. Sign – Nanisca shows King Ghezo a path forward for the kingdom without being involved in the slave trade. Nanisca sees a future where the Dahomey does not sell its people, including people from other tribes.

Sign 23 (Time: 00:52:30)

1. Signifier



2. Signified

General Oba Ade assures slave traders that they will have their cargo of slaves.

3. Sign – Malik overhears General Oba Ade discussing his plans with slave traders to fight alongside the Mahi and the Igbo against the Dahomey.

Sign 24 (Time: 00:54:50)

1. Signifier



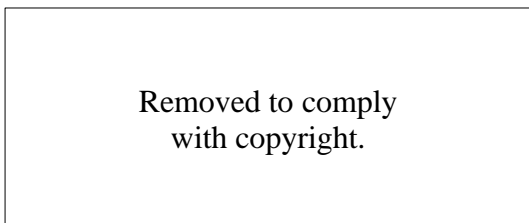
2. Signified

Nawi wields her sword as she approaches Malik.

3. Sign – Nawi was in the jungle looking for a river rock to sharpen her weapon. She comes across Malik, whom she recognizes from the port of Ouidah. Malik tells Nawi that he is not a slaver and that his mother was Dahomey.

Sign 25 (Time: 00:57:45)

1. Signifier



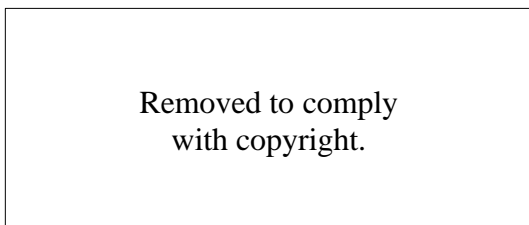
2. Signified

Malik stares at King Ghezo in awe as he brings him a gift.

3. Sign – Malik shares with King Ghezo that his mother’s dying wish was for him to come to her home, the only place she was ever free, Dahomey. King Ghezo also shares that his brother sold his mother into slavery.

Sign 26 (Time: 00:59:38)

1. Signifier



2. Signified

Nawi pulls Fumbe out of the thorny branches.

3. Sign – The final test to become Agojie, part of the king’s guard is held. During the first part of the test, Nawi goes back and helps her friend Fumbe, who is struggling.

Sign 27 (Time: 01:02:01)

1. Signifier



2. Signified

Nawi embraces Ode as they complete the final test.

3. Sign – Nawi still manages to win the challenge, despite going back to help.

Sign 28 (Time: 01:11:07)

1. Signifier



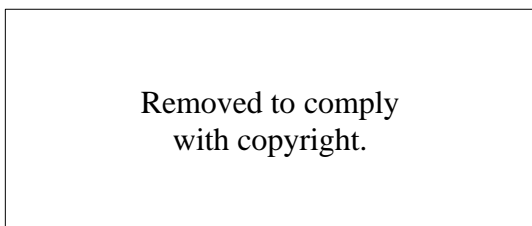
2. Signified

Izogie braids Nawi’s hair

3. Sign – After the initiation ceremony Izogie braids Nawi’s hair after recognizing that they are now sisters. Izogie shares that love makes people weak, and she is powerful and should not give her power away.

Sign 29 (Time: 01:12:07)

1. Signifier



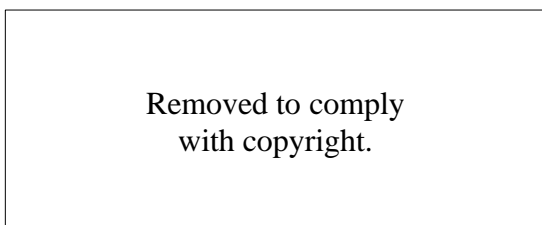
2. Signified

Nawi sits outside the Dahomey Kingdom with Malik

3. Sign – Malik shares that all he ever knew about African people was them being slaves. He is amazed to see that they can also be kings and warriors. Malik shares the Oyo are coming with other tribes.

Sign 30 (Time: 01:18:24)

1. Signifier



2. Signified

Nawi pulls out a shark tooth that was cut out of her arm

3. Sign – Nanisca shares her story with Nawi, revealing that Nawi is Nanisca's daughter.

Sign 31 (Time: 01:23:47)

1. Signifier



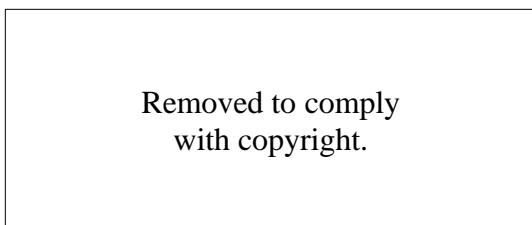
2. Signified

The Dahomey warriors scout and overlook the Oyo camp.

3. Sign – Nanisca uses the gunpowder trick to create explosions in the Oyo camp. Because the Dahomey were outnumbered, they had to plan their attack in advance.

Sign 32 (Time: 01:29:57)

1. Signifier



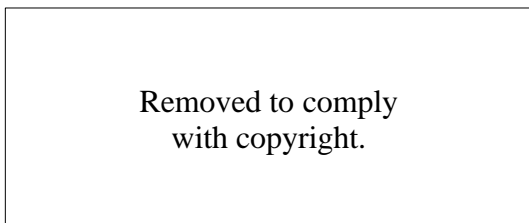
2. Signified

The Dahomey warriors watch as the Oyo soldier's retreat.

3. Sign – The Dahomey have defeated the Oyo in battle.

Sign 33 (Time: 01:30:09)

1. Signifier



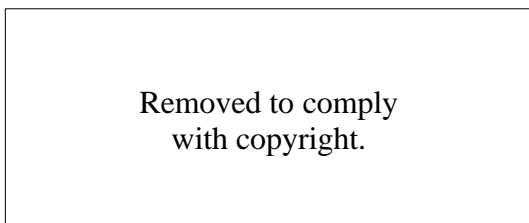
2. Signified

Ode's slain body is laid on the ground.

3. Sign – The lady who once confronted Ode for being from a different tribe, kneels over her body and states, “You fought well, my young sister” finally recognizing her as a sister.

Sign 34 (Time: 01:30:40)

1. Signifier



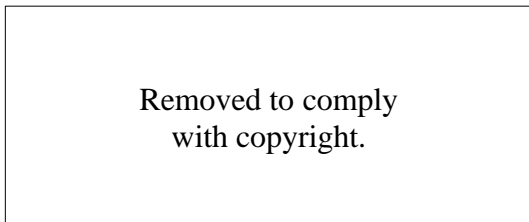
2. Signified

Nanisca inquiries about Izogie and Nawi's whereabouts after the battle

3. Sign – Nanisca learns that Izogie and Nawi are missing.

Sign 35 (Time: 01:31:40)

1. Signifier



2. Signified

Fumbe is on the back of an Oyo carriage.

3. Sign – Nawi, Fumbe, and other Agojie warriors have been captured. Nawi convinces Fumbe to jump off the carriage since she is not tied to anyone.

Sign 36 (Time: 01:34:35)

1. Signifier



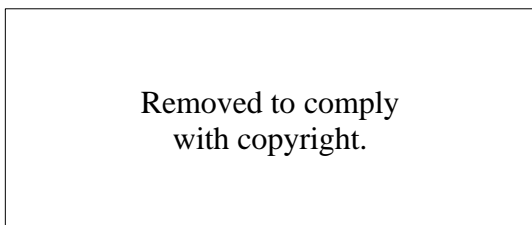
2. Signified

Izogie is slumped against a cage holding slaves, holding her broken arm.

3. Sign – Izogie feels defeated and is ready to slit her throat now that her arm is broken. Nawi provides encouragement and support to her “relentlessly, we will fight.”

Sign 37 (Time: 01:36:28)

1. Signifier



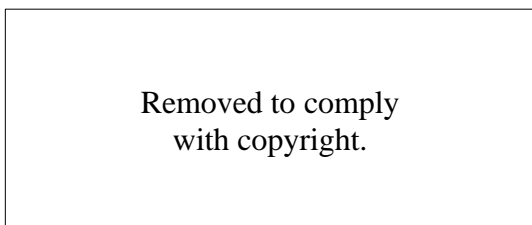
2. Signified

King Ghezo brings together his wives and the leadership of the Dahomey kingdom to share who chose as kpojito.

3. Sign – King Ghezo selects Nanisca as kpojito, the new King of Dahomey.

Sign 38 (Time: 01:37:48)

1. Signifier



2. Signified

Nanisca and King Ghezo have a discussion.

3. Sign – King Ghezo wants to celebrate her new role, winning the war with the Oyo, and move forward. Nanisca wants to find the lost Agojie. King Ghezo asserts his power and forbids Nanisca from seeking out captives.

Sign 39 (Time: 01:41:01)

1. Signifier



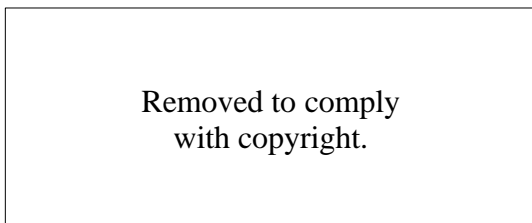
2. Signified

Portuguese slaver, Santo Ferreira yells at his childhood friend Malik.

3. Sign – During the slave auction of Agojie soldiers, Santo yells at Malik stating that he is lucky he is not on the auction block himself and told him to stay out of it.

Sign 40 (Time: 01:41:46)

1. Signifier



2. Signified

Izogie is shot from behind.

3. Sign – Izogie goes back to rescue Nawi, against the original plan, and is shot, resulting in her death.

Sign 41 (Time: 01:43:49)

1. Signifier



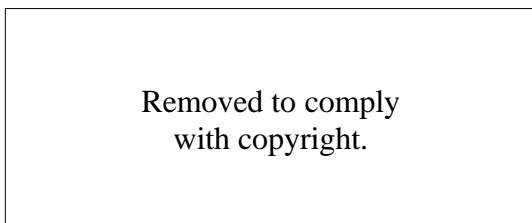
2. Signified

Nanisca discusses her revelation with Amenza.

3. Sign – Nanisca discovers the beast in her dream is her, “The beast I am so frightened of. It is me. It is that girl who was silenced in those shackles by those men. I’ve hidden her away. I have denied her pain. But I’m going to hear her now.”

Sign 42 (Time: 01:45:35)

1. Signifier



2. Signified

Nanisca runs to the port in Oudiah.

3. Sign – Against King Ghezo’s wishes, Nanisca travels to rescue Nawi. Unexpectedly she is joined by other warriors.

Sign 43 (Time: 01:46:08)

1. Signifier



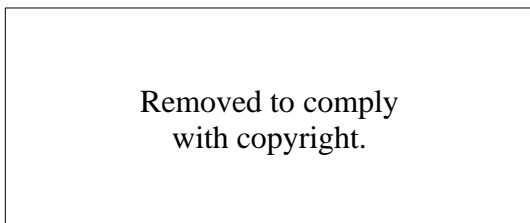
2. Signified

Malik and Nawi argue in his room.

3. Malik buys Nawi for 100 reais at the auction block to protect her after she tries to escape. He shares with her that he also booked passage for them both on the cargo ship to England.

Sign 44 (Time: 01:49:51)

1. Signifier



2. Signified

Nanisca stands in front of the cell where the slaves are held with Amenza.

3. Sign – Nanisca orders for the Port of Ouidah to be burned down and slaves to be released.

Sign 45 (Time: 01:53:09)

1. Signifier



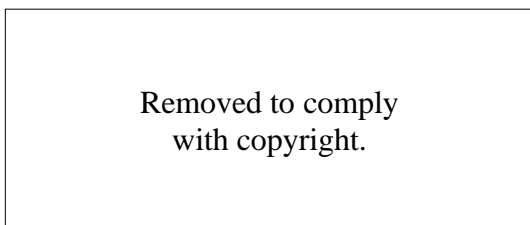
2. Signified

The slaves that were sold attacked Santo.

3. Sign – Santo asks Malik to help bring the slaves to his ship as the Port of Ouidah is attacked. Malik chooses to free the slaves and watches as they kill Santo.

Sign 46 (Time: 01:54:25)

1. Signifier



2. Signified

Nanisca and Oba Ade battle with their swords.

3. Sign – Nanisca goes after Oba Ade and ultimately kills him after an intense fight stating “You do not remember me. Now you will never forget.”

Sign 47 (Time: 01:58:02)

1. Signifier



2. Signified

Nawi looks towards the coast.

3. Sign – Nawi makes eye contact with Malik standing on the coast as he prepares to leave.

Sign 48 (Time: 01:58:42)

1. Signifier



2. Signified

The villagers cheer as the Agojie return.

3. Sign – Nawi’s father smiles as he sees her return to the kingdom with the other Agojie warriors.

Sign 49 (Time: 02:01:03)

1. Signifier



2. Signified

King Ghezo speaks to members of his kingdom.

3. Sign – King Ghezo highlights the warriors and shares that they are no longer under the thumb of Oyo, nor will they participate in the slave trade. “The Europeans and the Americans have seen if you want to hold a people in chains, one must first convince them that they are meant to be bound. We joined them in becoming our own oppressor. But no more. No more. We are a warrior people! And there is power in our mind... in our unity, in our culture. If we understand that power, we will be limitless.”

Sign 50 (Time: 02:01:29)

1. Signifier



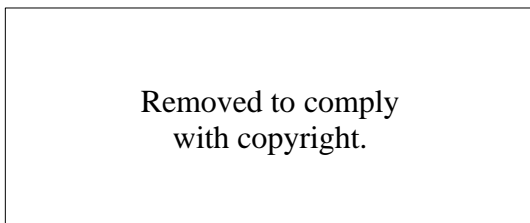
2. Signified

Nanisca looks shocked as the crowd cheers.

3. Sign – Nanisca is appointed the Woman King, despite defying King Ghezo.

Sign 51 (Time: 02:03:20)

1. Signifier



2. Signified

Nanisca joins Nawi sitting at the altar.

3. Sign – Nanisca sees Nawi giving Izogie an offering. Nanisca apologizes for leaving Nawi after she gave birth.

Sign 52 (Time: 02:05:55)

1. Signifier



2. Signified

Nawi whispers to Nanisca.

3. Sign – Nawi asks Nanisca to dance with her and calls her mother for the first time.

Sign 53 (Time: 02:09:56)

1. Signifier



2. Signified

Amenza leaves offerings at the altar.

3. Sign – Amenza leaves an offering for all off the fallen people who died. The last name she says is Breonna, a tribute to Breonna Taylor who was killed in her own home.

This study was guided by three research questions intended to understand how Black culture is produced and reproduced by Blacks along with the social commentary it created on X. To address that, this study aimed to gain insights into how Black culture and representation are being displayed in media, how social media commentary influences public opinion and shapes perceptions of Black culture, and the influence of social media commentary in the creation of fan communities and how these communities shape the perceptions of Black culture.

Findings

The first section of this study's findings utilized Brock's (2012, 2018) CTDA framework to analyze X and a sampling of their users who posted about *The Woman King* during its opening weekend. This examination involved assessing X not only as a technical artifact, but as a practice, and as a set of beliefs. In using CTDA, this study's findings extend beyond the analysis of the users' discursive strategies employed on X. In addition to users' discourse, there is an emphasis on the unique relationship between technology and culture on X. This relationship considered X's platform affordances, and how their users interact with and are influenced by the interface. These findings considered the cultural behavior and language patterns within the context of discussions about *The Woman King* on X and the film's impact on Black popular culture.

X as a Technical Artifact

As a technical artifact, X has unique characteristics that contribute to its functionality, so it was imperative to consider its interface, design, features, and how its users create narratives. X is a web-based platform that can be accessed through internet browsers on devices connected to the internet, such as computers, tablets, and smartphones. Additionally, X has native mobile applications that users can download on various operating systems. X's applications are optimized for smaller device screen sizes and integrated features such as push notifications and easier navigation using swipes and taps. X's web interface includes a left sidebar that provides shortcuts to navigate to areas such as home, search, notifications, messages, lists, bookmarks, and communities.

Users leverage X for personal expression and to participate in broader thematic conversations. One feature of X that supports the creation of narratives is the use of hashtags. A

hashtag is a word or phrase that is followed by the # symbol. Hashtags are important as a technical artifact because they promote a higher level of interconnectivity. Users employ hashtags to categorize content, making it discoverable to a broader audience. When a hashtag is clicked, the user will see other posts containing the same keyword or topic and allow other users to participate in conversations. 80.74% ($\mu = 1,186$) of the posts sampled used at least one of these keywords as a hashtag: *TheWomanKing*, *WomanKingMovie*, *WomanKing*, and *BoycottWomanKing*. It is important to note that *WomanKingMovie*, is the official username for *The Woman King* and that keyword may have been used as *@WomanKingMovie*.

Another feature of X is the explore tab, where users can find what's trending, live events, and topics of their interest. What is trending on X is determined algorithmically to be one of the most popular topics or hashtags on X at that moment. Trends can also be tailored to the user's location and who they follow. During the opening weekend, *#BoycottWomanKing* was trending with *#TheWomanKing*. Some users were suspicious that *#BoycottWomanKing* was trending with *#TheWomanKing*:

@ZBaby23117428: "I was speculating it was bots cause the hashtag started trending extremely quickly after the original *#TheWomanKing* went to #1"

@BeanzGotGamez: "It's ALWAYS funny to me hashtags like *#boycottwomanking* just randomly trend around Black films like *Woman King* drop, or there is always some 'issue' with the movie. It never fails."

@Hiddanas: "Quite telling that people waited till opening weekend to try to get *#BoycottWomanKing* trending. Seems quite disingenuous to wait till the last minute to try and have a nuanced conversation that might require or justify a boycott."

@classynogin: "Why did y'all decide to trend *#BoycottWomanKing* now?!"

While other users were supportive of #BoycottWomanKing trending too:

@nasescobar316: “I like this trend #BoycottWomanKing”

@Doubledeuces123: “The fact that #BoycottWomanKing is trending because Black Twitter is pushing making it trend is glorious since I bet the studio had money built in for media to call people ‘racist’ for not going to watch it. Even Viola is stepping up to guilt you. <https://google.com/amp/s/boundingintocomics.com/2022/09/14/viola-davis-says-that-audiences-who-dont-see-the-woman-king-are-supporting-the-narrative-that-black-women-cannot-lead-the-box-office-globally/amp/>”

@Michael_McCrary: “#BoycottWomanKing glad that this s*** is trending. Plaster about it days ago.”

X is characterized by a timeline of real-time posts shared by other users in your network.

These posts are limited to 280 characters and may include photos, GIFs, videos, and text to express thoughts, share information, or engage in conversations. Interactive elements such as replies, reposts, likes, and bookmarks are included on each post allowing users to engage with each other. The top five posts that had the most replies, reposts, quote posts, likes, and bookmarks captured from *The Woman King*’s opening weekend from 6:00 p.m. UTC to 7:59 p.m. UTC on Friday, September 16th, 2022, and Saturday, September 17th, 2022, are highlighted to show user dynamics on X and how these interactive elements contribute to X as a technical artifact.

Replies

Replies are responses to another user’s post. Users can reply by clicking the reply icon next to the post they are responding to. Replies can only be made on public posts, posts that are protected can only be replied to by the users’ followers. Table 4 contains qualitative data

collected from the top five posts that had the most replies. The post with the most replies ($\mu = 343$) used the #BoycottWomanKing while supporting the movie and cast members. This user decided to use an already trending hashtag to share an opposing view generating many conversations in support of and against *The Woman King*. All the most replied to posts include the #BoycottWomanKing hashtag with 60% ($\mu = 3$) being against the film.

Table 4

Five most replied to posts on X.

User Handle	Date	Post	Replies
@ChristaTRomance	9/16/2022 6:46pm	I'm not trusting any hashtag that tries to get a Black women led movie to fail. I'll see it for myself and if it's bad or spins history in a negative way so be it. But Viola & John are going to get my movie dollars. Suck on that, bots & ops. #BoycottWomanKing	343
@tariqnasheed	9/16/2022 7:04pm	The rulers of Dahomey performed magic rituals against the other Black ppl they enslaved, by making them walk around "The Tree of Forgetfulness". This was supposed to erase their ancestral memories so their spirits would not return back to Dahomey to seek revenge #BoycottWomanKing	225

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@HarrietEve9

9/16/2022
7:18pm

Hollywood has played in the face of descendants of slaves for far too long.
Now they are glorifying African slave traders with #TheWomanKing and
showcasing their blacks in blackface. #BoycottWomanKing

212

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@GraceRandolph

9/16/2022
6:31pm

#BoycottWomanKing? Hmm, I recall people DEFENDING
#GoneWithTheWind when #HBOMax added a sensitivity warning, & that
movie glorified slave owning & slave owners as not just heroic but victims
#TheWomanKing is honest about Africa's role in the slave trade, & is an
incredible film

123



@WhitlockJason 9/16/2022 The #BoycottWomanKing hashtag makes me think Thursday's premiere 75
7:01pm bombed at the box office and with audience response. Movie is trash.
Continuation of the demonization and emasculation of the black man.

Another unique feature of X is the use of threads. Threads are a series of connected posts from one person that expand their storytelling capabilities by providing additional context, an update, or extending a point. For example, @davidvolodzko used the thread feature to discuss the history surrounding slavery:

@davidvolodzko: "I admit I'm surprised to see #BoycottWomanKing trending, and am still looking forward to it, but I somehow doubt this means folks are ready to talk about African complicity in the Atlantic slave trade. Maybe not. Thread."

Similarly, @TajMarie17 put together a thread to discuss the history of Dahomey and its relationship to *The Woman King*:

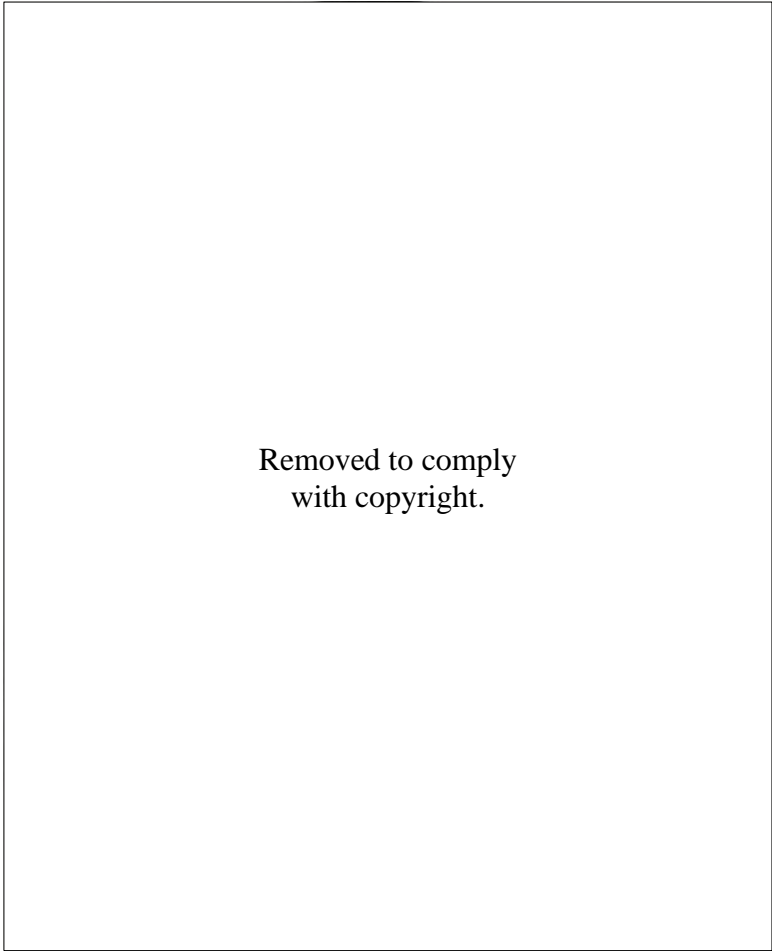
@TajMarie17: “To bring context, I have pulled together this brief ‘thread’ 🗃️ to not only speak on the Dahomey tribe but other aspects that #Thewomanking does not include. For the inspiration of #BoycottWomenKing, please watch the #Tonetalks video:

<https://bit.ly/3QQdFHu> #BOYCOTTTHEWOMANKING”

Reposts

Another feature of X that supports the creation of narratives is the use of reposts. Reposts allow users to share another account’s post with their followers by selecting the repost button. This process of sharing information brings together individuals and communities who may not otherwise connect through posts being reshared across multiple timelines. Reposts enable users to retain the original attribution of the post. Table 5 contains qualitative data collected from the top five posts that had the most reposts. The post with the most reposts ($\mu = 854$) used the #TheWomanKing hashtag to encourage other users to see the film in support of Viola Davis and included an image of her in Elle magazine. Although 80% ($\mu = 4$) of these posts utilized the #BoycottWomanKing hashtag, 60% ($\mu = 3$) were in support of the film.

Table 5*Five most reposted posts on X.*

User Handle	Date	Post	Reposts
@ajanaomi_king	9/16/2022 6:09pm	WORLD STOP... carry on to theatre to see this GODDESS @violadavis in #TheWomanKing	854
		 <p>Removed to comply with copyright.</p>	
@tariqnasheed	9/16/2022 7:04pm	The rulers of Dahomey performed magic rituals against the other Black ppl they enslaved, by making them walk around "The Tree of Forgetfulness".This was supposed to erase their ancestral memories so their spirits would not return back to Dahomey to seek revenge #BoycottWomanKing	792

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@ChristaTRomance	9/16/2022 6:46pm	I'm not trusting any hashtag that tries to get a Black women led movie to fail. I'll see it for myself and if it's bad or spins history in a negative way so be it. But Viola & John are going to get my movie dollars. Suck on that, bots & ops. #BoycottWomanKing	784
@HarrietEve9	9/16/2022 7:18pm	Hollywood has played in the face of descendants of slaves for far too long. Now they are glorifying African slave traders with #TheWomanKing and showcasing their blacks in blackface. #BoycottWomanKing	562



@diaryunpressed	9/16/2022 6:31pm	any person saying #BoycottWomanKing is a mindless sheep. watch the f*****g movie. they're addressing the exact things all you weirdos are complaining about. i hate twitter.	293
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Quote Posts

Quote posts also stimulate narrative creation and are like reposts. Quote posts allow users to add their content, such as comments, photos, or GIFs before reposting someone's post to their followers. As this content is shared, users can add new meaning to the users' original post. Table 6 contains qualitative data collected from the top five posts that were quoted the most. The post with the most quoted posts ($\mu = 135$) used the #BoycottWomanKing hashtag to share information about the Dahomey tribe's troubling history. This post included two images about *The Tree of Forgetfulness*. Despite 60% ($\mu = 3$) of these posts utilizing the #BoycottWomanKing hashtag, 60% ($\mu = 3$) were in support of the film.

Table 6

Five most quoted posts on X.

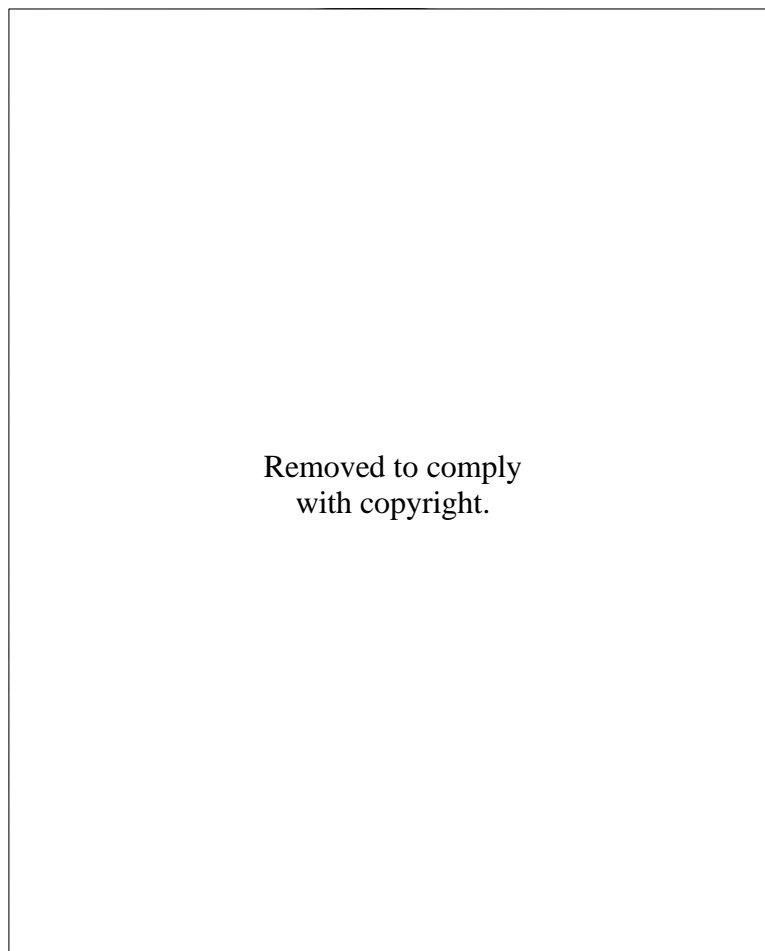
User Handle	Date	Post	Quotes
@tariqnasheed	9/16/2022 7:04pm	The rulers of Dahomey performed magic rituals against the other Black ppl they enslaved, by making them walk around "The Tree of Forgetfulness".This	135

was supposed to erase their ancestral memories so their spirits would not return back to Dahomey to seek revenge #BoycottWomanKing

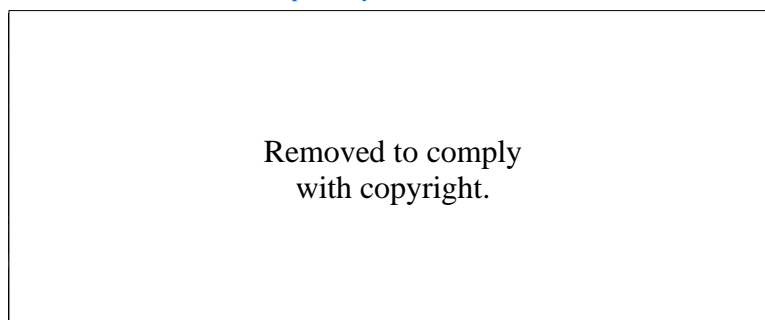
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with copyright.

@ChristaTRomance	9/16/2022	I'm not trusting any hashtag that tries to get a Black women led movie to fail.	99
	6:46pm	I'll see it for myself and if it's bad or spins history in a negative way so be it. But Viola & John are going to get my movie dollars. Suck on that, bots & ops. #BoycottWomanKing	
@HarrietEve9	9/16/2022	Hollywood has played in the face of descendants of slaves for far too long.	94
	7:18pm	Now they are glorifying African slave traders with #TheWomanKing and showcasing their blacks in blackface. #BoycottWomanKing	
@ajanaomi_king	9/16/2022	WORLD STOP... carry on to theatre to see this GODDESS @violadavis in	51
	6:09pm	#TheWomanKing	



@DiscussingFilm 9/16/2022 7:25pm #TheWomanKing is now Certified Fresh on Rotten Tomatoes at 95% with 115 reviews. Read our review: <http://bit.ly/TWKDE> 27



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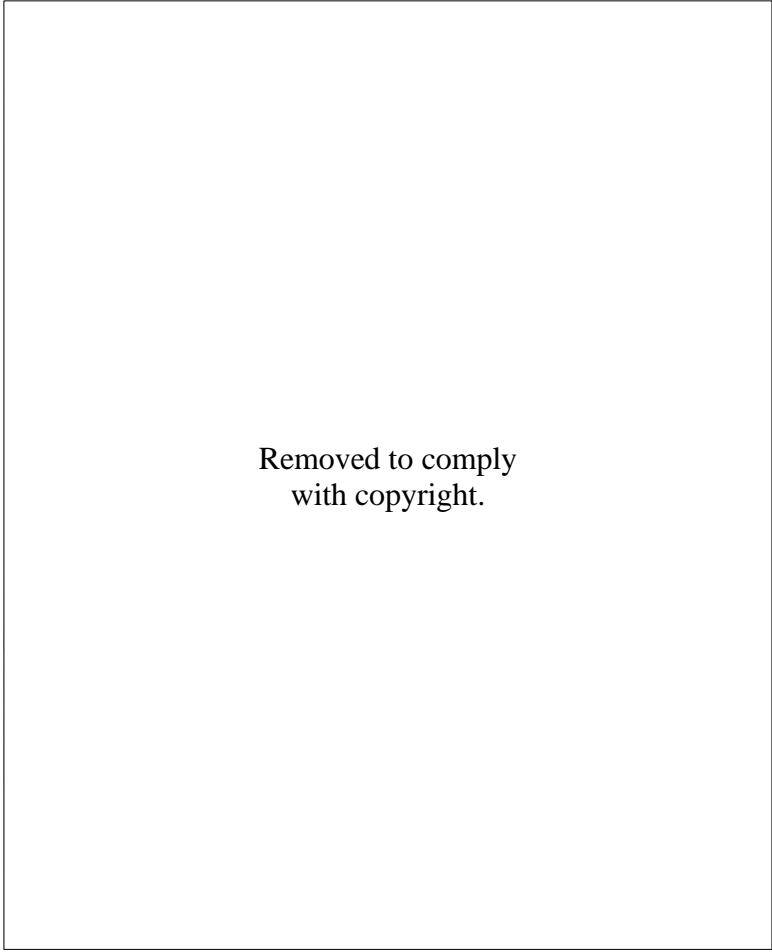
Likes

Likes are used to show appreciation or support for a post. To like a post, an X user taps the heart icon on it. Table 7 contains qualitative data collected from the top five liked posts. The post with the most likes ($\mu = 8,660$) was also the most reposted and used the #TheWomanKing hashtag and was in support of the film. 80% ($\mu = 4$) of the most liked posts were in support of

the film. Of the top liked posts in support of the film 50% ($\mu = 2$) used the #BoycottWomanKing hashtag.

Table 7

Five most liked posts on X.

User Handle	Date	Post	Likes
@ajanaomi_king	9/16/2022 6:09pm	WORLD STOP... carry on to theatre to see this GODDESS @violadavis in #TheWomanKing	8660
			
@ChristaTRomance	9/16/2022 6:46pm	I'm not trusting any hashtag that tries to get a Black women led movie to fail. I'll see it for myself and if it's bad or spins history in a negative way so be it. But Viola & John are going to get my movie dollars. Suck on that, bots & ops. #BoycottWomanKing	6115
@DiscussingFilm	9/16/2022 7:25pm	#TheWomanKing is now Certified Fresh on Rotten Tomatoes at 95% with 115 reviews. Read our review: http://bit.ly/TWKDF	2434

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@diaryunpressed	9/16/2022 6:31pm	any person saying #BoycottWomanKing is a mindless sheep. watch the f*****g movie. they're addressing the exact things all you weirdos are complaining about. i hate twitter.	2309
@tariqnasheed	9/16/2022 7:04pm	The rulers of Dahomey performed magic rituals against the other Black ppl they enslaved, by making them walk around "The Tree of Forgetfulness".This	2267

was supposed to erase their ancestral memories so their spirits would not return back to Dahomey to seek revenge #BoycottWomanKing

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Bookmarks

Bookmarks allow users on X to save posts on a timeline for quick and easy access. Table 7 contains qualitative data collected from the top bookmarked posts. The post that was most bookmarked ($\mu = 211$) was also the most quoted. This top bookmarked post used the #BoycottWomanKing hashtag and did not support the film. 100% ($\mu = 5$) of the top bookmarked posts utilized the #BoycottWomanKing hashtag, of these 60% ($\mu = 3$) did not support the film.

Table 8*Five most bookmarked posts on X.*

User Handle	Date	Post	Bookmarks
@tariqnasheed	9/16/2022 7:04pm	The rulers of Dahomey performed magic rituals against the other Black ppl they enslaved, by making them walk around "The Tree of Forgetfulness". This was supposed to erase their ancestral memories so their spirits would not return back to Dahomey to seek revenge #BoycottWomanKing	211
		Removed to comply with copyright.	
		Removed to comply with copyright.	
@HarrietEve9	9/16/2022 7:18pm	Hollywood has played in the face of descendants of slaves for far too long. Now they are glorifying African slave traders with #TheWomanKing and showcasing their blacks in blackface. #BoycottWomanKing	110

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@ChristaTRomance	9/16/2022 6:46pm	I'm not trusting any hashtag that tries to get a Black women led movie to fail. I'll see it for myself and if it's bad or spins history in a negative way so be it. But Viola & John are going to get my movie dollars. Suck on that, bots & ops. #BoycottWomanKing	70
@diaryunpressed	9/16/2022 6:31pm	any person saying #BoycottWomanKing is a mindless sheep. watch the f*****g movie. they're addressing the exact things all you weirdos are complaining about. i hate twitter.	62
@TajMarie17	9/17/2022 6:51pm	The #BoycottWomanKing hashtag makes me think Thursday's premiere bombed at the box office and with audience response. Movie is trash. Continuation of the demonization and emasculation of the black man.	44

As a technical artifact, X provides a versatile and accessible platform for users to engage with one another, leveraging its design, features, and interface to create and disseminate original narratives, including *The Woman King* fans.

X as a Practice

In considering X as a practice, how the platform is utilized to communicate among users is surveyed. Users on X have diverse digital practices to communicate and engage with each other. The simplistic design of X, character limits, and integration of multimedia elements influence their narrative capabilities and how users navigate and engage with content. In addition to the use of hashtags to join broader discussions, and engaging with others through reposts and

replies, multimedia elements were widely used. In the sampling of 1,469 relevant posts ($\mu = 1,469$) captured from 6:00 p.m. UTC to 7:59 p.m. UTC on Friday, September 16th, 2022, and Saturday, September 17th, 2022 during the opening weekend of *The Woman King* that used at least one of the keywords in their posts: TheWomanKing, WomanKingMovie, WomanKing, and BoycottWomanKing 34.17% ($\mu = 502$) of the posts used either an emoji 18.65% ($\mu = 274$), picture 11.37% ($\mu = 167$), GIF 7.01% ($\mu = 103$), embedded video 1.84% ($\mu = 27$), meme .88% ($\mu = 13$), or multiple multimedia elements. Multimedia elements enriched X's digital environment and aided in the expression of their cultural identities. When it came to expressing emotions, some users used all capital letters and exclamation marks:

@GiaPeppers: "The cast of #WomanKing is so beautiful. They each brought a different layer to the story and the performances are so brilliant! Viola Davis delivered, as I knew she would AND... Lashana LYNCH. LASHANA LYNCH!!!! THUSO MBEDU!!!!!! They were IN IT! BLOWN AWAY!!!!!"

Some used emojis:

@ninaturner: "It was all the things. My heart could hardly take it. 🍌🍌🍌#WomanKing"

While others used a combination of the two:

@shanellegenai: "Just left out from #TheWomanKing and my God...what a PHENOMENAL FILM. I don't even have the words to properly articulate the magnitude of beauty, brilliance and fierceness present in there.I am SO MOVED. Well done by every single last cast & crew member. Well done🍌🍌"

X's users share information and actively shape, reflect, and reinforce cultural beliefs, norms, and values. Beyond users' use of multimedia as a form of expression on X, their choice of language also mirrors their cultural identity and shapes the discursive landscape. The use of

distinctive language features such as AAVE reflected the cultural and linguistic diversity of the Black community in their digital practices. @twistedfiction4's response to the #BoycottWomanKing hashtag received 226 likes, 29 replies, 27 reposts, four quotes, and three bookmarks:

@twistedfiction4: "It's extremely interesting that I'm not seeing this #BoycottWomanKing until it's opening day. Y'all been knew it was coming out, so why the wait? Anywho, I have tickets at 8. Y'all be easy 🍷"

Another user, @shanellegenai, who shared her moving-going experience received 59 likes:

@shanellegenai: "Me: *Leaves the movie theatre moved and in awe of #WomanKing *
A random YT woman entering in the theatre: Was it good? Was it like Black Panther??
Girl if you don't get TF 😬"

Other posts include:

@phoenix4619: "Negus complain about EVERYTHING. #WomanKingMovie is a movie. All you pseudohistorians asking for accuracy when it literally says 'BASED' on events. Yall mad Miserable ."

@DEBOMARKS: "They are really trying "WHEW CHILE, SISTA GURL, YASSS QUEEN....The Trans Atlantic Slave Trade! I'll pass! #BoycottWomanKing"

The level of technical and digital literacy among X users sampled was vital in shaping how users navigated and utilized X. The proficient use of hashtags, tagging, and mentions are integral parts of digital literacy and increased the visibility of certain messages and conversations. The diverse range of technical and digital literacy levels, influenced their engagement patterns, content creation, and the overall dynamics of the sampled posts. Users with lower technical literacy may primarily engage through simple text-based posts or reposts,

contributing to the accessibility and inclusivity of the platform. Users with higher technical literacy may assume leadership roles and leverage X as a tool for community mobilization and advocacy, creating a space where digital literacy acts as a catalyst. User @tonetalks is an example of this:

@tonetalks: “Thank you to @yahoo @TheWrap @sknolle for covering the boycott I started off that has become a collective uproar by #ados Black Americans over #womanking. ‘Here’s Why Some of the Black Community Is Driving #BoycottWomanKing on Social Media’
<https://www.yahoo.com/entertainment/why-black-community-driving-boycottwomanking-005623632.html>”

@tonetalks role in the #BoycottWomanKing hashtag was noted by @fowler_jb and

@AmericandosN:

@fowler_jb: “I appreciate that #BoycottWomanKing is trending. Respect to @tonetalks for framing the issue and continuing to speak truth to power #ADOS”
@AmericandosN: “Replying to @tonetalks #ToneTalks efforts again are trending on Twitter! #BoycottWomanKing hits #4 top trending hashtags on opening day! 🍌 The gate is up! #WeHereNow #ADOS”

The strategic use of hashtags, incorporation of multimedia elements, and engagement in ideological conversations all contribute to leveraging X within its constraints.

X as a set of Beliefs

The digital practices on X go beyond mere technical proficiency, encompassing a sophisticated interplay of conveying messages that embody, reify, or refute ideologies that reflect the diversity of beliefs in the sampled posts. To reinforce these ideologies users, participate in

amplifying the visibility of certain narratives and perspectives through reposts, quotes, likes, and replies. The more a particular ideology is endorsed and disseminated, a collective construction of meaning is created and influences the broader discourse. The sample posts showcased intersecting voices, perspectives, and cultural expressions that collectively contribute to the formation of *The Woman King* fandom's distinct online identity and culture on X. The ideologies found in this study include three themes: film reactions and responses, film discussions, and societal discussions. These themes were developed from the codes outlined in Table 2.

Film Reactions and Responses

The first theme to emerge from the CTDA is film reactions and responses. In the realm of cultural studies and fandom, exploring audience reactions and responses is crucial for understanding the cultural behavior and language patterns of *The Woman King* fans on X and the film's impact on Black popular culture. Within this overarching theme, two subthemes emerged that captured the audiences' views: fans and anti-fans. The first subtheme explores the perspectives of fans, examining codes such as support, likes movie, going to movie, emotion, awards, see it yourself, and reviews. The second subtheme studies the anti-fan perspective, concentrating on codes such as against and undecided.

Fans. Under the fan's subtheme, posts were coded as support 54.39% ($\mu = 799$) if they included positive or supportive messages about the film and likes movie 27.02% ($\mu = 397$) if the user shared that they liked the film. Posts were coded as see it yourself 11.10% ($\mu = 163$) if it urged users to see the movie for themselves and form their own opinion, going to movie 8.92% ($\mu = 131$) if the users shared their intention to see the film, and emotion 6.19% ($\mu = 91$) if users express the emotions they had because of the film. Awards 2.18% ($\mu = 32$) if film industry awards were mentioned, and reviews 1.84% ($\mu = 27$) if a professional review, rating, or the box

office results were included. 58% ($\mu = 852$) of the sampled posts included at least one of these codes and contributed to fan discussions on X.

Most users who posted about *The Woman King* on X during the opening weekend were supportive of the film. The identified codes highlight the audience's interaction with the film, shedding light on the depth of their appreciation, emotional connections, and the broader cultural impact the movie has had on Black culture. Understanding the perspectives of fans becomes pivotal for unraveling how *The Woman King* has resonated with and contributed to the collective identity of Black users on X. Fans are likely to share positive reviews and comments about the film. @DiscussingFilm review post received 2434 likes, 218 reposts, 32 replies, 21 bookmarks, and 27 quotes:

@DiscussingFilm: “#TheWomanKing is now Certified Fresh on Rotten Tomatoes at 95% with 115 reviews. Read our review: <http://bit.ly/TWKDF>”

@VanityFair: “#TheWomanKing stands confidently in the tradition of the epics that have come before it—while blazing a path all its own. <https://t.co/Rm7umFJP75>”

Posts were made about the film's themes, symbolism, and cultural implications:

@Layshiac: “Omg, just saw @WomanKingMovie and it's one of the best films I've ever seen! Viola Davis is a living legend. The acting 🤩, storytelling, interpersonal conflicts within west Africa and the slave trade, whew. So. D***. Good. It better win some awards! #TheWomanKing”

@lakeinla: “I saw #WomanKing at Baldwin Hills on Crenshaw. It's about slavery, women empowerment, trauma, love, forgiveness, and power. Black women are total bada****. And it's the BEST place to see a movie if you're looking for a reaction from a live audience 😁 SO GOOD! Never quiet #gosee”

Only one fan from the sampled post included fan art, but many GIFs from *The Woman King* and memes were used as seen in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

Figure 1

Screenshot of post from a user who created fan art



Figure 2

Screenshot of sample post showcasing the use of a GIF from The Woman King



Many fans interacted with and celebrated the film's cast and crew on Twitter:

@Mastermind: "Listen! @WomanKingMovie was pretty damn incredible! Great job

@GPBmadeit 🙌🏾 @violadavis and @ThusoMbedu better get a d*** @TheAcademy nomination!!!! #YallAreDope!!"

@MarcusLStrother: "WOW! @violadavis and the entire cast, #WomanKingMovie paralyzed me to my seat. I sat in tears at the end and couldn't leave. The joy and pain that this movie brought is like no other. We are a beautiful Black people and this movie was everything beautiful about us! Tears!!"

Some fans may share their experiences attending film-related events, such as premieres as seen in Figure 3 and Figure 4.

Figure 3

Screenshot of post from a user who attended The Women King Movie Premiere

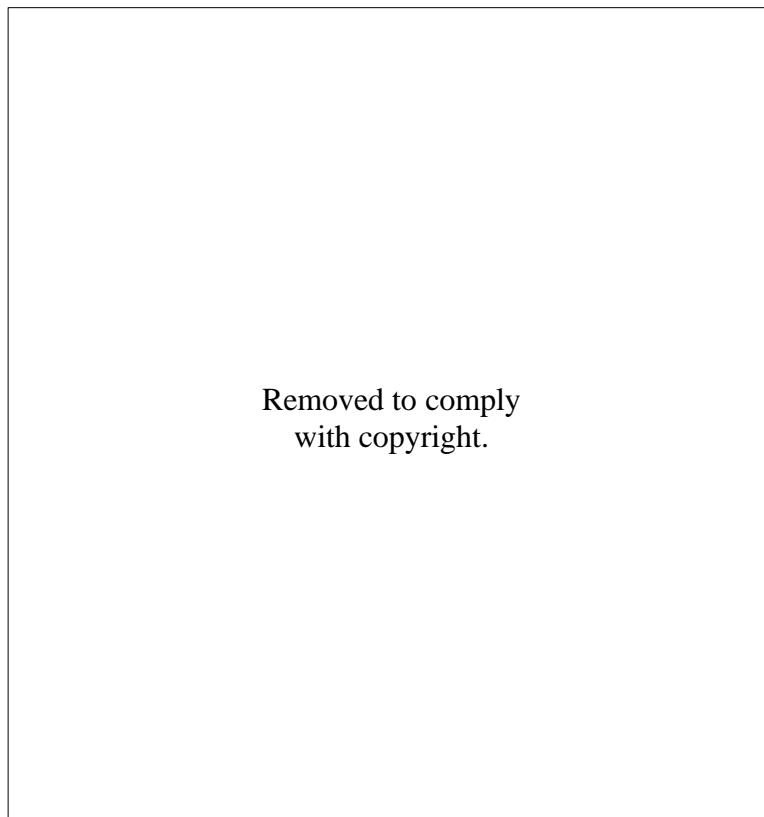
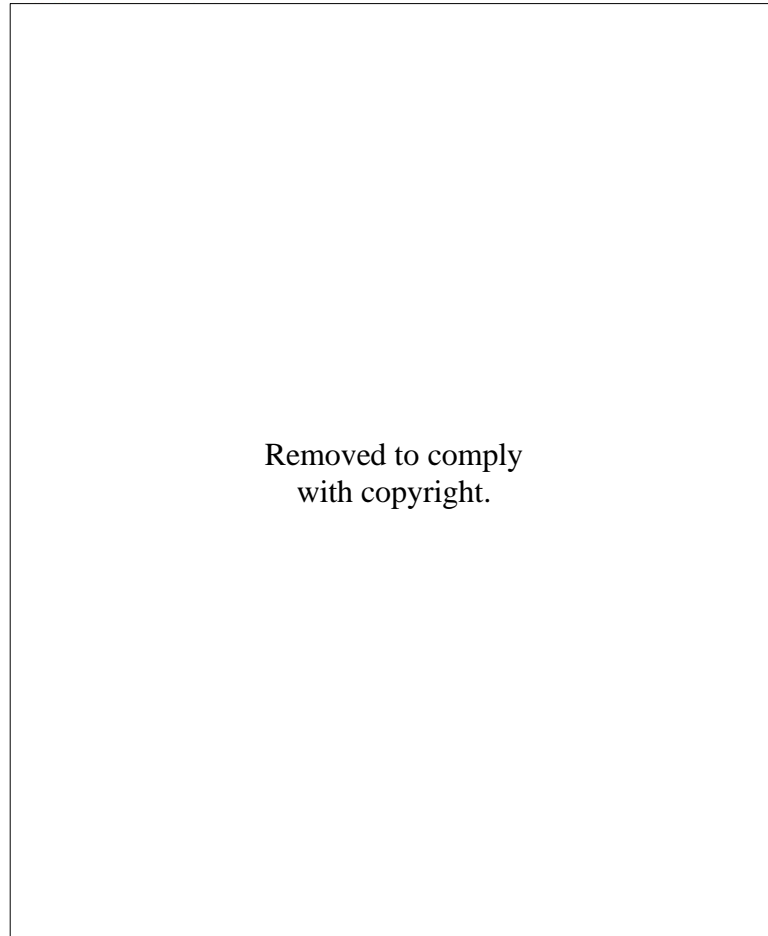


Figure 4

Screenshot of post from a user who attended The Women King Movie Premiere



Anti-fans. The second subtheme explores the anti-fan perspective, concentrating on codes such as against and undecided. Posts were coded as against 26.48% ($\mu = 389$) if against or have disparaging messages about the film or undecided 3.47% ($\mu = 51$) if users are not sure how they feel about the film being made. Anti-fans bring attention to the diverse perspectives of those who express dissent or reservations about *The Woman King* film and contribute to its cultural discourse. 29.95% ($\mu = 440$) of the sampled posts included at least one of these codes that contributed to anti-fan discussions on X.

With the use of critique posts, direct replies, and counter-hashtags, users also engage in practices that challenge dominant narratives and create diverse perspectives and conversations where users actively engage in the negotiation and reevaluation of societal beliefs within the digital realm. Anti-fans may use dedicated hashtags to express their dissent, beyond the individual critiques, users participated in a boycott campaign to assist in mobilizing others who share similar concerns. One user, @tonetalks called for the boycott of the movie:

@tonetalks: “Time to Boycott the Woman King movie. The film is about the Dahomey & Benin that traded slaves into the transatlantic. #BoycottWomanKing — Click Here: <http://youtu.be/41UxNyYtGic> — This may be the most offensive film to Black Americans in 40-50 years.”

@QTRBlackGarrett highlighted Black X’s role in the #BoycottWomanKing hashtag and garnered 1,363 likes, 115 reposts, 27 replies, five bookmarks, and three quotes:

@QTRBlackGarrett: “Good to see #blackTwitter calling out the African tribes that fed the slave trade #BoycottWomanKing”

A common argument around anti-fans was that the film deviates too much from the historical fails to capture the role of the Dahomey in the slave trade. One user, @TajMarie17, curated a thread of these discrepancies:

@TajMarie17: “To bring context, I have pulled together this brief ‘thread’ 📖 to not only speak on the Dahomey tribe but other aspects that #Thewomanking does not include. For the inspiration of #BoycottWomenKing, please watch the #Tonetalks video:

<https://bit.ly/3QQdFHu> #BOYCOTTTHEWOMANKING”

@NoGamesOnNotice: “Replying to @SalesmanBridge It doesn’t. The Dahomey Amazons were not heroes & did not become abolitionists. The fake palm oil production

story was written to absolve an evil empire that sent my ancestors to America. This film glorified slave traders & marketed it as #blackgirlmagic. #BoycottWomanKing”

Many anti-fans also had issue with the role of the Dahomey in the slave trade:

@AllieYoup: “They had to be FORCED to end the slave trade. #BoycottWomanKing #BoycottTheWomanKing”

@Black_Action: “If you want to support a film about slave raiders, go right ahead. Out of respect for all the bodies of our ancestors at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean, I refuse to support. #TheWomanKing <https://twitter.com/trapj99/status/1570897173419790336>”

In discussions initiated by fans and anti-fans, the opposing group may actively participate offering dissenting opinions or critiques. To illustrate, @2Strong2Silence noticed the #BoycottWomanKing trend and shared their thoughts and received 876 lies, 148 reposts, 35 replies, 20 bookmarks, and 12 quotes:

@2Strong2Silence: “If you’re participating in #BoycottWomanKing because of The National Review & The ADOS movement you’re doing it wrong. Be careful of who you take advice from.”

A similar sentiment was shared by @OuterBoroRoyal and @WeezielouQueen:

@OuterBoroRoyal: “If ADOS Twitter is up in arms about The Woman King, I’m going to pay to see it twice. #BoycottWomanKing”

@WeezielouQueen: “Replying to @BrokeHrtLiberal LOL! Black people on twitter acting like they didn’t know there were ‘Uncle Tom’ slave traders before Don’t boycott our history , just don’t repeat it! Support black projects and people #TheWomanKing”

Alternately, @H3adph0neMu51c and @TajMarie17 had a different message for fans:

@H3adph0neMu51c: “By defending the movie you’re defending slave traders and spitting on the graves of your ancestors sold into the trans Atlantic slave trade.
#BoycottWomanKing”

@TajMarie17: “Replying to @trapj99 and @violadavis ‘none of y’all have seen the film and know what it’s about’ But I and others know how to read 📖 up on history. Why would I “financially” support an ahistorical depiction that’s disrespectful to my lineage?
This tweet deserves the dumbest tweet for the day 🏆 #BoycottWomanKing”

Furthermore, anti-fans directed their concerns directly to filmmakers:

@NoGamesOnNotice: “Replying to @trapj99 and @violadavis Be a sell out thinking a #WomanKing Dahomey Amazon counseled Kang Ghezo into palm oil plantation production as a replacement for trading slaves! 😞 Viola did this for a check and career advancement/stabilization. This is her ‘poundcake speech’ moment.
#BoycottWomanKing”

@AmericandosN: “Replying to @WomanKingMovie Trivializing the TransAtlantic Slave Trades’ African captors as feminine empowered heroines is an ahistorical account is disgusting 😞 & like attempting to recast Adolf H. as some sort of champion which he was NOT! #BoycottWomanKing”

Film Discussions

The second theme that emerged was film discussions. Film discussions provided insight into the audience’s diverse interpretations, the film’s cultural significance, and the relationship between media, identity, and discourse on X. Filmmakers, historical context, and misogynoir were three subthemes developed from the overarching film discussion’s theme. The first

subtheme explores the cast code, which focuses on the individuals responsible for bringing *The Woman King* to life. Historical context is the second subtheme that analyzes posts coded as history, slavery, political, religion, or holocaust. The third subtheme considers misogynoir focusing on posts that contained race or gender related concepts.

Filmmakers. In the first subtheme, filmmakers explore the cast code, which includes posts that tag or mention the cast, crew, directors, or production team. 23.49% ($\mu = 345$) of the sampled posts included discussions related to the filmmakers of *The Woman King*. Filmmakers are exploring a wider range of narratives within the Black experience. Viewers believe that *The Woman King*'s storyline depicts Black individuals beyond stereotypes and showcases the complexity and diversity of Black culture. To illustrate, @fhallallen highlighted the history and culture shown in the film and gave a shoutout to the filmmakers:

@fhallallen: "Shouting from Rock Hill, SC to tell everybody #TheWomanKing is a remarkable story of strength, sisterhood and FREEDOM that beautifully shares our history and culture. Well Done @violadavis, @ThusoMbedu, Lashana Lynch, Shelia Atim, & @GPBmadeit @sonypictures #get2themovies"

Several fans expressed appreciation for the film's casting diversity which highlights the significance of representation in media:


@ChikeIgwebuike: "@jimmyodukoya_ and @JohnBoyega have made us proud as Nigerian storytellers tonight. Take it or leave it, we had a full cinema experience, and these guys gave us Nigeria jollof in all its smoky flavor with their roles on #TheWomanKing NG NG NG Naija to the World."

@TheCurvyCritic: "Baby, all I needed to know is Viola Davis was portraying a warrior and leading an all Black female cast, directed by a Black woman. @WomanKingMovie"

was everything I didn't know my spirit needed <http://wp.me/p2v8yf-5BL>
#thewomanking”

Some fans shared backgrounds, profiles, or interviews featuring the cast and directors of *The Woman King*:

@BasedJane: “I was a little sad to see Jordan Bolger leave Peaky Blinders (he got a role in The 100) but I am happy to see him in so many things since then. Tom & Jerry, The Book of Boba Fett, and now #TheWomanKing . It's going up for @caramaka, baby!!!”

@CineplexMovies: “#TheWomanKing features one tough cast! 🍷 We spoke to stars Lashana Lynch and Thuso Mbedu, producer Cathy Schulman and (a very well-rested) John Boyega about the physical demands of their new film. See The Woman King in theatres now! Tickets  <https://cinplx.co/3eXOsNO>”

@Variety: “Lashana Lynch says that while her singing voice changed while she was training for #TheWomanKing : ‘My teacher would be like, ‘We need to open your lungs and chest up; your throat needs relaxing.’ I'd say, ‘That's because I'm toughening up everywhere.’ <https://t.co/qJuw5KMIE0>”

There were numerous discussions among fans about the creative choices made by the cast and directors, analyzing how these choices contribute to the overall impact of the storyline:

@sideswipe_boss: “BLACK EXCELLENCE ON DISPLAY!!! #TheWomanKing was an excellent film! Great performances by the entire cast, a compelling story, amazing action and fight choreography, set and costume design was amazing! Truly one of the best films of the year! 9/10”

@thatalicewu: “Just got out of a matinee of #TheWomanKing and now contemplating ‘kickboxing.’ Which is the highest praise I could give any movie. Go @GPBmadeit!”

@nerdist: “#TheWomanKing’s legendary director Gina Prince-Bythewood on the film’s stunning visuals <https://trib.al/56x1hgz>”

@beingabookwurm: “just saw #TheWomanKing and Y’ALL. this movie is SO GOOD. the action + cinematography are stunning & the women at the center of the story LEAP off the screen w/ power, complexity and heart. Viola Davis is ofc a masterclass but s/o also to Thuso Mbedu and Lashana Lynch 🍌🍌🍌🍌”

@jaythecakethief: “I don’t think it is a coincidence that the majority of my favorite films thus far this year (Everything Everywhere, Nope, now #WomanKing) feature predominantly non-white casts. These stories just feel refreshing and exciting, windows into worlds not mine. Movies are magic.”

Many fans engaged in critical discussions about the performances of the cast and the directorial choices:

@moviere09350416: “#TheWomanKing was phenomenal well written great fights scenes lot of violence had Black Panther vibes to it one of my favorite this year could get Oscar nominations @violadavis @JohnBoyega performances are outstanding”

@ibsoulinspired: “Lashana Lynch is the ‘big cousin’ we all know and love. Best performance ever ❤️ #TheWomanKing”

Anti-fans chose not to support the film based on the race of some of the filmmakers:

@CeylaanBlue: “Replying to @EqualityEd Saw Maria Bello’s name and that’s all I need to know to make a hard pass. #BoycottWomanKing”

@SoLovelynAmazin: “In this particular social climate, one would think that Black actors would conduct their own research before taking on a Black role & not allow white hollyweird to tell them ANYthing about ANYthing Black. #BoycottWomanKing”

@AThinLinePoet: “#BoycottWomanKing Two white women: We need a n**** gal to paint black women child slave traders as heroic will you do it? Lupita: Hell no! The f***?! Viola Davis: Oooga boooga hi yi yi”

@nichole43119: “So a story about an African woman warrior tribe was written by 2 white women... Bet if I Google tons of black people have written stories about them and were overlooked... #BoycottWomanKing”

Historical Context. The second subtheme, historical context, encompasses codes such as history, slavery, political, religion, and holocaust. This subtheme uncovered how filmmakers navigate and interpret historical contexts, revealing how *The Woman King* contributes to the collective understanding of historical events, societal issues, and cultural dynamics. Posts were coded as history 22.4% ($\mu = 329$) if the post mentioned history about the film, slavery 20.08% ($\mu = 295$) if slavery was mentioned, political 3.74% ($\mu = 55$) if there was a political theme, religion 0.54% ($\mu = 8$) if religious ideology was mentioned, or religion 0.54% ($\mu = 8$) if religious ideology was mentioned. 34.51% ($\mu = 507$) of the sampled posts included discussions related to the historical context of *The Woman King*'s cinematic narratives. Countless conversations about *The Woman King*'s interconnectedness of various cultural and social elements within media narratives.

Fans and anti-fans engaged in many discussions analyzing the historical context presented in *The Woman King*. Many posts shared concerns about the accuracy of historical portrayals, the exploration of lesser-known events, or discussions on how the film contributes to historical narratives:

@TajMarie17: “Replying to @TajMarie17 Bottomline, #TheWomanKing is an ahistorical depiction. All tribes that participated in the slave trade did so out of self-

interest. For a comprehensive take on the movie, go to the following link:

<https://bit.ly/3dobLzV> African Kingdom video here: <https://bit.ly/3Dz21hc>”

@mojo_girl: “Replying to @realestateangie @violadavis and 6 others Did they touch on the fact that these warrior women were used to kidnap enemies and sell them into slavery? I’m curious how much of the Dahomey legacy was discussed in the film?”

@bakara_j: “DahomeyKings presided over human sacrifices/beheadings of slaves in their ‘Grand Customs and the Ek-que-moo-ah-toh-meh’ ceremony. 3 ceremonies w/a dual purpose-pacifying the war god, honoring ancestors & insensitivity training for female troops. 1/#BoycottWomanKing #WomanKing”

@bakara_j: “Replying to @bakara_j The decapitated head of the victims were ‘fixed on the walls of the palace.’ The Grand Custom ceremony took place 3or4x per yr. 2/2 #BoycottWomanKing #WomanKingMovie #WomanKing”

Several critical discussions surrounding *The Woman King*’s portrayal of slavery highlighted the impact on audience perceptions, it’s contribution to ongoing conversations about the representation of slavery in media:

@TajMarie17: “Replying to @TajMarie17 According to this clip, the Dahomey tribe sold close to a million slaves. According to the ‘interviewee’, the tribe was well aware of the severity of the trade and therefore opted (or preferred) to trade people of different tribes versus those within the tribe. #TheWomanKing”

@NoGamesOnNotice: “Replying to @SalesmanBridge It doesn’t. The Dahomey Amazons were not heroes & did not become abolitionists. The fake palm oil production story was written to absolve an evil empire that sent my ancestors to America. This film glorified slave traders & marketed it as #blackgirlmagic.#BoycottWomanKing”

@legitDogeQueen: “Replying to @legitDogeQueen The British empire was at the forefront of ending slavery globally & making it an unacceptable practice. Slavery still exists in parts of Africa where black enslave other blacks & in the Middle East where blacks are sold as slaves even today. #BoycottWomanKing”

Users went as far as comparing the Dahomey and their portrayal to the Holocaust:

@diaryunpressed: “Replying to @diaryunpressed it’s funny to me that we can have movies about hitler and oppenheimer but god forbid #TheWomanKing right???? i wonder why ○●”

@eshawiii: “This is an AWFUL comparison Oscar Schindler was an actual person who hekped thousands of Jewish ppl survive the Holocaust. The DAHOMEY Slave Traders reveled and willfully participated in a genocide of neighboring Africans. In #TheWomanKing they make them heroes. U should be 😞”

@AmericandosN: “Replying to @WomanKingMovie Trivializing the TransAtlantic Slave Trades’ African captors as feminine empowered heroines is an ahistorical account is disgusting 😞 & like attempting to recast Adolf H. as some sort of champion which he was NOT! #BoycottWomanKing”

@NoGamesOnNotice: “Replying to @The_Source_Plug I don’t want to see those women being elevated. Not even their #WomanKing. Nobody would challenge the Jewish community this way!”

Certain fans questioned the validity of not seeing the film because of the concern of the historical accuracy of the storyline:

@JAMAIwuyor: “Replying to @JAMAIwuyor Many ppl never questioned the thousands of films starring yt actors depicting European dominance, royalty, or warfare (fictional

and historical) during eras of slavery, colonialism, or Jim Crow. Yet #TheWomanKing gets labeled at ‘THE’ movie about enslavers? We’re not doing this.”

@landis_lain: “#WomanKing I am going to see it because history is what it is. Y’all wanna boycott something boycott all this fake hair and nails and cosmetic exploitation to do with Blackness. Yes we know they were involved in the slave trade. But they existed. They were bad asses.”

@catherine_amayi: “Replying to @xspotsdamark Thank you so much for being a sober voice amidst all the noise. Afrocentric art deserves to exist without political backlash just like other art from elsewhere. #WomanKing”

Some user’s posts had themes that brought up conversations surrounding about power dynamics, systemic issues, or political commentary embedded in the narrative:

@Tucker25218426: “Replying to @WomanKingMovie Can’t wait to see how they lie about this history to push some political agenda”

@TajMarie17: “Replying to @TajMarie17 In this clip, a descendant speaks on the Ashanti Tribe. Even though he claimed that the Ashanti Tribe did not know how extensive the slave trade was, they were very much unmotivated to end it due to the wealth that it brought. (Part 1/2) #TheWomanKing”

@Black_Action: “For those who say, ‘it’s just a movie. It’s not that serious. It’s only loosely based on true events,’ you clearly don’t understand or fully comprehend the game that’s being played. You’re exactly who they want to see this film and who they want to ‘vote or die.’ #TheWomanKing

https://twitter.com/Black_Action/status/1557976602784387073”

@nasescobar316: “Watching #TheWomanKing after you know it’s a movie glorifying African Slave Traders is like voting for Joe Biden AGAIN after he sent gas and food prices through the roof! If you know better, you do better. #BoycottWomanKing”

From the sampled posts, there were only a few posts that included religious themes such as beliefs, practices, or challenges within the context of the Black community:

@amazing_greyce: “So now moving forward, anything that shines a light on true history that doesn’t paint the ‘White Christian’ i.e Evangelist in positive light is deemed #CRT? 🙄 #BoycottWomanKing for what?”

@kornellshabazz: “How about instead of boycotting #TheWomanKing we pick up a book and study history. Enjoy fantasy and then learn real s***. Aint nobody boycott church when white Jesus was on the wall.”

@KoreabooKiller: “Replying to @taanubey @araujohistorian and @WomanKingMovie It wasn’t just america who supported Chattel slavery, all of Europe did and moralized it with religion.”

Some users reflected on the representation of historical events and their impact on contemporary understandings of cultural trauma and how the media shapes collective memory:

@Black_Action: “If you want to support a film about slave raiders, go right ahead. Out of respect for all the bodies of our ancestors at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean, I refuse to support. #TheWomanKing <https://twitter.com/trapj99/status/1570897173419790336>”

@quantumblackne2: “Replying to @violadavis @WomanKingMovie and 5 others I can’t wait for you to experience Hitler” - said no actor ever. why is disrespecting Black people so normalized?! i experienced your #WomanKingMovie @violadavis and now i’m poor in us fighting for #REPARATIONS. 🙄 #BoycottWomanKing 🚩🚩🚩🚩🚩”

@JAMAIwuyor: “Replying to @JAMAIwuyor I think I can sit through this one movie about the Dahomey Amazons and come out in one piece. And yes, the story of Dahomey Women Warriors, their training, and military prowess is legendary and worthy to be told. And by the way, the movie does not glorify slavery. #TheWomanKing”

@Amazon_Queenn: “Critics don’t have an issue with Davis playing a strong Black leader in ‘The Woman King,’ but are alarmed that the history of the Dahomey tribe, who sold other Africans into slavery, has been whitewashed. #BoycottWomanKing

https://www.yahoo.com/entertainment/why-black-community-driving-boycottwomanking-005623632.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly90LmNvLw&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAKuRtXWH9c7ohpA8BceIBZd3aPfVCQCfriLqrM11jcOlkL5bRZQzWHI S1GFGv2VaZH9o0iuEFR48MXyln68uB5cYCeHbBV5-75bfzYVLdkmaLPhrJRhBbPqMY8-4y-gz7PDo2vQ_u4bChwlfVp7NaLYYF6KHafolktuVermeacdIF”

Misogynoir. The third subtheme, misogynoir, introduces codes such as race and gender, exploring the intersectional challenges faced by women of color within cinematic depictions. Posts were coded as race 20.35% ($\mu = 299$) if against or have disparaging messages about the film or gender 12.46% ($\mu = 183$) if users are not sure how they feel about the film being made. This subtheme critically examines how *The Woman King* inspired discussions on the portrayal of women of color in cinema and issues of racial and gender bias. 24.57% ($\mu = 361$) of the sampled posts included at least one of these codes that contributed to discussions encompassing race and gender themes on X and the complexity of representation and identity among Black women.

There was a large user population engaging in discussions about the representation of race and gender in *The Woman King* and the impact of the representation of intersecting identities on the audience:

@vincentlao18: “The time has come. Now seated for #TheWomanKing In support of VIOLA DAVIS, and the rest of strong Black women! ❤️👉👈🌱”

@PettyLupone: “It is VERY important to support #TheWomanKing opening weekend so we can continue to see Black women dominate on the big screen. And I plan to see it tonight and tomorrow so anyone telling folks not to can kick rocks while barefoot. 😏”

@princellasmith: “Replying to @Brandyspeaks1 I really wish y’all would watch this movie before commenting on it. It just feels like black women being put front and center is really triggering folks. Sadly, it’s also triggering some of our own people who have internalized racism and misogynoir. DO NOT #BoycottWomanKing”

@EscaflowneClown: “This talking point is tired and played out. Since when has Hollywood not made ahistorical films? It’s not a documentary. It’s an action epic. Just say y’all don’t want Black women to get their shine. #TheWomanKing Go see the woman king y’all when you get a chance.

<https://twitter.com/TajMarie17/status/1570785893929328641>”

Some users felt that there would not be so much backlash if men played a larger role in the film:

@piperhuguley: “I wonder if there would have been #BoycottWomanKing if it were a production helmed by Black men... 😏”

@princellasmith: “Here, I’ll help you. Racist whites and self-hating black men hate to see dark-skinned women with a platform. DO NOT #BoycottWomanKing. I saw it. It’s well

done and does not whitewash slavery or certain African tribes' involvement with it.

#TheWomanKing”

Viewers also considered the role in colorism in media and discussed how the narrative considers the unique experiences of Black individuals, particularly focusing on how gender intersects with race to shape characters' identities and challenges of those with a darker complexion:

@RedWallPro: “Replying to @adeyemi_cynthia As a dark skinned Black woman, you would be so proud of this movie. No, don't take your children. But you go. And report back how amazing and uplifting it is. That's what it did for me and EVERYONE, including my African friends who were in the theater #TheWomanKing”

@princellasmith felt strongly about this position:

@princellasmith: “Replying to @ChristaTRomance Thank you!! I saw the film, and it's good. It does not whitewash what was going on at all. People really hate to see dark-skinned women with any kind of platform for real. They want an excuse to hate that movie. DO NOT #BoycottWomanKing #TheWomanKing”

@princellasmith: “Here, I'll help you. Racist whites and self-hating black men hate to see dark-skinned women with a platform. DO NOT #BoycottWomanKing. I saw it. It's well done and does not whitewash slavery or certain African tribes' involvement with it.

#TheWomanKing”

Anti-fans took the position and criticized the targeting of Black women:

@PerfectUrPurpos: “Replying to @PerfectUrPurpos All money isn't good money.

@jemelehill Whatever may fuel your energy to pivot away from evidentiary truth to claims of targeting Black women will also act as cement; securing your disgraceful position in this moment in time. #BoycottWomanKing”

@Black_Action: “Out of respect for all the Black Women who were enslaved, raped, maimed, brutalized and murdered via the Transatlantic Slave Trade, I refuse to support this film. #TheWomanKing <https://twitter.com/jemelehill/status/1570920757055860737>”

@JonahHe29614304: “I never thought in woke 2022 that Hollyweird would glorify a major player in the African slave trade. Of course it’s about woman empowerment. Downplaying the abuse the Dahomey kingdom dealt upon their prisoners.

#BoycottWomanKing”

There were some users who did not agree with the misogynoir narrative:

@philanderwicks: “Replying to @BBSewsandGames The #BoycottWomanKing has nothing to do with misogynoir. It’s about revisionist history. An attempted rewrite that’s occurring right b 4 our eyes. 🙄 I’d say it has a lot to do w/the glorification of slave traders.”

@SoulAmerican2: “If this film was about Black men warriors of the Dahomey instead of women y’all would be on the #BoycottWomanKing train too, talmbout the patriarchy and some more shit.”

@blackdetta: “Replying to @DK_Hennessy Making a hero out of an african enslavement squad because...gender is disgusting #IsThisYourWomanKing #BoycottWomanKing”

Societal Discussions

Societal discussions is the final theme that developed from the CTDA. The consideration of the broader societal discourse beyond the film among *The Woman King* fans is vital to examine from cultural studies and fandom lens. This central theme is composed of two subthemes, popular culture, and bots and ops, which provide unique views into the complexity of societal discussions. The first subtheme, popular culture, includes the pop culture and Breonna


Taylor codes. Some fans engage in commentary discussing how *The Woman King* reflects and influences broader elements of societal discussions about real-world events, cultural trends, and values. The second subtheme bots and ops comprise of posts coded as ADOS or trolls. Bots and ops focus on anti-fans and users who are affiliated with the American Descendants of Slavery (ADOS) or mention ADOS or Foundational Black Americans (FBA).

Popular Culture. The first subtheme, popular culture, comprises of posts coded as pop culture 15.93% ($\mu = 234$) and Breonna Taylor 0.61% ($\mu = 9$). 16.47% ($\mu = 242$) of the sampled posts included discussions related to popular culture. This subtheme presents posts related to contemporary culture and impactful real-world events that shape our collective consciousness. Discussions of popular culture topics on X create a digital space for users to reify and shape beliefs, media portrayals, and advocacy. Popular culture topics were inclusive of a wide range of topics such as music, choreography, fashion, hairstyles, language, other media, and current events. Additionally, viewers discussed how the film challenges common storytelling conventions, addressing issues related to representation and stereotypes.

The Woman King fans shared their admiration and appreciation for the music and choreography in the film. The incorporation of musical traditions and diverse choreography is a common way to showcase Black culture:

@Ndiilo_Nthengwe: “Brilliantly scored. I keep reliving almost every scene in the movie just from the soundtracks alone. I hope a theatre adaptation of this film is underway for the sound to fully come alive. #TheWomanKing

https://twitter.com/T_Blanchard/status/1570811908894359552”

@Ndiilo_Nthengwe: “Replying to @Ndiilo_Nthengwe Deeply moved by the soundtrack! #TheWomanKing 

@YtH8r: “Just saw #WomanKingMovieawesome acting performances, excellent choreography and great action sequences 👍”

@m77oz: “The Woman King reminded me of a Shaw Brothers martial arts flick with the heart-pumping training & fight sequences, the beautiful costumes and attention to detail. It’s Black Panther meets the 36th Chamber of Shaolin and the MVP for me was Lashana Lynch. #TheWomanKing”

@x_saikaley: “#TheWomanKing was quite disappointing. While the filmmaking, set and costume design, music, and performances are good, the story, dialogue, pacing and PG 13 rated action drags the movie’s potential. Not terrible or unwatchable, but quite average and generic of its genre.”

The Woman King highlighted cultural African attire that varied based on the different tribes in the film and various hairstyles. Social bonds are materialized through cultural attributes such as clothing and hairstyles:

@LarryAJRobinson: “How many different hair styles did you spot in #TheWomanKing ???”

@Variety: “Costume designer Gersha Phillips drew upon African tradition while creating outfits for #TheWomanKing . <https://t.co/EHGWT07ONq>”

A few fans notated the films attempt to reflect the language and vernacular to resonate with Black audiences to create a sense of authenticity and cultural familiarity:

@DadaBoyEhiz: “Good movie but can’t get pass the accent 🤔🤔 #TheWomanKing”

@antismoler: “The accents are a lot more passable than BP tbh and the acting is very good #TheWomanKing”

The representation of popular culture in films with large Black casts is diverse and can vary based on the filmmakers' intentions, the narrative focus, and the cultural context depicted in the story. For example, @sawnee07 reflected on a fighting scene in the movie and compared it to how some people may fight today:

@sawnee07: "Things from our ancestors really be in us ... watching the women put palm oil before going into battle is really giving how Black girls Vaseline up before going to fight #thewomanking"

The Woman King was positively compared to other films by some users:

@DrLite13: "The power and beauty were felt and seen within the FIRST MINUTE. As usual @violadavis was SUPERB. The Agojie of the Dahomey are the REAL LIFE warrior women upon which Wonder Woman is based. Go see this film! #TheWomanKing #Nanisca"

@Just_a_Papa: "Viola Davis has proven to be the GREATEST living actor of our time. The Woman King is a triumph of epic story telling in the line of Gladiator, and Braveheart. #TheWomanKing"

Other users compared the storyline of *The Woman King* to other Black films, and promoted support of the film:

@_joshpray: "But let another gangster movie get made, we'll make it a cult classic 🙄🙄🙄🙄🙄 lol but never mind me #BoycottWomanKing because now we care so deeply"

@pieceofmind1234: "#BoycottWomanKing for what? The movies that glorify strippers, drug dealing, and murders got y'all glued to the screen....but y'all drawing the line with #WomanKing ! Yea ok"

@Chillcago: “Ya’ll want me to boycott the first ever high budget film starring 4 black women from a black company Because the real history is different than the film version. Nah... We gonna have to take that ethical L this time there are bigger things at stake. #BlackMovies #BoycottWomanKing”

@Queen_NoCrown: “Black cinema has changed so much in the last few years. Viola Davis is one of the many who’ve lead the charge. We owe them so much. To see Black Kings AND QUEENS is powerful. In 1963 we had a white Cleopatra. This is just the beginning. Imagery is powerful. #TheWomanKing”

Other uses noted and compared other Black or Black led films that were also boycotted and the criticism behind it:

@Sha_Moore: “This hashtag is giving suspect. As white supremacists are bashing The Little Mermaid for having a Black woman playing the role of Ariel. Now adosians want us to boycott Woman King because of the history of tribe depicted in the film? nah. #BoycottWomanKing”

@ZBaby23117428: “Replying to @ZBaby23117428 Yo honestly seems like every time a slave rebellion movie is released something happens to sabotage it. The same thing happened with the Nat Turner film. I guess Wakanda (fantasy) is the only place black power is can reside... #TheWomanKing #BoycottWomanKing”

@JTrains1988: “The same people telling to #BoycottWomanKing are the same people cheering the Royal Family. Hypocrites everywhere”

Many users highlighted that there are other films that are not historically accurate that did not receive the same backlash:

@CitizenQuips: “This may surprise everyone on #BoycottWomanKing twitter, but despite their depiction in 300, the ancient Spartans were not bastions of individual liberty.”

@BELLA_SNOWDEN: “The US Air Force has committed thousands of atrocities yet no bodies boycotting Maverick 😏 and tons of people in the black panther party we’re fucking horrific but nobody boycotted Judas and the Black Messiah 🗿
#TheWomanKing doesn’t glorify, it condemns. 👍”

@ReleaseUrJob: “If you’re gonna #BoycottWomanKing then you also need to boycott the NFL, NBA and rap music bc those institutions are modern slave trade y’all happily and ignorantly ignore.”

In response to actress Kerry Washington, buying out several theatres for showings of *The Woman King* film and there were varying reactions:

@bakara_j: “You bought out a few theaters for a movie but did you buy out a bottle water company to send water to Mississippi? #BoycottWomanKing
#JacksonWaterCrisis”

@806texasgrl: “Replying to @vote3rdpartynow @Mike_Melas_John and @tariqnasheed
Maybe @kerrywashington doesn’t realize the hashtag #BoycottWomanKing is trending for a reason? 😏 Intelligent Black society isn’t fooling w/the feminist trope that simultaneously celebrates slave traders. We’re Descendants of American Slaves & we say: No! @violadavis @JuVeeProds”

@blackdetta: “So she’ll pay for people to go see the enslavers of Black American ancestors But Wont tweet one word about reparations for their descendants smh #IsThisYourWomanKing #BoycottWomanKing”

@reidforoakland: “Thank you @kerrywashington for your generosity! Oaklanders — don’t miss a FREE showing of #TheWomanKing this Sunday at @JackLondonOak’s Regal Cinema. #Oakland #culture #nightout

<https://twitter.com/kerrywashington/status/1570804404189802496>”

@AnitaJoyceThom2: “Replying to @kerrywashington So, going to the see ‘WomanKing’ is on you, Ms Kerry Washington? At any theater shown?”

@JusMe_Chelle: “@kerrywashington bought out the theater for #WomanKing 🗨️ Who tryna meet me down Gallery tomorrow? 😊”

Historical events that reflect social issues were also included in the post credits of the film.

Incorporating references to contemporary social and political issues, which can initiate commentary on the challenges and triumphs faced by Black communities. Fans who saw the movie made posts about the tragic case of Breonna Taylor:

@_allthatjaz_: “IF YOU GO WATCH THE WOMAN KING STAY UNTIL THE VERY END OF THE CREDITS PLS N THANKS 🗨️ #TheWomanKing”

@positiviTee: “There is a tribute to Breonna Taylor in post credits scenes of #TheWomanKing. Please stay for it.”

@clarencelinar: “Please go see #TheWomanKing for yourself and ignore the foolish call to boycott. @violadavis and @GPBmadeit have definitely made the culture and the ancestors proud with the telling us this powerful story. (Stay past the first set of credits)”

@AKyourbae: “Then the post credit shout out to Briana Taylor ... I almost cried
#TheWomanKing”

Bots and Ops. The second sub-theme under societal discussions is Bots and Ops which includes codes such as ADOS 5.99% ($\mu = 88$) and trolls 3.74% ($\mu = 55$). Only 8.85% ($\mu = 130$) of the sampled posts aligned with the Bots and Ops sub-theme, but individuals associated with ADOS were credited for creating the #BoycottWomanKing hashtag. Posts coded as ADOS were created by users who are affiliated with or mention ADOS or the FBA. Posts were coded as trolls if users discussed individuals trolling *The Woman King*. This subtheme examines how users on X contribute to the broader societal conversations despite varying complex ideologies in the Black community and considers the impact of bot accounts on influencing users on X. Members of ADOS used X’s platform to share their stance and educate others on why *The Woman King* should be boycotted:

@tonetalks: “Thank you to @yahoo @TheWrap @sknolle for covering the boycott I started off that has become a collective uproar by #ados Black Americans over #womanking. ‘Here’s Why Some of the Black Community Is Driving #BoycottWomanKing on Social Media’ <https://www.yahoo.com/entertainment/why-black-community-driving-boycottwomanking-005623632.html>”

@Black_Action: “This is what makes it difficult for some Black Americans to heal and come together with some other members of the diaspora. We get labeled as ‘lunatics’ because we won’t support a film glorifying slave raiders. #TheWomanKing”

@TajMarie17: “The film is a glorification of African Slave Traders. This film is disrespectful towards those that descended from US chattel Slavery. This is:

#AntiBlackAmerican #Revisionism #Ahistorical #BoycottWomanKing

<https://youtu.be/41UxNyYtGic>”

Discussions around specific terms or organizations can sometimes lead to division within the Black community. Fans banded together to call out the #BoycottWomanKing hashtag and address the narrative coming from the ADOS community:

@Emma_Nuelok: “FBA and ADOS are one of the most stupid set of African Americans ever. The Woman King is a great movie regardless of the hate it is receiving from the same people who want Black characters and stories in movies #TheWomanKing #BoycottWomanKing #Seethemovie #Agojie”

@TiphSeven: “Let’s start a block party using the #BoycottWomanKing hashtag. Any time you see the ADOS/FBA accts with the American flag, just block. ADOS/FBA are troll accounts and don’t speak for African Americans.”

@2Strong2Silence: “If you’re participating in #BoycottWomanKing because of The National Review & The ADOS movement you’re doing it wrong. Be careful of who you take advice from.”

In support of the movie, some fans encouraged others on X to still see the movie, and attributed the negative feedback and criticism to troll accounts:

@ChristaTRomance: “I’m not trusting any hashtag that tries to get a Black women led movie to fail. I’ll see it for myself and if it’s bad or spins history in a negative way so be it. But Viola & John are going to get my movie dollars. Suck on that, bots & ops. #BoycottWomanKing”

@daoneblackdress: “This #BoycottWomanKing is full of bots and white people pretending to be black. Don’t listen to that garbage. Go see the movie for yourself and form your OWN opinions.”

@ayiri_s: “Replying to @ZBaby23117428 Just saw it, ignore the bots #TheWomanKing”

@darlinginmyway: “Replying to @darlinginmyway It’s mainlybots, rogue blue checks and people with no god**** sense. Ignore the noise. Go see #TheWomanKing”

@ChampBronson: “White opps trying to tank black movies... again. Using Avatar of people of black people to do it. This movie talks about the issue they boycotting the movie about. Makes no sense. #BoycottWomanKing”

Summary

Chapter 4 uncovered a comprehensive exploration into the cultural behavior and language patterns of *The Woman King* fans on X, shedding light on the film’s impact on Black popular culture. This results chapter utilized a CTDA multimodal analytic technique that provided a framework to outline and report these findings. The first section of the chapter reports the outcomes of analyzing X and its users within a CTDA framework. This section delves into the complexities of user interactions, digital practices, and the cultural landscape on X, offering insights into the dynamic online environment of *The Woman King* fans.

The second section of the findings chapter delves into the results derived from discourse analysis of posts specifically related to *The Woman King* film. These findings were cross-referenced with the identified themes from a content analysis of the film. This dual approach provides an understanding of how online discussions and the film itself intersect, contributing to the research questions and the application of cultural studies and fandom theories. The analysis not only highlights the film’s ability to challenge dominant narratives but also sheds light on

digital practices and fan discussions and their dynamic relationship between *The Woman King*, its audience, and its contribution to the broader discourse surrounding Black representation in popular media.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Overview

The purpose of this dissertation was to understand *The Woman King* fans' cultural behavior and language patterns on X and the film's impact on Black popular culture. To achieve that, Chapter 5 first provides a detailed summary of findings from the CTDA and discusses the three themes that resulted: film reactions and responses, film discussions, and societal discussions. The CTDA examined how culture is expressed, negotiated, and contested in the digital realm, emphasizing the importance of considering both cultural and technological aspects in the analysis of X. Subsequently, Chapter 5 discusses the findings and answers each of the three research questions from a cultural studies and fandom theoretical stance. This discussion chapter also considers the implications of this study and provides an overview of the delimitations and limitations. Furthermore, Chapter 5 makes recommendations for future research. In doing so, this discussion contributes to a comprehensive understanding of the film's impact on Black popular culture in the digital realm and the relationship between digital practices, cultural representation, and audience engagement.

Summary of Findings

A summary of this dissertation's major findings is presented in this section. First, this section summarizes the film reactions and responses that captured the audiences' views and perspectives. Next, this section presents a summary of film discussions, that includes the audience's diverse interpretations, the film's cultural significance, and the relationship between media, identity, and discourse on X. Finally, this section provides a summary of the societal discussions, which considers a broader conversation beyond the film. These findings were instrumental in shaping and informing the discussions surrounding the three research questions

presented in the following section. Results from the CTDA of the sampled 1,469 relevant posts from fans of *The Woman King* who posted about the film during its opening weekend on X revealed how Black culture is produced and reproduced by Blacks and the social commentary it creates in digital spaces.

Film Reactions and Responses

Understanding the cultural behavior and language patterns of *The Woman King* fans on X and the film's impact on Black popular culture film reactions and responses were pivotal. The results indicate that in the diverse perspectives of fans, the majority of positive audience engagement constructed narratives of enthusiastic endorsement and active participation. Fans celebrated the representation of Black characters, especially the Black women characters and their stories in the film. This celebration fostered a sense of pride and empowerment within the Black community. In addition to the characters, there were further discussions about themes and cultural references that contribute to a shared cultural experience and understanding within the Black community. Fans emerged as vital contributors to the film's cultural resonance, expressing support through various means, from emotional engagement to attending screenings and sharing their experiences through reviews.

Alternately, there were many conversations from an anti-fan perspective, providing valuable insights into critical reactions and challenges voiced about *The Woman King*. The critical conversations that emerged between fans and anti-fans highlight the complexity of audience dynamics and the film's reception within X, emphasizing the importance of acknowledging dissenting voices and diverse perspectives in the analysis of Black popular culture. Anti-fans were determined to negatively impact the film's box office performance and share the true history of the Dahomey tribe and their role in the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

Commentary on social media helps raise awareness of Black films, serving as a form of word of mouth to reach broader audiences. Social media platforms such as X, provide a space for Black audiences to engage with one another, share their thoughts, and build a sense of community around popular culture artifacts. It also facilitates the development of fandom rituals, such as fan art and hashtag campaigns. With both #TheWomanKing and #BoycottWomanKing hashtags trending together on X, it enriched the cultural impact of *The Woman King* and the understanding of its audience. This increased visibility led to broader audiences discovering *The Woman King* and conversations surrounding the film, thus contributing to its growth of fandom. The interconnectedness of cultural behavior and audience engagement provides a holistic understanding of how the film becomes a focal point for discussions, expressions of support, and critical reflections of Black popular culture on X.

Film Discussions

Film discussions provided a broad exploration of the diverse interpretations, cultural significance, and the complex relationship between media, identity, and discourse on X and fans of *The Woman King*. Film discussions incorporated more than just film reactions, they contributed to the film's broader impact on Black popular culture. Many fans were happy and supportive of *The Woman King* just because it was primarily a Black female cast and crew on and off the screen. This positive reinforcement contributes to a culture of pride and recognition within the Black community. Several discussions addressed gaps in representation and the challenges faced by Black filmmakers, especially those of darker complexion. However, several audience members highlighted and were concerned that two of the writers were White.

Additionally, several fans emphasized and promoted the positive representation of the Black characters and storyline of *The Woman King* contributing to its cultural significance in

showcasing Black women as strong and fearless. Misogyny was a common theme of those who were in support of and against the film. Countless posts included race or gender-related ideologies. *The Woman King* influenced conversations that intersected with issues of race and gender. Critical insights into how audiences navigate and respond to the film's portrayal of women within the broader context of misogynoir, offering a comprehensive examination of the film's impact on conversations surrounding race and gender in Black culture historically and currently.

Cultural critiques of *The Woman King* involved discussions and analyses of other films, including Black films to offer reviews on themes, representation, and storytelling. A major theme in discourse among users on X was the historical context and accuracy of the Dahomey tribe and their role in slavery. Many fans and anti-fans viewed the storyline through historical and socio-political frameworks. This exploration provided valuable insights into how audiences engage with the film's historical thematic elements, drawing connections to broader historical narratives and socio-political discussions surrounding slavery, societal issues, and cultural dynamics. The scrutiny of the historical context enriches the understanding of how *The Woman King* becomes a cultural artifact that resonates within wider discourses.

Societal Discussions

Fans of *The Woman King* were involved in societal discourse and enriched the understanding of the film's impact on broader cultural conversations. Popular culture discourse comprises of a wide-ranging spectrum of topics, including music, choreography, fashion, hairstyles, language, other media, and current events, illustrating the versatility of X in facilitating multidimensional cultural dialogues. For example, many fans commented on the fact that most of the cast were dark-skinned women who wore their natural curls in a variety of

styles. Commentary on X has the power to influence broader popular culture trends. Memes, GIFs, catchphrases, and references originating from *The Woman King* were already becoming popular within Black communities, contributing to the overall fandom experience.

Social media commentary allows Black communities to express their cultural identity in response to the film. Many anti-fans were affiliated with ADOS and the FBA and introduced layers of opposition in the discourse, emphasizing the film's intersectionality with socio-political movements and highlighting the potential influence of these Black organizations on the narrative surrounding the film and its influence on Black popular culture. ADOS and FBA members used their platform on X to reshape the dominant cultural narrative of *The Woman King* and confront societal norms. When Black films fall short of representing the community authentically or perpetuate harmful stereotypes, social media can be used to filmmakers accountable. Criticism and calls for change can lead to more responsible storytelling. Supporters of *The Woman King* viewed ADOS and FBA members as trolls and challenged their viewpoints by creating critical conversations and actively shaping beliefs. This discourse showcased the divide and varying viewpoints in the Black community.

Fans emerged as vital contributors to the film's cultural resonance, expressing support through various means, from emotional engagement to attending screenings and sharing their experiences through reviews. This inclusion highlights *The Woman King's* role in creating dialogue on relevant social issues, indicating its ability to resonate within the greater context of popular culture. X has leveraged their platform to raise awareness about issues such as racial injustice and inequality. *The Woman King* surpasses conventional boundaries in film, actively participating in and influencing discussions that contribute to the development of societal perspectives within the digital realm of Black popular culture.

Discussion

This discussion section examines the findings of each research question and expresses how popular culture artifacts impact Black culture in digital spaces. *The Woman King* is a rich popular culture artifact for critical discussion, it is inspired by the African state of Dahomey during the Transatlantic Slave Trade and focuses on the Agojie, an all-female warrior group. First, this section explains how Black culture and representation are currently being displayed in media. Second, this section discusses the influence that social media commentary has on Black culture. Lastly, this section describes the influence that social media commentary has in creating fandom in Black communities. By answering these three separate research questions, this research provides insight into understanding how Black culture is produced and reproduced by Blacks along with the social commentary it creates.

In examining the findings, Stuart Hall's cultural studies theory proves pertinent in understanding Black culture. Hall (1993, 2004) focuses on the role of media in the construction of meaning and the representation of identity within cultural contexts. His framework allows researchers to analyze the complex relationship of cultural signifiers in artifacts like *The Woman King* and distinguish how media contributes to the ongoing negotiation of Black identity and social structures. By applying Hall's (2004) concepts of encoding and decoding, researchers can analyze the multifaceted layers of representation in media, shedding light on how Black culture is both portrayed and interpreted in the digital realm. This study affirms that through discourse, media audiences can resist hegemony and make meaning through frameworks of interpretation.

Additionally, considering the influence of social media commentary on Black culture, Henry Jenkins, a leading theorist in fandom, provides a powerful lens through which to understand the participatory nature of online communities. Jenkins (2006a, 2013, 2018) argues

that fans are active producers of culture, engaging in a transformative, participatory culture that exceeds traditional consumer-producer dynamics when consuming and circulating media. Examining social media discourse through this theoretical framework reveals how Black audiences actively contribute to the dialogue around cultural artifacts like *The Woman King*. Jenkins' (2018) emphasis on fan agency allows for an exploration of how social media platforms serve as spaces for the co-creation and reappropriation of Black cultural narratives, which this study shows is influencing the broader cultural landscape.

Furthermore, Marshall McLuhan's media ecology theory is integral to comprehending the impact of social media commentary in creating fandom within Black communities. M. McLuhan (1994, 2011) suggests that the medium itself is a message, shaping what is communicated and how it is perceived and understood. In the context of social media commentary, McLuhan's ideas support the exploration of how X transforms the dynamics of community building and fandom rituals. Analyzing X's influence on the creation of rituals and traditions within Black online communities provides a distinct understanding of how social media functions as an ecological system, influencing the dynamics of cultural engagement and expression. This discussion utilized these theories as a comprehensive framework for answering these research questions and understanding the intricate relationships between media, cultural representation, social commentary, and community building within the context of Black culture.

RQ1: How are Black culture and representation currently being displayed in media?

In this contemporary landscape of media, the representation of Black culture is a critical focus revealing the intricate relationship between fandom and the larger context of media ecology, shaping societal attitudes, norms, and developing perspectives. The pervasiveness of media platforms such as films and social media has created a space for influencing and

disseminating cultural narratives worldwide, contributing to the construction of a global cultural landscape. Cultural studies scholars such as Hall (1993), Lee (2017), and Sewell (2013) align with this belief that the media influences our identities through television and film by shaping how we are represented.

With the historical misrepresentations and underrepresentation, there is an urgent need to evaluate and understand the current state of Black culture in media. In this context, the representation of Black culture in media becomes a crucial component of the media ecosystem, shaping and being shaped by various media platforms and technologies. In exploring how Black culture is currently portrayed in media, this study demonstrated themes surrounding diverse narratives, empowerment and resilience, and the recognition of talent. This study supports Hooks' and West's (2017) and Nelson's (2019) view of the importance of Black popular culture as a vehicle for expressing Black perspectives and instigating critical discourse.

Diverse Narrative

There has been a transformative shift in Black culture and representation in contemporary media because of the demand for diverse narratives that authentically reflect the complexities of Black experiences and counteract harmful stereotypes. *The Woman King* challenges traditional stereotypes and fosters an inclusive portrayal of Black culture. In media, the Transatlantic Slave Trade is often shown from one perspective, not considering the impact of European colonization and how different nations in Africa were affected. The diverse narratives in *The Woman King* showcase Black stories in a different period countering the stereotypical portrayals of Black individuals in popular culture that scholars such as Lee (2017) and Steele (2016) found. *The Woman King* showcases an alternative path for women and girls. The Agojie in the film dedicate their lives to protecting their kingdom instead of marrying and building a family. These

narratives are an example of the heterogeneity within Black culture and how the film strives to represent a more accurate and authentic spectrum of experiences.

Furthermore, there has been a notable upsurge in the exploration of intersectionality in media narratives, reflecting the growing awareness of understanding multifaced identities are shaped and spread by media due to the contributions of Hall (1993), Lee (2017), and Sewell (2013). Black characters are portrayed with multifaceted identities, incorporating aspects such as gender and class contributing to a more inclusive and layered depiction. This intersectional view adds depth to characters but also addresses the interconnected nature of diverse social identities within the Black community. *The Woman King* portrays varying African kingdoms and customs that are rarely portrayed. The effort to demonstrate more authentic representation and diversity in storytelling is still in its beginning stages despite scholars such as González-Velázquez et al. (2020) and Lawson-Borders (2018) revealing how popular culture contributes to the social construction. *The Woman King* has a narrative that is outside the singular perspective often seen in cultural artifacts.

Empowerment and Resilience

There has been an increase in the portrayal of Black cultural narratives characterized by empowerment and resilience, growing from historical stereotypes and providing empowering representation. The growth of Black creators and filmmakers in the industry has played a central role in shaping these empowering and resilient narratives. Increased representation behind the scenes supports authentic stories and captures distinct Black experiences. This shift mirrors the upsurge recognition of the strength, diversity, and agency within Black communities found by Hall (1993), Lee (2017), and Sewell (2013) years ago, as well as a conscious effort to counteract negative images that have existed in mainstream media since the 1880s.

The Woman King contributes to and embodies narratives of empowerment by depicting Black characters as leaders, and agents of change, and captures individual journeys to overcome adversity. As Black characters navigate obstacles and work towards their goals it positively contributes to their communities and society. *The Woman King* allows Black women, particularly those who are dark-skinned, to see themselves represented in mainstream media and culture. As the main characters develop, fans can relate to themes of women's empowerment, motherhood, and self-discovery. With storylines highlighting the success and occurrences of empowerment, they contribute to a more confident and motivational image of Black culture defying many harmful institutional and societal systems.

As a thematic element, resilience is intertwined into recent popular culture narratives, showcasing the ability of Black individuals and communities to endure and overcome systemic challenges. The storyline in the film showed how Agojie in the film evolved, overcame, and successfully protected their kingdom despite the obstacles they faced. This portrayal emphasizes the determination, strength, and resilience that exemplifies the Black experience. Resilience plots add to a wider understanding of the complex ways in which Black culture navigate and triumph over hardship and their pursuit of autonomy and actualization. Increased themes of resilience in media are consistent with González-Velázquez et al. (2020) assertion that popular culture actively contributes to the social construction of identity and give insight into how society perceive and accept individuals.

Many fans, however, reacted and responded to scenes surrounding moments of vulnerability considering themes of loss, sisterhood, and the sacrifices of family and motherhood. For example, General Nanisca's healing was a common theme throughout the storyline, in this process was realized after accepting the present and coming to terms with the

emotional wounds of her past. These findings were consistent with Adams' (2022) and Steele's (2016) views on Black fan's strained connection with media because of their portrayal. As a result, continued efforts to challenge and address systemic issues within the entertainment industry are needed to support this progression. Narratives involving empowerment and resilience reshape perceptions, counteract stereotypes, and promote an affirmative and inclusive perception of Black culture in media.

Recognition of Talent

Black culture in media's present state emphasizes the commitment to promote inclusivity through the transformative acknowledgment of Black talent and the conscious effort to reduce stereotypes. This paradigm shift also observed by Everett (2014) and Fox et al. (2020), signifies the rising response of the diversity, complexity, and distinction within the Black community. The growing population of Black creators and filmmakers has improved the diversity in decision-making and production positions within entertainment media. There has also been an increase in the recognition of their talent in front of and behind the camera. Minority members of the entertainment industry are actively working on dismantling obstacles and offering platforms for an expansive range of voices on the collective consciousness.

As a director, Gina Prince-Bythewood focused on uplifting Black female talent. This commitment to inclusivity reflects a recognition of the richness of Black culture and contributes to a more unbiased and symbolic media landscape. Furthermore, it highlights the shift from previous media studies by Dale et al., (2020), Mastro and Tukachinsky (2011), Oliver et al. (2015), and Ramasubramanian and Oliver (2007) that found it difficult to counteract negative stereotypes of racial and ethnic minorities in media.

However, some challenges continue, and there is a need for increased representation both in front of and behind the camera. The industry's leadership, decision-makers, and casting directors play a crucial role in shaping the narrative landscape. Advocacy for increased diversity in these positions is necessary for ensuring that the momentum toward authentic and diverse Black representation in media continues to develop. The storyline of *The Woman King* is told from a women's perspective which adds depth and authenticity. This finding aligns with J. B. Cole (2014), who highlighted the emphasis on Black identity and an increased awareness of the Black subculture since the Black liberation. The push for more authentic storytelling and improved representation is reshaping the narrative landscape, fostering a media environment that better reflects the diversity and complexity of Black culture. Through a predominantly Black, mostly female cast and crew, and creating a movie set in South Africa *The Woman King* has contributed to representation in film.

Consistent with prior postmodernist thought considered by R. T. Craig (1999), the findings demonstrate Black culture and representation in media are displayed through diverse narratives, empowerment and resilience, and the recognition of talent, revealing the multilayered dimensions through which popular culture serves as both a mirror and influencer of societal perceptions. The impact of Black representation is a facilitator for social change by promoting inclusivity. These results parallel earlier research by Bernabo (2019) in which film offers a rich array of meanings that prompt audiences to consider and assess their perspectives on societal issues beyond a singular dominant ideology. With a predominantly Black, mostly female cast *The Woman King* has become an example of visual narratives playing a crucial role in shaping cultural beliefs and attitudes about gender and race. The media landscape recognizes the potential to challenge stereotypes, amplify diverse voices, and contribute to a more equitable and

just society. There is an ongoing need to critically analyze current media portrayals across various platforms, to contribute valuable insights into the dialogue of Black culture, its representation, and the transformative possibilities inherent in media narratives.

RQ2: How does social media commentary about *The Woman King* film influence Black culture?

Media determines what we are exposed to and how we view it. With the increased access and availability of various social media channels, there is a growing and prominent symbiotic connection between the media ecology of digital platforms and fandom cultural discourse. The media content people watch, see, and interact with can influence our perceptions of belief systems, experiences, realities, and attitudes. Each medium creates biases that influence the culture that it is present. The medium itself, in this case, social media platforms, serves as the message, influencing the way cultural narratives are constructed and disseminated. Society's dominant technology is a direct reflection of developed cultural patterns.

Aligned with a previous study by Stabile and Ershler (2015), our findings support that with evolving technology, social media becomes a platform through which individuals actively construct knowledge, engaging in an interactive process shaped by their surrounding environment. Social media platforms provide unparalleled and dynamic connectivity that enables cultural narratives that are not only shared but also shaped by their respective digital landscape. This analysis supports the influence of perceptions that social media commentary has on Black culture. Through amplifying voices, cultural trends and memes, and influencing the Box Office there are dynamic distinctions revealed and are consistent with cultural studies and fandom research conducted by Chávez (2009) and Jenkins (2013).

Amplifying Voices

X is a democratized platform that allows users to share their experiences and opinions and can potentially confront and redefine traditional portrayals of Blacks in film and Black culture. Historically, Blacks in mainstream narratives have often been underrepresented or excluded. Through hashtags, reposts, and trending topics, X amplifies marginalized voices and brings Black thought to the forefront. With this study, viewing X as a technical artifact, practice, and set of beliefs, sets the stage as a platform in which voices are amplified. Subsequently, impacting and shaping cultural narratives surrounding Black popular cultural artifacts.

Confirming what has been established by Pfadenhauer (2019) and sociocultural theory, our research shows the reconstruction of how realities are formed and maintained, taking into account their objectivity, interpreting individuals' perspectives on reality, and realizing the emergence of subjectivity from each individual. Amplified voices support a deeper dialogue about Black culture and representation within the Black community. This study revealed diverse expressions that contributed to cultural conversations surrounding *The Woman King*, fostering both inclusive and critical discourse by encompassing both supportive and critical perspectives.

The #BoycottWomanKing hashtag in this study exemplifies how commentary on X can catalyze mobilization and activism within Black film and Black culture. Hashtags were used to connect with those who have similar beliefs and turn them into a shared social justice cause and promote change. Alternately, hashtags were also used to share contrasting narratives, paralleling earlier research from Burr (2015) and Fosnot (2005) that asserted individuals who share a common culture are shaped by their pre-existing cultural knowledge as their reality unfolds, with their interpretations of interactions framing their thoughts. Engagement on X drove conversations outside of the platform, impacting and influencing broader digital cultural

discussions and the real world. The immediacy of posts on X allows users to quickly engage in conversations surrounding cultural events and social concerns. Cultural discourse on X is transformed by influencing perceptions among vast audiences that may have differing attitudes and cultural norms. X is a significant agent in shaping the cultural narratives of Black communities and created digital artifacts of varied stories, struggles, and identities while assessing *The Woman King*'s contribution to Black culture.

Cultural Trends and Memes

As a social media platform, X not only reflects cultural trends but drives them in the Black community. Memes, GIFs, videos, and emojis are forms of fan and cultural expressions often created, disseminated, and amplified on social media. This study built off of Everett's (2014) views of Black popular culture as a unique and dynamic cultural phenomenon that has played a pivotal role in influencing American popular culture, encompassing a multitude of cultural expressions. Trends in cultural expressions can transcend the boundaries of time and space in the digital realm and can contribute to the creation of a shared cultural identity in the Black community. On social media channels such as X, fans transform certain aspects of Black films into cultural phenomena. Memes, catchphrases, and trends originating from or related to *The Woman King* or other Black films can rapidly and organically spread across the digital landscape, becoming a part of the broader Black cultural phenomena.

Hashtags can be viewed as cultural markers by identifying and linking shared experiences and related significant cultural discussions that contribute to the construction of Black cultural trends. The creation and use of Memes, GIFs, and videos and the integration of emojis are a form of cultural shorthand on X. Social media users use popular cultural artifacts such as *The Woman King* to produce and spread various forms of cultural shorthand to disseminate memes to capture

and wittily comment on cultural ideologies, experiences, and societal experiences. With the #TheWomanKing and #BoycottWomanKing hashtags trending, posts that use these tags alongside cultural shorthand contribute to their widespread circulation and normalization of certain cultural symbols, phrases, or gestures within Black culture. These findings add to Florini's (2019) and Lawson-Borders' (2018) discussions about the unique linguistic patterns and communication styles within the African American community. The film-based cultural shorthand's become an accessible and relatable means through which cultural commentary is shared, shaping the discourse, and reflecting the communal humor and creativity of Black Twitter.

The influence of posts on X surrounding Black culture through cultural trends and shorthand reflects society. As a result, *The Woman King* shorthand helps shape popular culture and contributes to the evolution of Black cultural expression. Aligned with previous studies from Asante and Nziba Pindi (2020) and Fox et al. (2020), the research demonstrates Black popular culture has been instrumental in fostering cultural and political empowerment for the Black community and is instrumental in shaping the collective Black consciousness. Posts on X also highlighted the forms of activism in *The Woman King*. Fans noticed and engaged in conversation about the tribute to Breonna Taylor in the post-credits of the film fostering a sense of collective mourning and solidarity. The influence of X on Black culture exemplifies the social media platform's potential to surpass digital spaces and impact real-world outcomes through collective discourse.

Influencing the Box Office

The rising influence of social media raises concerns regarding its impact on the entertainment industry and sway box office performance is a concern. Film releases are

progressively impacted by the online conversations and sentiments expressed on social media platforms. An understanding of these discussions can be translated into concrete outcomes in terms of viewership, box office success, and industry recognition. The film's outcome is paramount to measuring the gravity of social media's influence on the representation and reception of Black culture in mainstream media. This study's results were consistent with that of Everett's (2014) and Fox et al. (2020) view of media industries capitalizing on the participatory nature of digital media and communication technology and the transformation of popular culture by Black audiences. Many conversations on X shared concerns and criticism with the support of *The Woman King*.

Positive or negative social media commentary can impact the success of Black films and their viewership. There were many discussions on X about recommendations, reviews, and discussions on the film that influenced other users' choices. These results were also consistent with the limited effects model in media effects studies, in which Werder (2009) corroborates media has minimal impact on the audience since individuals can exercise control over the media messages they consume and their interpretations. Reactions and opinions on *The Woman King* during the opening weekend in real-time caused the #TheWomanKing and #BoycottWomanKing hashtags to trend. Trending topics reach a wider audience contributing to the shaping of public perception and the film's success. The endorsements by influential voices and positive sentiment within Black X create a buzz that extends beyond the platform, generating interest, and anticipation, and creating a form of word-of-mouth marketing.

Additionally, positive Black representation created sentiments of support. Criticisms related to the historical representation of Dahomey and their role in the Transatlantic Slave Trade quickly gained traction on X and caused potential viewers to reconsider *The Woman King*.

Consistent with prior fandom research from Chávez (2009) and Jenkins (2013) affirming that cultural studies reveal the historical and contemporary connections between audiences and mass media, impacting everyday life. Social media commentary greatly influences and shapes Black culture and the public perspective on representation through its immediacy and reach. *The Woman King* is an example of how dark-skinned Black women can lead a global box office and challenge dominant cultural narratives.

In line with existing social constructivism thought outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Creswell and Poth (2018), this study affirms the position that people seek to comprehend the world by engaging with the communities in which they interact. This study shows that there is an intricate relationship between social media commentary and Black cultural discourse, emphasizing the deep impact they have on shaping and disseminating cultural narratives. The increased accessibility and availability of social media, has drastically improved connectivity, showcasing its power to amplify voices, propel cultural trends and memes, and even influence the Box Office. The dynamic distinctions uncovered through this research underscore the symbiotic connection between social media and cultural discourse and the transformative impact on cultural narratives and their reception within diverse communities supporting Turner and West's (2020) media ecology assumptions: media are infused in every act and action in society, media fixing our perceptions and organizing our experiences, and media tying the world together.

RQ3: In Black communities, how does social media commentary affect the fandom of *The Woman King* film?

Social media creates a dynamic landscape and is a powerful channel for fans of contemporary media. Social media platforms serve as mediums that have reshaped and

influenced the traditional dynamics of fandom. Everett (2014) credited these shifts in the twenty-first century to the influence of Black culture. X's affordances of real-time engagement, fandom rituals, and community building are especially powerful in Black communities. Media connects us; as technology advances, there are more means and opportunities to connect people across time and space. The global village creates an ecosystem in which economic, social, political, and cultural systems are merging and being influenced by one another.

With the increase in access and usage of social media by members of the Black community, expanding the global village, it has become a digital space for them to express, applaud, and engage with cultural artifacts. In this study, social media commentary exhibits rhetorical techniques within Black spaces such as humor and folktales rooted in Black oral culture that Steele (2016, 2018) recognized. Fandom in digital spaces is continuing to evolve as a place to share cultural experiences beyond time and distance and create an online communal identity. As indicated by Gamaleri (2019), studying media by framing its environment provided insight into the contexts in which communication is processed and how the medium of the message influences its interpretation. These results support M. McLuhan's (2011) earlier research, indicating with the growing technicality of new media, there have been dynamic changes in communication, culture, and society transforming our world into a global village.

Real-time Engagement

The global village has created an environment where media is accessible at any time and place. Social media platforms such as X provide immediate and dynamic interactions among fans. The immediacy of posts, replies, reposts, and discussions surrounding shared experiences creates a unique space for cultivating fandom in real-time, allowing Black communities to actively participate in the creation and dissemination of cultural content. Consistent with prior

fandom research from Busse (2009) our findings demonstrated the expansion of fandom, and how it empowers fans to connect and communicate with fellow enthusiasts. Black fans being able to construct communal identity and cultural discourse has been transformative in creating new digital spaces.

These digital spaces are linked by collective expressions, cultural references, and shared experiences. X as a digital space synchronous community building, particularly during significant cultural moments such as the release of *The Woman King* film. Many fans who saw the film during the opening weekend posted live about the experience, and shared their reactions, and emotional responses. Fans leverage hashtags to draw attention to conversations about the film and navigate the complexities of Black representation in media. Black fans taking advantage of real-time engagement with cultural artifacts can be viewed as a digital ritual.

Fandom Rituals

Fandom rituals on social media consider the cultural practices and shared experiences that define and reinforce fan identity within Black communities. Social media contributes to the construction of a collective fan culture by allowing users to create and share their fan rituals in digital spaces. Participation is crucial for preserving oral and cultural traditions of Black culture, as well as engaging in acts of resistance. Similar findings surrounding fandom rituals on podcasts have been observed by Florini (2015, 2017), Fox et al. (2020), Giroux (2011), and Tiffe and Hoffmann (2017). Analyzing the rituals of *The Woman King* fans on X provides insights into how digital platforms not only serve as spaces for fan expression but also contribute to the formation of traditions and practices that build and connect communities. The development of fandom rituals on Black X is a dynamic and culturally significant phenomenon that contributes to the unity and identity of Black fan communities.

Hashtags are a critical element in the creation of fandom rituals on X. These findings align with prior research by Busse (2009), Hobbs (2022), and Jenkins (2013) indicating algorithms now play a significant role in mediating fans' interactions with media content on digital platforms. Fans use specific hashtags such as #TheWomanKing to mark and organize discussions, creating a ritualistic pattern of engagement around themes like *The Woman King*. These hashtag rituals are a symbolic marker, reinforcing a sense of shared identity among Black fans. When users repost, quote, or like posts on X, it functions as a participatory ritual, replicating the communal nature of Black fandom. Fans being able to validate expressions, and acknowledge shared experiences through these interactions becomes a ritualistic practice that strengthens a sense of belonging and mutual support.

X users often post content and events live, forming a collective ritual that emulates traditional communal viewing experiences. In these live posts, fans often share reactions, analyses, insights, and celebratory thoughts. During the opening weekend of *The Woman King*, many fans posted about their experience seeing and supporting the film, establishing an additional form of fandom rituals. Most fans posted before and after viewing the film. Despite it being taboo to use phones during the movie viewing experience in theaters, others, however, posted while in theaters and some even took pictures and shared them. Busse (2009) has suggested that fans' increased online presence, media engagement, and generated content have shifted media research to audiences, fandom, and subculture communities. Additionally, as mentioned previously, fans often express their humor and creativity by creating and sharing cultural expressions such as memes related to the fandom.

Similar ritualistic behaviors as fans in digital spaces are used among anti-fans. Anti-fans may create hashtags to criticize and express negative opinions on shows, films, or celebrities and

to encourage others who share similar sentiments. The #BoycottWomanKing hashtag was primarily used by anti-fans of *The Woman King*. Through the expression of dissatisfaction, many anti-fans increased live critique posts during the opening weekend to create a counter-narrative to the positive discussions within the fandom. Although anti-fandom rituals are not universally negative, several trolling posts left negative comments or harassed *The Woman King* fans. These findings provide insight into the double consciousness of Black identity discussed by Brock (2012), Du Bois and Wortham (2011), Dyer (2017), and Morrison, (1993).

Both positive and negative expressions of fandom rituals can gain visibility quickly due to the platform's real-time nature and the use of hashtags. These rituals not only serve as a way for fans and anti-fans to express their passion but also contribute to the overall visibility and engagement of the fandom on X and other social media platforms. Drawing on the perspectives of Fiske (2010) and Jenkins (2013, 2018), this study can interpret this as a type of activist activity, where fans are regarded as interpretive communities actively advocating for their subcultures.

There is a challenge to maintain a balance between expressing opinions, and criticism, and maintaining a respectful discourse on X. Despite this, the establishment of recurring fan engagement on X dedicated to *The Woman King* fosters ongoing rituals that strengthen community bonds. These rituals, deeply embedded in X's functionalities and dynamics, create a unique space where Black fans actively participate in the co-creation of their digital cultural landscape and contribute to the ongoing construction of cultural identity.

Community Building

Social media commentary is a facilitator in the development of connections and solidarity within Black fandoms. In addition to individual expressions of passion and support, the

collaborative nature of online connections supports the formation of strong communities. Community building on social media illustrates the socio-cultural significance of fandom within Black communities and its potential implications on broader social dynamics. The concept of community building reiterates how Black fandom on X shapes cultural identity and fosters social connections. Fans and anti-fans of *The Woman King* actively engaged in discussions and shared experiences, insights, and expressions that contributed to the formation of a vibrant and interconnected community despite geographical boundaries.

The reciprocal nature of interactions within Black fandom on X exemplifies how social media can be a powerful tool for community building. This research considers M. L. Craig (2002), Edgar and Toone (2019), and Lofton and Davis (2015) emphasizing the significance of private spaces for Black individuals, highlighting their historical role as sanctuaries for fostering cultural pride and resilience. Shared cultural references, language patterns, collaborative engagement, and lived experiences make these communities stronger. In addition to fan expression, cultural nuances are celebrated, shared, and collectively shaped, fostering a resilient and supportive community rooted in shared cultural experiences. Social media commentary influences the creation of fandom in Black communities through cultural participation, collective identity, and shared experiences in the contemporary digital age.

Implications

This section provides an overview of the implications of the findings of this qualitative content analysis study and how it fits into and contributes to the existing body of knowledge. Black popular culture is central to sharing Black thoughts, culture, and experiences (Nelson, 2019). This study contributed to the limited scholarly research on Black popular culture artifacts created for Black audiences and its Black fandom. Hall's cultural studies theory enriches the

implications by emphasizing how cultural meanings are shaped by media artifacts (Chávez, 2009). Examining *The Woman King* fans on X, combined with a content analysis of the film, reveals how *The Woman King* represents and portrays Black culture. This study also sheds light on its influence in challenging dominant narratives and shaping the discourse surrounding Black representation in mainstream media, underscoring Hall's (2004) assertion that media representations are sites of cultural negotiation. As a result, three practical implications of this study are significant contributions to both academic scholarships concerning cultural studies and fandom theories our understanding of Black culture in media, and the broader impact of social media on Black popular culture discourse.

The first crucial implication of this study is how findings of the CTDA framework and discourse analysis significantly contribute to our understanding of how Black culture is displayed and discussed in contemporary media. *The Woman King* serves as a cultural benchmark within the digital landscape of influencing discussions about Black culture and its representation in media. Jenkins' (2013, 2018) view of fandom as a participatory cultural practice aligns with the findings surrounding *The Woman King*'s influence in challenging dominant narratives. Through analyzing the interactions of fans and anti-fans on X, this study provides valuable insights into the active engagement and contribution of users with the film and its broader implications on how Black culture is portrayed in the media, received by fans, and interpreted in the digital realm by different audiences. This study revealed themes centering on unique narratives, empowerment, resilience, and the acknowledgment of Black talent. *The Woman King* was a catalyst for conversations that challenged dominant narratives and reshaped the discourse surrounding Black representation in popular media.

These results build on existing evidence of how popular culture artifacts can empower individuals and communities. Jenkins' (2013, 2018) conceptualization of fandom as a participatory culture that surpasses traditional consumption patterns is evident in the study's emphasis on X as a space for community building and engagement. User engagement and interactions on X became a means of fostering a sense of community and shared cultural identity.

Additionally, this study contributed to themes of anti-fandom how the perpetuation of online conflicts, and the amplification of divisive perspectives. This understanding is crucial not only for scholars but also for filmmakers, writers, and producers seeking to create more authentic, inclusive, and diverse representations in mainstream media. This study contributes to ongoing conversations within the field about the power of media in shaping cultural perceptions and challenging stereotypes by providing insights into the reception and impact of films within specific communities, aligning with Jenkins' (2013, 2018) assertion that fans are not passive consumers but active producers of cultural content. Furthering the discussion on the influence of Black popular culture artifacts produced by media industries and fans (Everett, 2014).

The second key implication of this study is social media's impact on Black culture. Social media platforms, such as X, act as dynamic virtual spaces where discourse and dialogue influence and shape perceptions and attitudes toward Black culture, individuals, and communities. As the accessibility and diversity of social media channels continue to expand, a symbiotic relationship between these digital platforms and cultural discourse becomes increasingly evident and impactful, supporting Jenkins' (2013, 2018) view on fandoms' participatory nature and role in shaping perceptions and attitudes toward Black culture. These platforms offer unprecedented connectivity, fostering the sharing and active shaping of cultural narratives within their digital realms. X is shown as a platform for Black individuals to reconnect

with their oral communicative traditions and has become a widely embraced forum for sharing insights on cultural and social occurrences (Roberts, 2009).

Examining the connection between Black everyday life and experiences, and investigating this relationship alongside their online discourse can establish a distinctive and alternative public communal space (Steele, 2016). This examination underscores the considerable influence that social media commentary exerts on shaping perceptions of Black culture. Amplifying voices, disseminating cultural trends and memes, and impacting the Box Office, are all distinctive elements that provide an understanding of how Blacks produce and reproduce Black culture among online fan communities. Highlighting the use of cultural shorthand adds to the Black linguistics and aesthetics (Florini, 2019).

The final significant implication of this study is the influence social media has on Black fandom. Social media creates a dynamic landscape and is a powerful channel for fans of contemporary media. By examining the interplay between the film, social media commentary, and the formation of fandom, the research provides insights into how digital platforms can contribute to community building and cultural engagement for fans and anti-fans. In exploring the influence of social media on Black fandom, the study contributes to Jenkins' (2013, 2018) understanding of the evolving nature of fandom in digital spaces. Social media platforms have redefined and impacted the conventional aspects of fandom, especially within Black communities. Furthering Bernabo's (2019) notion that X can be used to amplify popular culture artifacts and offer a more expansive understanding of the role television and films play in addressing cultural, and societal issues, and engagement on social media.

X's capabilities for real-time engagement, fostering fandom rituals, and building communities prove especially influential in exemplifying the participatory nature of

contemporary fandom within Black online spaces. The surge in social media access and usage among Black community members has transformed these platforms into digital arenas where they can express, celebrate, and interact with cultural artifacts. Fandom in digital spaces is continuing to evolve as a place to share cultural experiences beyond time and distance and create an online communal identity. These findings align with Jenkins' (2018) view that digital platforms provide new avenues for fans and anti-fans to engage with and contribute to *The Woman King*'s cultural phenomena.

This study revealed trending hashtags such as #TheWomanKing and #BoycottWomanKing, which were leveraged by Black fans and anti-fans contributing to the advantages of digital media by creating their own meticulously crafted hashtags for live-tweeting, participating in culturally derived fan activities that revolve around Black experiences viewed through Black cultural perspectives (Florini, 2019). This study contributed to the limited scholarly research on Black popular culture artifacts created for Black audiences and its Black fandom. As media continues to evolve, these implications provide a foundation for future research, encouraging scholars to explore the dynamic interplay between media artifacts, fandom, and cultural representation within the ever-expanding landscape of digital communication.

Delimitations and Limitations

The study's use of Brock's CTDA multimodal analytic technique and a content analysis of *The Woman King* film provides a rich understanding of the cultural behavior and language patterns of the fans. Examining *The Woman King* fans on X, brings forth significant implications for academic discourse, media practitioners, and the broader societal understanding of Black representation in popular culture. However, several constraints merit consideration and

researchers must acknowledge and discuss the constraints and potential biases that may have influenced the research outcomes. These considerations are integral to the scholarly dialogue surrounding fan communities and the broader impact of media representation on cultural discourse. Therefore, this section focuses on the identification and discussion of the constraints due to the delimitation and limitations of this study.

Delimitations are constraints placed by the researcher to control factors that may affect the results of the study or to narrow the focus on a specific problem (Terrell, 2016). First, this study focuses on a specific social media platform, X. Although X's distinctive affordances provided insight into how *The Woman King* fans participated in discourse, focusing on a specific platform may limit the generalizability of the findings. Each social media platform has distinguishing features, diverse user dynamics, and the behaviors observed may not be representative of the entire fan community. Additionally, the study's qualitative nature may pose constraints in terms of scalability, making it challenging to capture the full breadth of fan interactions.

The study designs limited data points by considering posts containing keywords such as TheWomanKing, WomanKingMovie, WomanKing, and BoycottWomanKing. Given the sheer number of posts over the opening weekend of *The Woman King*, the researcher had to further narrow down to posts from 6:00 p.m. UTC to 7:59 p.m. UTC on Friday, September 16th, 2022, and Saturday, September 17th, 2022, resulting in the purposive sampling of 1,469 relevant posts ($\mu = 1,469$). As such, the sampled posts may not fully represent the diversity of *The Woman King* fanbase, but posts were collected until there was data saturation. The study acknowledges this limitation but suggests that the use of content analysis and CTDA may compensate for some of these biases by offering a more immersive and nuanced understanding of online behaviors.

Additionally, only examining one Black cultural artifact was another delimitation. Including other cultural artifacts that were to be aired in the future will provide an opportunity for real-time data collection. As a methodology, CTDA has not been widely used so there is no direct approach to implement in the study. However, its prescriptive nature and application make it most suitable to investigate digital media discourse utilizing a qualitative content analysis to evaluate technologies as an accumulation of artifacts, practices, and cultural beliefs critically.

Content analysis methods draw on the researcher's experience as an observer; working inductively, the researcher builds patterns and themes. As a Black woman conducting this study on the film *The Woman King*, I acknowledge that my background, culture, and lived experiences may play a role in defining the interpretations of themes developed from the data. Despite my familiarity with Black culture and Black popular culture, some references were not fully understood.

Limitations are inherent to the study due to the methodology and setting that may affect the generalizability of the results (Terrell, 2016). The reliance on digital data, specifically captured posts on platform X, raises concerns about the representativeness of the sample. Some fans may be more active online than others, and the study may inadvertently prioritize the voices of those who are vocal within digital spaces. Additionally, the study acknowledges that the data collected is static and may not capture the evolving nature of online conversations over time.

Furthermore, the discourse analysis of posts related to *The Woman King* film, while providing valuable insights into fan discussions, may encounter limitations in interpreting the nuances of tone, context, and intent within online conversations. Since pre-existing historical posts were used, the data collected may not reflect all the posts that occurred during the opening weekend. If user's accounts were banned, deleted, or set as private between the time they were

posted until data collection occurred, those posts were not accessible. Posts that were also deleted before data collection were not included. The data presented in this study is representative of the time data was collected and can impact the interpretation of the results.

Acknowledging potential biases is essential, especially in research involving digital spaces and minority groups. The study recognizes that certain user groups, such as those less digitally literate may be underrepresented. The digital divide introduces a constraint that needs consideration when interpreting the findings, as the experiences of offline fans may not be fully captured. Additionally, there was no way to filter posts by race or gender. Despite these constraints, the study's implications are insightful. It contributes to the evolving field of content analyses and multimodal analysis, offering methodologies for future researchers to explore fan behaviors in digital spaces. The findings offer insights into how *The Woman King* contributes to Black popular culture and challenges dominant narratives, contributing to ongoing discussions within cultural studies and fandom theories.

Future Research

This study revealed the cultural behavior of *The Woman King* fans on X and the film's impact on Black popular culture in digital spaces. However, the study's delimitations and limitations indicate the necessity for additional exploration of Black popular culture, the dissemination of Black thought, and creating spaces for critical dialogues. How Black popular culture matters and what influences Blacks in digital spaces requires further research. Particularly around Black fandom and the use of social media as a cultural form to discuss Black cultural representation. With limited existing research this section explores opportunities for future research that could further enrich our understanding of the role of Black culture in media and the influence of social media commentary.

Future research in related studies can take advantage of a more longitudinal approach by examining fan interactions and discussions over extended periods. This would provide insights into how perceptions and interpretations of *The Woman King* change over time, capturing the dynamic nature of online discourse among all audience members of the film. Additionally, this would allow fans and anti-fans to engage in more critical and robust discussions. Depth to this study can be added by considering other social media platforms and comparing their respective digital practices and language patterns among fans. Each social media platform has its unique features, and a comparative study could highlight variations in cultural behaviors, and how fan expressions are tailored to different digital spaces.

Additionally, in-depth interviews with fans can provide a more personal perspective on their motivations for fandom, emotional connections to the film, and their perspective on Black culture and how it affects their perception of their cultural identity. Researchers can further examine the role of intersectionality and the identity of fans by analyzing the views of different intersecting demographics. The study focused on the collective experience of *The Woman King* fans, but future research should consider how intersecting identities within fandom may create sub-communities within the Black community. Exploring how factors such as race, gender, sexuality, and socioeconomic status intersect in shaping fan interactions could provide a better understanding of the diverse voices within the community.

Furthermore, research in media studies can delve deeper into the intricate relationship between media industries and their promotion strategies on social media platforms. Investigating the role of media promotion in fostering both positive and negative discourse surrounding media artifacts is paramount. This research would explore how media industries strategically utilize social media platforms to promote cultural products, navigate public opinion, and ultimately

shape perceptions of Black popular culture artifacts. By doing so, it can improve the understanding how media industries actively shape and influence conversations about media and popular culture artifacts. Future media studies can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics between media industries, social media, and Black popular culture in digital spaces.

Conducting similar studies on other Black popular culture artifacts and exploring how they are received and discussed within digital fandoms can provide comparative insights. This approach would contribute to a broader understanding of patterns and variations in fan engagement within the context of Black representation in media. Exploring *The Woman King* functions as a valuable foundation for future research by revealing the complexities of fan engagement. The proposed directions for future research aimed to address identified gaps, ensuring a more inclusive assessment of the role of Black culture in media, social media's influence on it, and the cultural discourse surrounding Black representation in popular media in Black communities.

Summary

This qualitative content analysis study aimed to understand *The Woman King* fans' cultural behavior and language patterns on X and the film's impact on Black popular culture. The findings showed the cultural impact of *The Woman King* on X, within Black popular culture, is insightful and complex. Positive audience engagement among diverse perspectives is evident, with fans celebrating the representation of Black characters, particularly Black women, fostering pride and empowerment. The film's portrayal of Black characters and storyline, addressing issues of race and gender, influences conversations intersecting with misogyny. Cultural critiques involve analyses of other films, exploring historical accuracy and socio-political

frameworks. Fans engage in broader societal discourse, enriching the film's impact on cultural conversations beyond cinema.

Film discussions encompass more than reactions, exploring diverse interpretations, cultural significance, and the complex relationship between media, identity, and discourse. Social media platforms like X serve as spaces for Black audiences to engage, share thoughts, and build a sense of community around popular culture artifacts, leading to the film's increased visibility and growth in fandom. Positive reinforcement for *The Woman King*'s predominantly Black female cast and crew contributes to a culture of pride within the Black community. Discussions address representation gaps and challenges faced by Black filmmakers, incorporating concerns about the film's two White writers.

Social media commentary reflects Black communities' expression of cultural identity in response to the film. Conversations between fans and anti-fans highlight the complexity of audience dynamics, emphasizing the need to acknowledge dissenting voices in the analysis of Black popular culture. Anti-fans aim to negatively impact the film's box office and shed light on the Dahomey tribe's historical role in the Transatlantic Slave Trade. Anti-fans affiliated with ADOS and FBA introduce layers of opposition, emphasizing the film's intersectionality with socio-political movements. Social media becomes a tool to hold filmmakers accountable for authentic representation and challenge harmful stereotypes. The divide and varying viewpoints within the Black community are evident in the discourse. Commentary on social media becomes a form of word of mouth, raising awareness of Black films and contributing to broader audience reach.

The inclusion of a tribute to Breonna Taylor during the film's post-credits reinforces *The Woman King*'s role as a cultural artifact intertwined with real-world events, cultural trends, and

values. X leverages its platform to raise awareness about racial injustice and inequality, showcasing the film's active participation in shaping societal perspectives within the digital realm of Black popular culture. *The Woman King* transcends conventional boundaries, contributing actively to discussions that extend beyond the cinematic experience. Communication scholars now have an increased understanding of how Blacks produce and reproduce Black culture and the social commentary and fandom it creates in digital spaces.

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Appendices

Coding Sheet

Sample Coding Sheet to Document Posts Related to The Woman King

Id	Name	Post	Image	Time stamp	Key words	Profile Type	Replies	Reposts	Quotes	Likes	Bookmarks	Themes	URL

Sample Table to Document Signs from the Content Analysis of The Woman King

Sign # (Time: 00:00:00)
4. Signifier (form) 5. Signified (concept, denotation)
6. Sign (connotation)