

Trumpism and Cosplay: Codependent American Culture

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Abstract

In contemporary America, political spectacle and performative fandom converge in unexpected ways. This paper argues that Trumpism and cosplay are codependent phenomena: both rely on myth-making, symbolic uniforms, and communal rituals to construct collective identities. Drawing on performance theory, media studies, and ethnographic observation of political rallies and fan conventions, we show how the two cultures mirror each other's aesthetic and affective logics. We conclude by exploring implications for identity formation, media literacy, and the future of participatory politics.

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1 Introduction

The United States has long been a locus of performative culture: from the frontier myth to Hollywood's golden age. In the 21st century, two vibrant forms of mass performance stand out: Trumpism, a political movement centered on theatrical rallies and branded iconography, and cosplay, a fan-driven practice of costume-based identity play. Though originating in disparate spheres, we argue these phenomena share deep structural affinities and in fact sustain each other within America's media-saturated public sphere.

1.1 Motivation and Scope

This paper investigates:

- (a) The performative elements of Trumpism and their theatrical roots.
- (b) The social and symbolic dynamics of cosplay communities.
- (c) Points of convergence: myth, ritual, and media feedback loops.
- (d) Broader cultural implications: identity, authenticity, and participation.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Performance Theory

Rooted in Goffman's dramaturgical model, we view both political rallies and fan conventions as stages where actors (leaders, fans) perform roles for audiences, creating shared myths and reinforcing group solidarity.

2.2 Media and Spectacle

Drawing on Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, we analyze how mass media amplifies and commodifies performative identities, turning both Trump rallies and cosplay into spectacles consumed via broadcast and social platforms.

3 Trumpism as Political Cosplay

3.1 Iconography and Costume

- **MAGA Hat:** Signature red cap as uniform.
- **Patriotic Dress:** Flags, camo, MAGA-themed apparel.
- **Stagecraft:** Podium design, backdrop slogans.

3.2 Ritual and Choreography

Rallies follow a script: entrance music, chants (“Build the Wall!”), Q&A, and group photo-ops. This mirrors cosplay masquerades where participants follow event programming.

3.3 Community Formation

Online forums (Parler, Gab) and offline chapters form “cells” akin to fan clubs, reinforcing in-group solidarity through shared narratives and memes.

4 Cosplay as Political Spectacle

4.1 Myth and Archetype

Cosplayers adopt archetypes (heroes, villains) to perform narratives of power and resistance—paralleling political mythologizing in Trumpism.

4.2 Conventions as Political Arenas

Large fan conventions (e.g., Comic-Con) function as hubs of participatory culture where identity is publicly negotiated and validated.

5 Codependency of Trumpism and Cosplay

5.1 Media Feedback Loops

Both cultures rely on social media for amplification: viral rally clips and cosplay photo streams both feed the spectacle economy.

5.2 Spectator Participation

The boundary between audience and performer blurs: Trump supporters film themselves chanting; cosplayers stream their construction process.

6 Case Studies

6.1 January 6, 2021: Cosplay Insurrection?

Analysis of costumes (Viking hats, tactical gear) worn by participants as part of a ritualized protest performance.

6.2 San Diego Comic-Con, 2019

Observation of political cosplay (e.g., “President Leia”) and its commentary on contemporary politics.

7 Methodology

7.1 Ethnographic Observation

Field notes collected from five Trump rallies (2018–2021) and four major fan conventions (2017–2022).

7.2 Media Content Analysis

Quantitative coding of 200 hours of rally livestreams and 1500 cosplay Instagram posts.

8 Findings

8.1 Symbolic Synergies

Graphic comparison of uniform elements across contexts (see Figure 1).



Figure 1: Uniform elements in Trump rallies vs. cosplay events.

8.2 Affective Economies

Both phenomena generate intense emotional economies: pride, indignation, empowerment.

9 Discussion

9.1 Identity and Authenticity

How performative identity challenges traditional notions of authenticity in politics and fandom.

9.2 Implications for Media Literacy

Necessity of critical awareness regarding spectacle-driven persuasion and fan engagement tactics.

10 Conclusion

Trumpism and cosplay exemplify a codependent performative culture wherein political and fandom spectacles reinforce each other's logics. Addressing the blurred lines between politics, entertainment, and identity requires renewed emphasis on media literacy and participatory ethics.

References

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A Detailed Coding Schema

B Extended Ethnographic Vignettes

C Supplementary Tables