

## 5.4. **DIGITAL CULTURE AND MUSIC: THE INFLUENCE OF FANDOM ON MUSICAL CONSOLIDATION IN PANDEMIC TIMES THROUGH DIGITAL PLATFORMS**

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### × **Abstract**

This study aims to identify the influence of fandom on the consolidation of artistic success in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, analysing the behavioral phenomena related to the audience on digital platforms of independent artist Ana Cañas. The pandemic caused the cancellation of in-person concerts, bringing major difficulties for the artists. In the middle of this scenario, Ana Cañas achieved artistic success, made possible due the intervention of fandom. This research is based on qualitative and quantitative approach and is classified as a case study, using document analysis and netnography as research techniques for data collection and selection and analysis of comments generated from fan activism, around three digital platforms - Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. It was found that fandom activism effectively helped in the musical consolidation of the independent artist, but represented, above all, a political act of resistance.

**Keywords:** digital platforms, fandom, resistance, independent music, pandemic.

## 1. **Introduction**

The digital culture, with the emergence of the internet, brought the possibility of the musical consolidation of an independent artist through the intervention of fandom's activities, a term used to characterize the meeting of fans in digital platforms, regardless of sociocultural factors or geographical limits. Fans act in the divulgation of their idol for the legitimation of the artist success through network participation. For Jenkins (1992), "the fandom is, therefore, one of manifestations more representative of the participatory culture. When talking about fandom what is in question is not only the individual behavior of a fan, but a collective experience." (Ribeiro, 2016: 11). Fans for a long time were seen as passive people of mass culture, however, with contemporary studies and the emergence of digital culture, they came to be seen as an engaged audience that actively participates in culture. The resources present in digital platforms enables their participation in the flow of communicational processes. This research is based on the assumption that fans offer alternative solutions as well as represent resistance: "Fan activism is a form of resistance in the creative and cultural ambit" (Amaral et al., 2015: 141).

This research aims to analyse the influence of fandom on the musical consolidation of the independent

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music artist Ana Cañas, through digital platforms, during the pandemic period. We considered that online fandom activism has enabled the artist's success through the resources available on the internet generating network dialogues, debating agendas, offering creative solutions, and enabling a crowdfunding campaign. Through this research, we intended to analyze how the fans' communities on digital platforms are constituted and to identify how the resources available made possible the proximity between fandom and artist in order to mediate the communication. For this reason, we analyzed the dialogue and interactivity of fans to understand the power and degree of the fandom's influence on digital platforms, and how this has reflected in the artist's success, identifying the main factors that were determinant for this singer's artistic success. As mentioned before, for the purposes of this study, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube are used as digital platforms of analysis, more specifically the official profiles in which the artist is registered to communicate with the public. It will also be carried out an analysis between the social activism of fandom of the independent artist Ana Cañas in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This research hopes to be a contribution with clues to be followed by other artists in the independent scene, providing a reflection on the subversive and activist role of the online fandom, considered as an agent of social mobilization in digital culture.

## 2. Digital culture and music

The digital culture has brought revolutionary changes to the music scene, offering new possibilities for the consumption, production, and dissemination of the product as a cultural asset: "Digital Culture is transforming the manifestations of musicality and people's relationship with music" (Cuervo, 2016: 28). The main milestone in the music scene in the digital era occurred with the emergence of the Peer-to-Peer (P2P) networks that made it possible to consume music easily and informally in MP3 format by simply connecting to the internet through a computer, without the need for a physical reproduction media. It is notable that the digital culture has brought new consumption habits that strongly impacted the growth of music industry globally, mainly due to the streaming consumption. Digital platforms emerge together with digital culture, allowing the computer-mediated communication through information transmitted and recorded in the communicative process. Digital platforms are understood as "the technologic space of inscription and transmission of the information, visible from the access screen, recorded on the respective disk and memory, in order to be communicated" (Passarelli et al., 2014: 116).

## 3. Fandom and social activism

### 3.1. The origin of fan studies

Etymologically, "fandom is an English term originated of two terms: fan and kingdom. It's used to designate the fan communities of a specific cultural product, usually provided on the Internet" (Souza & Martins, 2012: 5). A fandom can integrate several participants and is usually associated with destitute groups of social influence, regardless of sociocultural characteristics.

*\*Fandom is typically associated with cultural forms that the dominant value system denigrates – pop music, romance novels, comics [...] It is thus associated with the cultural tastes of subordinated formations of the people, particularly with those disempowered by any combination of gender, age, class and race (Fiske, 1992: 30)*

Communication between fans and artists passed through transformations and got a greater prominence with the emergence of digital culture. Amaral (2009) corroborates that, through online forums and social networking sites, audiences give visibility to the idol's work, which before was restricted to correspondence, fanzines or others alternative media. For Jenkins: "None of this is new. What has shifted is the visibility of fan culture. The Web provides a powerful new distribution channel for amateur cultural production" (Jenkins, 2006: 131). Fandom activities and their segments have won a greater

prominence with the internet. Fans identify themselves with other fans and debate and exchange information, regardless of social differences, because they share a common objective, and are united “in a kind of alternative society, which acquires characteristics of a complex and organized society, fans share references, interests, and a common sense of identify that makes them feel like they belong to a large group” (Ribeiro, 2016: 10). Fans’ studies originate from the dichotomy between passive and active audience, the result of a new contemporary configuration. According to Carlos and Gelain (2018), fans’ studies arise from the discussion of a passive versus an active audience in the United States and Europe, the fan being differentiated by the engagement with the media industry and its texts. Furthermore, for Escosteguy (2001), in contemporary studies, proposed by the Centre of Contemporary Cultural Studies – CCCS, of the University of Birmingham (Souza & Martins, 2012), the figure of the fan is described as that of an active and critical individual, and not just as a simple passive and submissive receiver. The fan is someone capable of interpreting the message intended for them and of reacting in an interventional manner.

In relation to media content, fans are characterized by being active, claiming their right to participate, being “(...) the most active segment of the media audience, one that refuses to simply accept what they are given, but rather insists on the right to become full participants” (Jenkins, 2006: 131). Therefore, the fan, in contemporary thinking, starts to be conceived by the logic of a resistant and critical individual, who does not easily accept what is imposed on them, and who becomes a participant of the culture, re-signifying the received media contents. The fan can be considered a subversive subjective, because, besides the interpretation endowed with critical sense, they also react and contest, thus, the fan activism can be understood “as a quotidian resistance” (Souza & Monteiro, 2015: 152). In this dichotomy, fans legitimize and strengthen a cultural movement by actively participating in culture through online communities, playing a social role.

*\*After the confrontation between two antagonistic theoretical aspects, we show fans as members of communities that share the same tastes and preferences. In them develops what Henry Jenkins (2008) calls participatory culture, a series of sociocultural behaviors that transform the fan into an active, critical and intervening consumer (Souza & Martins, 2012: 1-2)*

### 3.2. The independent scene and the alternative fandom

The emergence of the independent scene, referred to as “indie”, is linked to the idea of freedom on the artist’s part and had its historical origins in the 1980s, under the premises of production based on Do It Yourself – DIY. Ito (2017) remembers that the independent records labels, also known as indies, “invest in creations that escape the pattern instituted by major music corporations” (The phonographic industry, para. 25).

*\*The term ‘indie’ is associated with the concept of ‘independent,’ which refers to the freedom of artists in comparison to large conglomerates and music labels. The movement was established in the 1980s, in England and in the United States, through small initiatives that worked as labels launching artists under the order of Do It Yourself (DIY), which meant a way to produce based on low-cost and strongly creative practices (Cavalcanti, Souza-Leão, & Moura, 2021: 3)*

According to Mcneil & McCain (2013), the DIY ideology can be seen as a form of struggle, resistance and survival (Medeiros, 2015). Because of their subversive characteristics related to the forms of independent music production, such as the denial of socially imposed values, the fans of independent artists are also connected to the ideological premises and positions that surround the indie scene. In this ambit, “the DIY philosophy and the expression of rebellion also extends to audiences who perceive the value of the indie universe and seek proximity to it” (Guerra, 2010: 167).

Therefore, this form of music production also involves an alternative audience, in this context, “music consumption within music scenes considered independent is seen as differentiated, often linked to an idea of alternative music” (Medeiros, 2015: 32). In the musical universe, indie represents a philosophy of life that involves artists who have chosen to break away from the structures of a mass system, expressing the

real meaning of music. This way “indie refers to a musical production aligned with the experimentation discourse, with lack of concern with the interest of mass audiences and with the rejection of profit as a purpose” (Cavalcanti, Souza-Leão & Moura, 2021: 3). The independent scene is consolidated by its ideological values, and is characterized, therefore, by the disassociation with a major recording company, establishing itself, above all, for the denial of submission to the prevailing social values. For this reason, being independent in the music world goes beyond the debate that involves indies or majors, indie is a state of mind that sets itself against corporate hegemonic values (Herschmann, 2011).

From this perspective, fans of indie music play a relevant role in consolidating the success of independent artists, because they constitute a segmented audience that is faithful to the artist's precepts, strengthening the spirit of the music and the values it represents through their idol.

*\*The genre was consolidated along the way thanks to its fans, whose features make them different from other music fans; they do not often align with mainstream products, they defend the movement's concept and follow their idols regardless of fashion cycles (Bromwich, 2014; Coscarelli, 2017; Maloney, 2011). Thus, they take opposite positions to that of labels and artists who distance themselves from the ideal of independent production and musicality (Sanneh, 2005); besides, they make voracious criticisms to artists who prioritize success over the musicality and originality of their productions (Daly, 2016) (Cavalcanti et al., 2021: 3).*

The internet comes to assist in the strengthening and consolidation of independent artists who use the available resources to publicize and increase the visibility of their work, from this perspective “the popularization of internet benefits independent artists who, before, could only promote their work through of in person audience” (Medeiros, 2015: 34). In this culture of production and consumption on the indie scene, Ana Cañas, the object of this research, chose to position herself outside the space of a record company, becoming an independent music artist. Her ideological position also involves a different kind of audience. The album named *Todxs*<sup>117</sup> was the artist's first independent album. The album affirms the singer's critical position and presents lyrics in defense of feminism and of issues related to political minorities. It received a Latin Grammy<sup>118</sup> nomination in 2019.

## 4. Ana Cañas: resistance and music in pandemic times

As a methodological tool in this case study, it was used the document analysis of the artist's life, which brought a better context understanding. The virtual netnography was used for the analysis within the digital platforms. The post made on Ana Cañas' official Facebook fan page, in which the artist speaks about the cancellation of a live and the lack of sponsorship during the pandemic, generated a number of 1,600 reactions, among these 958 “likes”; 379 “sad” reactions; 280 “care” reactions; 70 “love” reactions; five “wow” reactions; four “angry” reactions and three “haha” reactions. It also obtained a number of 123 comments and 50 shares. The artist has a total of 299,000 followers on her official fan page. The same post made on Ana Cañas' official Instagram profile generated a number of 7,852 likes (Figure 5.4.1) and 369 comments. On this digital platform, the artist has a total of 226,000 followers, until the date of this analysis. The number of comments on Instagram compared to Facebook was significantly higher. The image was posted on both digital platforms on 10 June 2020.

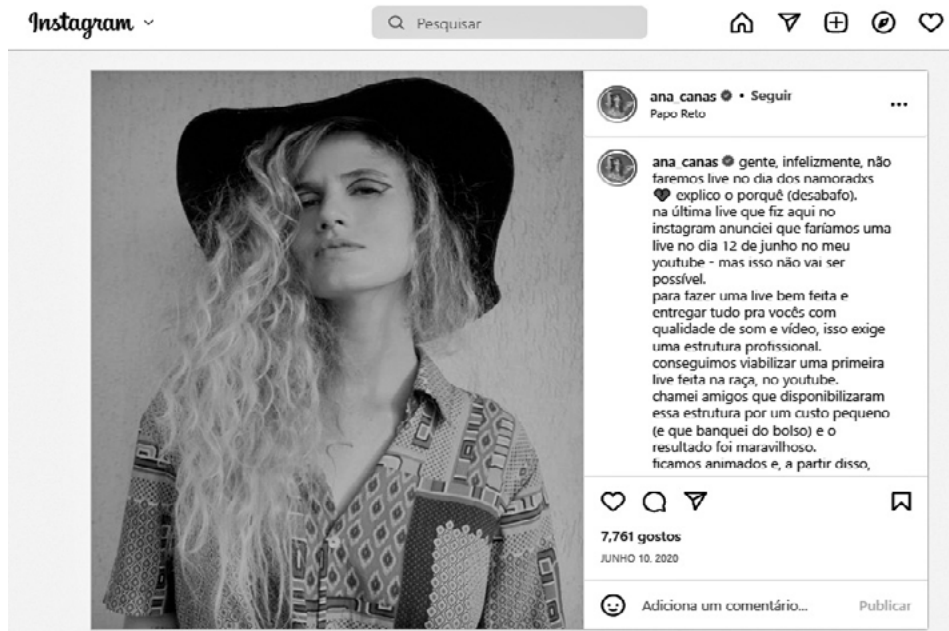
On the artist's official YouTube channel, the stored video of the live streaming (Figure 5.4.2), which took place on 9 July 2020, got a number of 537,428 views, 29,000 likes, and 2,214 comments, until the date of this analysis, on 17 June 2021. The artist has a total of 350,000 people subscribed to her video platform. As we can see, the number of views of the live streaming was higher than the number of people subscribed to the channel. Thus, 58 Facebook comments were selected to be analyzed, this number totals 47%. We also analyzed the interpersonal communications, which are the response to comments: on Instagram, 173 comments were selected, which also totals to 47%, following the same percentage of comments. On

<sup>117</sup> Ana Cañas releases fifth album independently. See more at: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/ilustrada/2018/12/ana-canas-abraca-ativismos-e-feminismo-em-seu-quinto-disco.shtml>

<sup>118</sup> See more about the Latin Grammys at: <https://www.latingrammy.com/en>

YouTube, 10% of the comments were selected, which totals a number of 221. This approach uses a smaller sample, only part of it was used, given the high number of comments on the live video clip.

The cancellation post of the live was made because Ana Cañas had performed a previous live that was used as publicity material to obtain sponsorships during the pandemic. The live show scheduled for 12 June 2020, the date Valentine's Day in Brazil, was canceled, because the artist wasn't successful in raising sponsors. The artist wanted to offer a quality broadcast to the public, and to do so it would require the work of an entire music production chain.



» **Figure 5.4.1.** Post on the artist's official Instagram that originated the fandom's crowdfunding campaign<sup>119</sup>

» **Source:** Instagram, Ana Cañas, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CBQfwmjIhTV/>

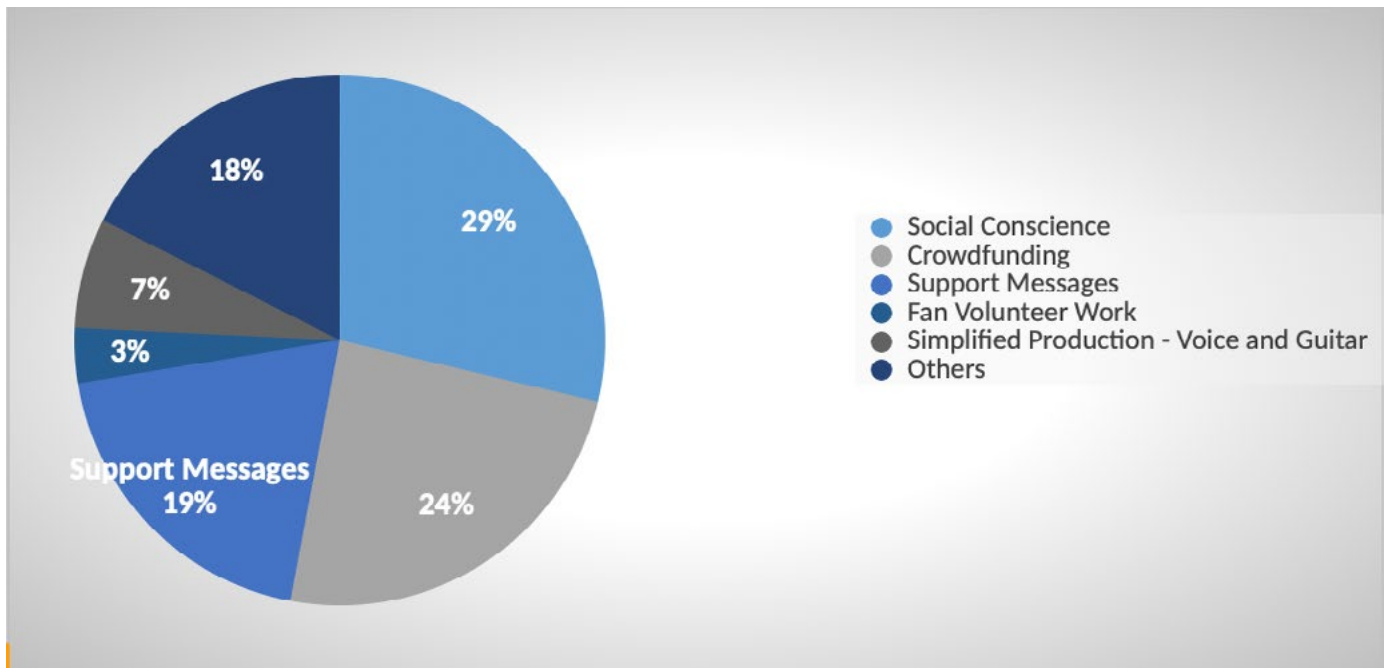


» **Figure 5.4.2.** Videoclip take from the live on Ana Cañas' YouTube channel

» **Source:** YouTube, Ana Cañas, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mvb6Qtu9hS8>

The comments were categorized (Graphic 18.1) according to the degree of importance and with a qualitative analysis (as a guide and criterion), was also an interpretative approach to each selected platform. The graphics indicate the representation percentages of each subject in the online fandom debate and show

the quantitative approach. In this context, one approach complements the other.



» **Graphic 5.4.1.** Categorizing the analysis on the artist's Facebook and Instagram profiles

» **Source:** The authors, 2021

In category social conscience, political nature comments and criticisms of the system were analyzed, in response to the singer's post. From this analysis, it was seen that political comments and criticisms of the dominant model were made by fans who think in alternatives to confront these questions. We can see that the members are also conscientious citizens who seek to debate issues of extreme relevance to society, especially social issues, as the inequalities that arose in the music industry during the pandemic. Thus, we notice in relation to the members of the fandom that:

*\*There are points of proximity and confluence among them, constituting a new way of being and exist in the world, of acting and reacting to politics, aiming at a collective action and performance, both in terms of organizations and claims (Soares, 2019: 56)*

This means that fans use digital spaces as a form of activism for social transformation with the resources that are available to them, being collaborative citizens. According to Jenkins, "we may also want to look at the structures of fan communities as showing us new ways of thinking about citizenship and collaboration" (Jenkins, 2006: 246). Therefore, fans within a fandom have a politicized dimension of social problems and unite to promote changes and transformations in the social frameworks on which they debate. The political factor is also an indication of cultural identification, in which "fans not only appreciate the music, they buy the same causes, defend the same flags" (Medeiros, 2015: 26).

About crowdfunding, the fandom engagement help to the artist is the topic of discussion. The fans unite through dialogues which take place in the comment section and reach a consensus that on crowdfunding as the best option to make the live streaming happen. Crowdfunding is one of the collaborative activities that occur within fandoms.

*\*Crowdfunding allows projects to be made possible thanks to the fan contribution of fans, be it large or small. The popularization of collaborative projects has grown vertiginously in the last two years. In crowdfunding, contributors donate whatever amount they can afford (Amaral et al., 2015: 149)*

Therefore, it can be directly observed the fandom mobilization around the proposal to make the live streaming as something carried out through the union and mutual help of the others fans, which are "extremely organized and planned, to be able to achieve the goals of the actions and impact as many people as possible, increasing visibility for their idol" (Ferreira et al., 2019: 13). Communities have

characteristics in common such as the “co-action of their participants, who share values, goals, and attitudes of mutual support, through interactions in the online universe” (Rheigold 1993 in Ribeiro, 2016: 15).

The fandom communication, through mutual support and encouragement in form of messages, are seen as a motivation for the artist to keep going, despite adversity. According to Soares: “The term ‘resist’ etymologically comes from the Latin *resistentia* and the verb *resistere*, which means to stand firm, to persist, to repeatedly oppose without losing one’s position” (Soares, 2019: 136). Despite the uncertainties of the pandemic, fans urge the artist not to give up, to stand firm, and this is also interpreted as an act of resistance. These messages of support directed to the singer Ana Cañas bring a greater proximity through dialogue and communication, strengthening the affective bonds of the fandom with the artist. About this:

*\*One of the reasons that motivate a fan is affectivity and it is because of this that he/she devotes him/herself to one or more kinds of artists, building his/her own identity according to the diverse products of the cultural industry, with which he/she emotionally connects (Medeiros, 2015: 26)*

About the category *simplified production – voice and guitar*, fans suggest that the singer perform a live with a simpler production, only voice and guitar. The Do It Yourself - DIY is an element of punk culture to the music, where “grassroots experimentation generated new sounds, new artists, new techniques, and new relations to consumers which have been pulled more and more into mainstream practice” (Jenkins, 2006: 132). However, homemade and resource-free forms of production are linked to DIY practices, which is also associated with indie music. Many independent artists have been launched under the premise of DIY “which meant a way to produce based on low-cost and strongly creative practices” (Cavalcanti, Souza-Leão & Moura, 2021: 3).

In this section *fan volunteer work*, fans participate directly in the dissemination of the artist by asking for sponsorship from companies to help make the live possible, by tagging official brand’s profiles that could be potential supporters. This strategic form of requesting sponsorship constitutes what is called to as fan volunteer work. “It can also be said that fans feel a greater need to participate in the promotion of their object of interest, becoming more visible and relevant to the artists. This need has become greater, and they ended up being a new way to help leverage the idol, becoming strategic in this middle, especially for bands without much budget” (Ferreira et al., 2019: 5). Ito (2017) points out that these “activities performed by fans can be inserted into the conception of free work, that which is voluntary, unpaid, and based on the pleasure of those who performs it” (Life and Death of a Musical Social Network, para. 52). The author complements that “among the motivations for working for free for the artist are the affective rewards implicit in such actions - an individual feeling of helping those you like and doing your part” (Ito, 2017, Final considerations, para. 11). Therefore, the fans are not only participative, but also collaborative, acting as cultural mediators of the artist.

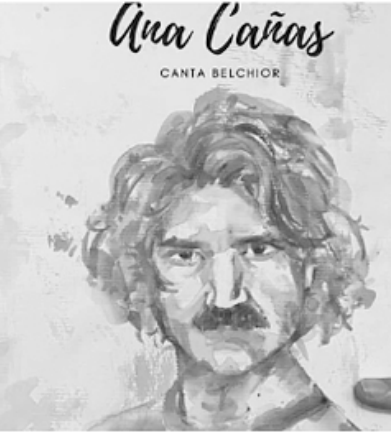
The categorizations the *result of the crowdfunding campaign* indicate the activities performed within a fandom, embedded in digital platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. As seen, from the fandom’s mobilization, the singer conducted a crowdfunding campaign suggested by the fans, whose focus would be to raise the necessary funds to make the cultural project happen (Figure 5.4.3). The project included the realization of a concert in live format, in tribute to a singer from Ceará (Brazil), Belchior, held on 9 July 2020 and broadcasted on YouTube. The categorizations bring a mapping of the activities of this specific fandom, from the observation of behavior patterns that were repetitive throughout the comments.



EVENTO / FESTA / ANIVERSÁRIO

## Ana Cañas Canta Belchior

ID da vaquinha: 1133980



Arrecadado

R\$ 59.229,00

Sem meta

Apoiadores

1183

Encerrada



Ana Cañas

Ativo(a) no Vakinha desde outubro/2019

2 vaquinhas criadas • 2 vaquinhas apoiadas

COMPARTILHE ESTA VAQUINHA

<https://www.vakinha.com.br/1133980>

Copiar



Sobre

Novidades

Quem ajudou

gentêêê ❤️ teremos SHOW especial INÉDITO ❤️

confesso que nunca me passou pela cabeça levantar uma campanha pra viabilizar uma live ou show.

» **Figure 5.4.3.** Result of the crowdfunding campaign proposed by the online fandom

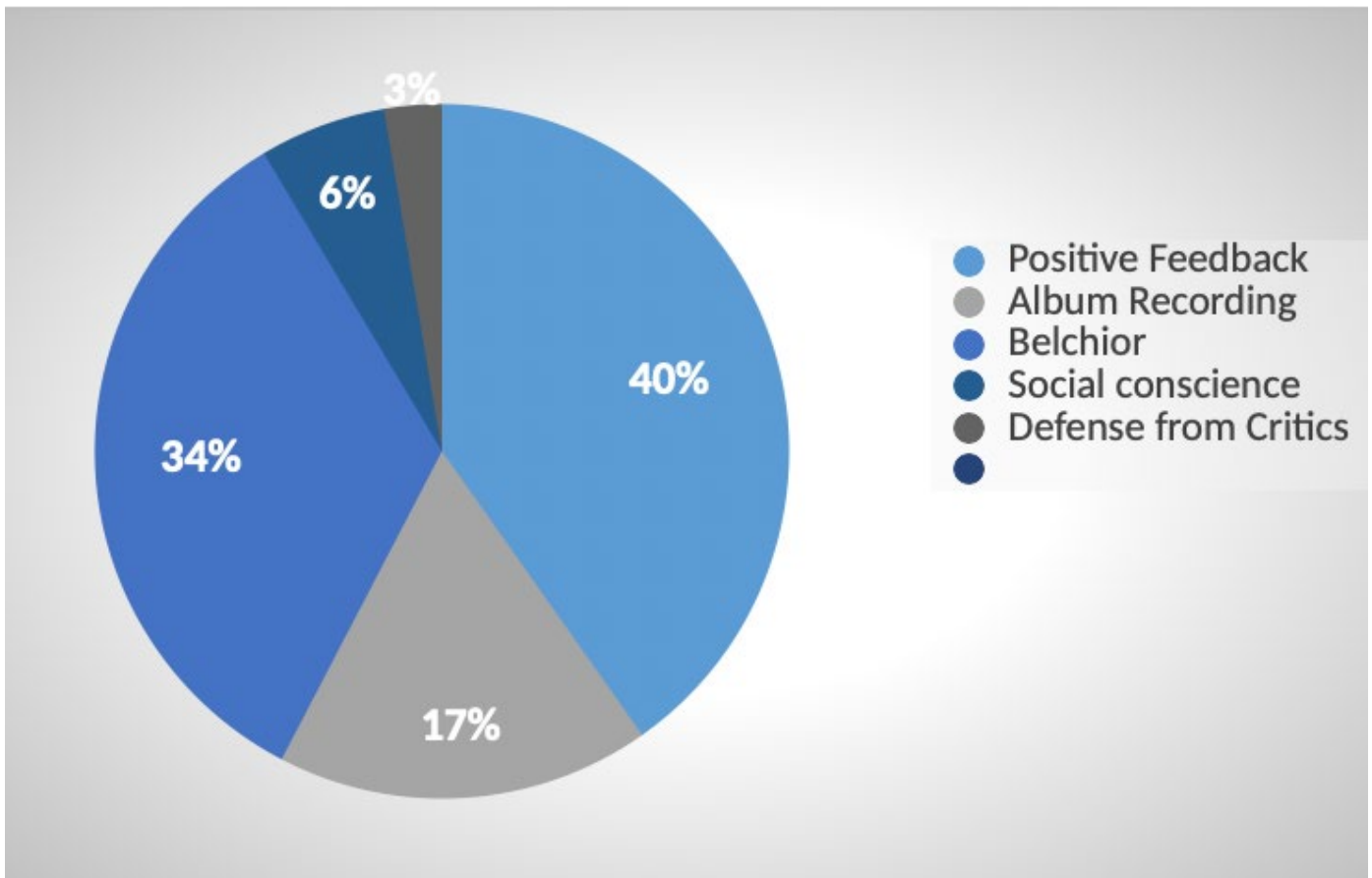
» **Source:** Vakinha, Ana Cañas, 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.vakinha.com.br/vaquinha/ana-canas-canta-belchior>

## 5. YouTube

Next, we present a graphic that contains the categorizations referring to the manifestations expressed by the audience through YouTube comments, and that are related to the concert in the live format displayed on YouTube, thanks to the fandom crowdfunding campaign. The audience's opinion generates valuable marketing feedback for both the producers of cultural assets and the artists, who can get a better knowledge of their audience. As seen, the fan culture "provides valuable free feedback on market trends and preferences" (Fiske, 1992: 46-47). Thus, we start understanding that categorized comments constitute a form of feedback provided by the audience and help in the production of a cultural asset or project.

For this analysis, the following categories were used: (i) positive feedback that relates to reaction comments by the public that expressed feelings such as excitement and gratitude, as well as praise directed at the live, which indicates the intense relationship of the fan and potential fans with the artist, especially after the music experience offered; (ii) the album recording involves the comments that asked the artist to make the recording of a new album, comments indicating they wanted to revisit the live and requests for concerts after the pandemic. This shows the public's involvement with the work, indicating that the recording of an album would be successful; (iii) the category Belchior relates to all the comments that mentioned the Ceará singer, indicating that part of the lives' audience was attracted to it by the fact that it was a tribute to the singer, configuring a new niche of fans for the artist and expanding her audience; (iv) the social conscience involves the people who were a part of the politically charged debate, which had already been identified on Facebook and Instagram, to the YouTube live comments. In the live, several times she mentioned political issues that had been experienced in the country. The audience, as

a form of response, also expressed themselves politically; the Defense from critics involving part of the public that engaged in comments in defense of the artist because of the criticism she received, acting as ambassadors.



» **Graphic 5.4.2.** Categorization of the audience regarding the live broadcast on YouTube

» **Source:** The authors, 2021

The objective of this categorization is to map the main common characteristics of the collective dimension of audience behavior after the live. We understand that the categorizations indicate key success factors that contributed to the recording of the album. A factor that confirms the success of the live was the completion of a new crowdfunding (Figure 5.4.4) that resulted in the viability of funds for recording the album, again with the help of the fandom and the audience.

## 6. Final considerations

This study showed that fan activism, through participation in digital platforms, enables the consolidation and success of artists in the music segment, as is the case of independent artist Ana Cañas. Thus, we clearly perceive the role of “artivism” present in the singer, a concept that relates to the artist who uses their art as a form of activism and militancy. In this way, we understand this social role as a reflection in the fandom’s activism. The social impact that the fandom has had in times of crisis, as it was in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, is extremely important. Fans played a social role in promoting the artist, using digital platforms as a space for intervention, debate and criticism. Alternative solutions were proposed through the union and collaboration of their members, who acted independently to achieve a common objective, breaking with the dominant power structures. In fandom, fan activism can be seen “as a practice of resistance, that is, as an intentional action against a force considered hegemonic in order to bring about change” (Amaral, Souza & Monteiro, 2015: 144).

Fandom activism has taken into account the segment of the indie scene, which offers freedom and provides a greater connection between artist and audience. The fandom acted as a movement of social mobilization and political participation, claiming their rights based on the participation and engagement

of the fans themselves. They themselves carried out the changes and transformations they wanted, which represented a political act of resistance through the use of alternative paths. The union of fandom, crowdfunding and digital platforms favored independent artists, allowing them to continue their work during the pandemic, and in some cases, even increasing their notoriety and success. In this ambit, digital platforms have amplified the transformations in a given social framework, especially through fandom's mobilization and resistance practices. The nonconformism of the fan provided this change by its subversion character, because, for the intervening fan, after the end point, there is always a starting point for new possibilities, debates, and alternatives.

The image shows a screenshot of a crowdfunding page on the Vakinha platform. The main heading is "Ana Cañas Canta Belchior - vamos gravar o disco!" with the project ID "1267941". The page displays a goal of R\$ 54,000.00 and shows that R\$ 55,508.00 has been raised by 839 supporters. A video player is embedded, showing a live stream of Ana Cañas singing. The page also includes a share button and navigation tabs for "Sobre", "Novidades", and "Quem ajudou".

» **Figure 5.4.4.** Crowdfunding for the recording of the album originated from the live streaming.

» **Source:** Vakinha, Ana Cañas, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.vakinha.com.br/vaquinha/ana-canas-canta-belchior-vamos-gravar-o-disco>

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