University of KwaZulu-Natal

Social Network Fandoms & Online Role-Playing: *Harry Potter* and *The Vampire Diaries* Fans on *Twitter*

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DECLARATION - PLAGIARISM

I, Zakia Jeewa, declare that

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2. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

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Signed

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Acknowledgements

I would like to dedicate this mess to:

My parents, for not stifling whatever fan interest I had, even if it seemed weird at the time.

The residents (and the occasional visitors) of the MA Room in F107, where a lot of intense discussion, viewing of *YouTube* videos and snoozing occurred. You know who you are… Trisha, Tim, Marco, Adam, and the occasional strays, Graham, Nicholas and Andrew.

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And to the fans.

To the lovely, beautiful, witty, fascinating fans who had taken time out of their schedules to answer my questionnaires and chat to me on *Twitter* all day, EVERY day. Whether it was to rant about stuff we hated, or celebrate and fan girl over every aspect that made us excited along the way. (We're still ranting and celebrating and getting excited...)

This study would not exist without them.

(And to everybody else that I didn't mention)

Contents

Abstract

With the rise of social media, fans of popular culture texts such as films and TV series have taken to new media platforms, and particularly *Twitter,* to socialize and interact amongst each other, creating virtual communities online which happen in real-time. Using contemporary theories of the 'active' and 'interactive' audience, fandom and participatory culture, this ethnographic study, working within the discipline of contemporary cultural studies, focuses on the enormous online fandoms of *Harry Potter* (novels and films) and *The Vampire Diaries* (novels and TV series).

This study identifies and explains the many ways that fandoms manifest themselves online, emphasising 'fan-talk', fan art and photography, fan fiction, fan videos, and, above all, fan role playing, all of which work to sustain fan communities on the Internet.

The work of Fiske and Jenkins will be drawn upon to draw broader conclusions about the contemporary phenomenon of online fandom, which challenges traditional notions of the consumer (and indeed of media consumption) and theories of media domination which assume an omnipotent, ideologically-riddled media confronting an impotent and pliable mass audience. Fandom, blossoming within the social media possibilities of the Internet and the networks of globalization, appears to speak rather of a shift in power-relations between the commercially-driven culture industries and audiences, where both culture and identity production are no longer the monopoly of elite institutions, but are essential parts of an emergent 'participatory' culture assembled 'from below' by ordinary people, actively constructing social realities and identities that paradoxically both 'defer to' and are 'different from' the aesthetic texts of the mass media around which fandoms are built. A 'shadow cultural economy' is being fabricated by creative fans that demands a radical revision of traditional notions of authorship in order to include the 'secondary production' of a host of creative texts by fans.

Keywords: Fandom, role-play, fan communities, online communities, Twitter, Harry Potter, The Vampire Diaries.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis is an ethnographic study of online fandom, focusing on the *Harry Potter* and *The Vampire Diaries* fan communities active on the social network Internet site *Twitter*.

At the age of 11, one of my first obsessions began (a decade long obsession, might I add) after seeing a newspaper book review revealing the first instalment of the fictional world of *Harry Potter* created by J.K. Rowling. At such a young age, my dedication to being a fan consisted of reading the books repeatedly, watching the films (also repeatedly) collecting pictures, newspaper clippings and magazine articles of cast interviews, then assembling them in a secret scrapbook that ended up stashed someplace my mother would not find. After seeing an address in a teen magazine, I had bravely decided to write my first fan letter to the UK to an actor of the series and had gotten thrilled a month later when I received an autographed picture of the cast in the mail.

My identity as a *Harry Potter* fan was more than simply liking the books. I wanted to get as close to the phenomenon as possible without alerting the conservative nature of my parents who would perhaps assume that I was possessed by some magic form and needed an exorcism. I had come from a reserved home where if a person was obsessed with something, it was considered abnormal. Jenkins (2006) explains how there was a moment when fans were marginal to the operations of our culture, being ridiculed by the media and shrouded in social stigma. Fans were pushed underground by legal threats and were often depicted as brainless and inarticulate. (Jenkins 2006: 1). This has come to change over the last decade.

My expression of being a fan was somewhat private and was not expressed as openly as fans are able to today, given the present possibilities opened up by the Internet, not to mention the endless merchandise available to be bought with which one can publicly declare one's fandom. All I had were the books and films, and that seemed enough. The following extract taken from Rowling's fifth instalment of the *Harry Potter* series describes a scene that many fans as well as I have experienced.

'Is that a Tornados badge?' Ron demanded suddenly, pointing to the front of Cho's robes, where a sky-blue badge emblazoned with a double gold 'T' was pinned. 'You don't support them, do you?'

'Yeah, I do.' said Cho.

'Have you always supported them, or just since they started winning the league?' said Ron, in what Harry considered an unnecessarily accusatory tone of voice.

'I've supported them since I was six.' said Cho coolly. 'Anyway… See you Harry.'

She walked away. Hermione waited until Cho was halfway across the courtyard before rounding on Ron.

'You are so tactless!'

'What? I only asked her if-'

'Couldn't you tell she wanted to talk to Harry on her own?'

'So? She could've done. I wasn't stopping-'

'Why on earth were you attacking her about her Quidditch team?'

'Attacking? I wasn't attacking her, I was only-'

'Who *cares* if she supports the Tornados?'

'Oh, come on, half the people you see wearing those badges only bought them last season-'

'But what does it *matter*?'

'It means they're not real fans, they're just jumping on the bandwagon-'

<div align="right">(Rowling 2005: 208)</div>

Personally, 'real fans' are those who have read, appreciated and know the details of the books meticulously.   It was only a year after reading the first three books that I saw the commercialisation and marketing of *Harry Potter* merchandise happening in front of me, something I highly disapproved of, after I noticed classmates at school one day who never showed an interest in reading, 'claiming' to be *Harry Potter* fans by wearing *Harry Potter* clothes and collecting the 3D chocolate frog cards a few months after the release of the first *Harry Potter* film (clearly, they had jumped on the Potter bandwagon because of the films. I only hope they were clever enough not to deprive themselves of a truly amazing series by actually reading the books later on).

It was only thereafter that I realised, by becoming an active consumer of such merchandise myself, I would be able to heighten my own fan identity, enabling me to feel closer to the phenomenon which was *Harry Potter* and, due to my book knowledge, feel naturally superior to the 'fake' fans.

12 years later, and my collection of *Harry Potter* merchandise includes a variety of strange and wonderful things. A Wizard's Chess Set as seen in the films, PC games based on the novels, and a wand, to name a few (it's rather strange to figure out, but my mother was actually the one to buy me these items – without me even asking!). However, these objects

hold little significance compared to my fan experience and interaction with other fans who share the same sentiment for the series as I do. After being exposed to the internet as a 17 year old, my fan identity had spread to cyberspace. If I could not physically live the *Harry Potter* experience, I could imagine it on a platform with hundreds of others simultaneously. And so, with the rise of new media, the internet had become a Mecca for my fan interactivity.

Role Play

I was first exposed to role-play when I was 19, after joining the social networking site *Facebook*, and I was faced with the dilemma of putting up a profile picture. As a young Muslim girl who had been raised to conceal my identity, the idea of putting up a picture of my face for strangers to see was certainly a concept I knew my parents would have found disturbing. My parents were not aware of my deciding to join the online social networking frenzy, yet I decided to upload a picture of something I liked rather than my face, because if anything, a stranger would be able to tell more about me through seeing a picture of the Hogwarts[1] castle rather than my strange naïve looking face (the irony of this story is that my mother now has *Facebook*. There are pictures of her face on her profile. I know - because she specifically asked me to take pictures of her).

It was then that I realised I had subconsciously adopted a form of role-play identity, and while everybody on my friend list found it strange that I did not have a 'proper' profile picture, I was somehow conveying who I really was and what I was interested in through the use of this *Harry Potter* inspired picture. I was signifying my fandom to the series – this I later understood from the comments I gathered under that specific picture - but I was also interestingly making a connection between my identity and my fandom, that somehow participating in a fandom also raised questions about how fans creatively use say the *Harry Potter* novels to construct identities. If Jenkins (2006) famously wrote of the 'participatory culture' sustained by fans unwilling passively to accept culture 'from above', then it seemed that fans are also interested in participating in the fashioning of their identities rather than leaving that to institutions 'from above', and that they do so 'from below' by creatively ab/using the richly symbolic materials of popular culture, to which they have unusually

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[1]Hogwarts is the name of the British Wizarding School mentioned in the novels and is an ancient castle.

intense affective attachments. The thesis will look at this phenomenon with specific attention to fan role-playing on the Internet.

The *Harry Potter* phenomenon which began as 7 novels has now spread to become an 8 part film deal which raked in over 4.47 billion dollars worldwide, with the books cashing in a remarkable 7 billion dollars. The book series was translated into 55 different languages, making J.K Rowling the first billionaire author worldwide and the first female billionaire in Britain (according to the Guinness Book of World Records 2012). Not to mention the *Harry Potter* Theme Park in Orlando. And the *Harry Potter* Studio Tour that fans can take in London.

Merchandise derived from the stories within the movies and the books (the two mediums and their versions of storytelling differ in certain aspects, creating variations among fans, some of whom have seen the films, but not read the books), include clothing, toys, sweets, party and bedroom apparel, entertainment like board games as well as electronic PC games with the release of each movie, and a wide variety of other products that were created from the book as well as from the films for fans. This can also be said for *The Vampire Diaries* Fandom.

Wait. Why is *The Vampire Diaries* Fandom included in here?

A study of one fandom runs the risk of being applicable only to that specific fandom, with even the most qualitative overviews impossible to make. It is consequently far better to have at least two *Twitter* fandom samples – both with vast fan bases – to enable me to speak more confidently of fandom generally. Not only am I familiar and deeply involved with both the *Harry Potter* and *The Vampire Diaries* fandoms on *Twitter*, but I wished to share these experiences and explore further in this online study the perpetual flow of fan created content for *The Vampire Diaries*, a weekly television show which has the fandom reacting and creating fan work that is generated in real time. New episodes are screened every Thursday night and as this supernatural story continues to unfold, there is a continual surge of fan created material in the works, all which is displayed and shared on *Twitter*. Therefore, unlike the *Harry Potter* novels and films, *The Vampire Diaries* is still continuing in 2013/14, and provides a different angle on fandoms to the other fan community.

The Vampire Diaries was also researched because its fans are an excellent portrayal of how a fandom manifests online, having started off quite recently – in 2009, and I was lurking online to see it come about. I was too young to have been able to write an MA on *Harry Potter* fans

in 1997. Also - we didn't have *Twitter* in 1997. *Twitter* only arrived in 2006. And in that gap of 9 years, fan created content (which comes along with fandom) has become massively digitised, with accessibility to the internet being widespread.

Therefore, while the *Harry* Potter fandom began offline, *The Vampire Diaries* fandom is an entirely online phenomenon. And with one fandom 'ending' and another one having already begun – the thought of combining the two fandoms within this study would be perfect. ('Ending' has been hyphenated because *Harry Potter* fans do not believe that the magic is over. Once you open the book, you immediately return to it).

With the rise of the internet, fans have found exciting new ways to extend their personal appreciation of books, TV shows and films to an online platform, enabling them to interact with each other and to make their versions of fictional realms to come alive. It is a creative and instantaneous process - and *Twitter* was the place I witnessed this happening. I had never seen such a large scale of fans, all on a single site, whether sharing fan videos with one another, simultaneously flocking together to tweet a few words repeatedly in order to get a trend happening, or immediately tweeting their responses to favourite TV shows they were watching.

Fandom studies contributes to a history of exploring the nature of media consumption. The "participatory culture" of fandom that Jenkins described as a fringe subculture in 1992 is now increasingly part of the mainstream: "Fan fiction can be accessed in astonishing quantities and diversities by anyone who knows how to Google. Media producers monitor Web forums such as 'Television without Pity,'" (Jenkins 2006b: 2). Within these increasingly popular and mainstream communities, we are able to see that fans are as active as ever, re-creating content and re-inventing their identity as fans. And on a site like *Twitter*, where everything happens in real time, this immense amount of fan discussion and activity can be studied.

The thesis will in particular seek to answer through ethnographic research focused on two online communities the following four related research questions:

Q1: What constitutes fandom and the notion of participatory culture?

Q2: How has *Twitter* – as a New Media platform - shaped online contemporary fandom?

Q3: How are *Harry Potter* and *The Vampire Diaries* fandoms manifested on the *Twitter* website?

Q4: How does role-playing manifest on *Twitter* and how do fans actively refashion identities online?

Briefly therefore, the thesis will critically examine the theory of fandom and the 'participatory culture' created and sustained by the contemporary *Twitter*-based *Harry Potter* and *The Vampire Diaries* fandoms in order to understand how these fandoms manifest themselves, with specific attention given to fans' creative re-making of the symbolic universe of their fandoms through such aesthetic expressions as fan art, fan fiction and poetry, fan videos and photographs, and, most importantly, fan role-playing, which raises interesting reflections on contemporary self-fashioning.

Outline of Project

Chapter One provides a brief introduction to my thesis – a qualitative ethnographic investigation of the 'active audience' of online *Twitter* fandoms of *Harry Potter* and *The Vampire Diaries* – and outlines the content of the subsequent chapters of my thesis.

Chapter Two is the review of literature on fan fiction, fan art, and online forums for fans of TV shows, all of which provide helpful insights for my own research.

Chapter Three provides an overview of the theoretical framework for this study: active and interactive audiences, the nature of fans and fandom, fan meaning making and sharing, participatory culture, and reflections on online identity.

Chapter Four provides an overview of the qualitative methods used to gather data for this study. With the main data gathering technique being the netnography, a combination of in-depth interviews and participant observation was used. This chapter describes this process in detail, along with the rationale for this approach. It also describes the research sites and addresses the ethical concerns associated with this study.

Chapter Five introduces the reader to *Twitter*, a social networking site typical of Web 2.0 whose communication platform structure has enabled its creative use ('user generated content') by a host of fandoms, whose very global existence would probably not exist without the Internet.

Chapter Six presents the research findings which emerged from the interpretations of my collected research data. The two galaxies of the *Harry Potter* and *The Vampire Diaries* fandoms within the much larger universe of *Twitter* are analysed as virtual communities sustained not only by incessant 'fan talk', but also by a host of shared creative expressions, from fan art to fan videos to fan role-playing. Fandom, far from being some reverential response to the symbolic products of the culture industries, is seen as an imaginative, sometimes parodic, production of an autonomous cultural space 'from below' that overturns the very notion of the cultural 'consumer' and which places fans at the forefront of the emergence of a contemporary 'participatory culture' by ordinary people.

Finally, Chapter Seven will draw a few general conclusions about fandom and contemporary culture from the thesis's research findings.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter examines the literature on how fandom and the more recent online fandom practically expresses itself, with an emphasis upon applied fandom studies. It therefore examines the various characteristics of fan activity and the important effects that internet social network sites have in spreading and enriching these practices.

Hall and Newbury suggest that the creative potential of the internet takes two forms. First, they argue, it offers new 'opportunities for cultural participation'. Second, they maintain, the internet provides a highly accessible medium through 'which young people are able to explore and promote their own identities and concerns' (1999: 100–1). My literature review will be built around these two essential features of the internet.

With the rise of Web 2.0, fans of books, films, television programmes etc. have taken to new media platforms such as *Facebook* and *Twitter* to socialize and interact with similar fans, creating an online forum which generates new content and feedback that happens in real-time. Marchione explains how the rise of the internet has taken fandom from what was once a more "underground," lesser-known cultural practice amongst small grassroots groups (local clubs, conventions, small magazines distributed by post) to a practice on a worldwide scale, accessible to everyone at the click of a button. "Thus fandom arrived at a more above ground, visible place in the cultural imagination, transcending the practice of fanzine distribution within small circuits of dedicated fans to a widespread, user-friendly medium within reach of mass amounts of people" (2009: 12). Fandom has as a consequence of the internet become more mainstream, the very ease of internet and fan community access generating internet fan communities with staggeringly large memberships spread throughout the globe.In a participant observer account of fan fiction, Guinery (2004) for example noted that the phenomenal growth of the *Harry Potter* fandom can be directly related to the emergence of the internet, and to the middle-class readers' internet access.

While there has been studies conducted about the *Harry Potter* fandom online through researching *Harry Potter* forums, fan fiction sites and *YouTube* videos (Hijazi 2007; Jenkins 2006a), there are no studies conducted about *Harry Potter* fans on *Twitter*. Nor are there studies available which have been conducted about the much more recent *The Vampire Diaries* fandom online, or indeed specifically on the *Twitter* site. No prior research has been

conducted incorporating social media, role-play, and fan interaction taking place on *Twitter*; however, a few studies focusing on other aspects like fan fiction, fan art and fan videos have been researched and are helpful to this study, as they provide conceptual tools to make sense of the subcultural world of fandom which happens in real time, online (Manifold 2005; Rogozinska 2007). I am interested in the literature which examines specifically how online fandom manifests itself: those inter-active and aesthetic practices such as fan fiction; computer generated images and hand drawn art, known as fan art; *YouTube* videos of fans re-enacting their favourite scenes and newly-created parodies; music inspired by the fandoms; fan role-playing; and the sustaining of online fan communities.

Fan Fiction

Writing has been considered one of the most popular ways for fans to distribute and concretise their passions in fictional universes. Fan fiction is a term used to describe works of fiction written by fans for fans about their favourite literary, television or film texts and characters, often expressing their own personal views using characters found within an existing media text. Fan fiction is another form of transformative text which is shared on *Twitter* by fans and readers alike, and since it is free, links are shared online, whether to fanfiction.net or to another site which hosts fan fiction or a blog site.

Characters are developed further than their original manifestations; they are thrown into romantic or erotic relationships that are non-existent in the 'host' text; new situations are created for protagonists to deal with; and sometimes characters interact with protagonists from other popular culture texts (there are for example many cross-over fan fiction stories involving *Star Trek* and *Star Wars*). As always, 'active' audiences become 'prosumers', making visible a 'participatory culture' of often spectacular proportions. As is well known, the *Harry Potter* novels created a global army of young readers. What is less well known is that these novels also spurred into existence an army of writers, writing stories of varying lengths and quality derived from the literary universe of J.K. Rowling's novels. There are a great many stories available online based on every character from the *Harry Potter* novels and films that details their lives, their past, present and future, and their interactions with characters both seen and unseen in the books/films. These stories may differ from the original text in the sense that there may be 'shipping' (fan-generated relation/ships between usually fictional characters in media texts), or a different plot involved.

Thomas (2011) explains the term *fan fiction* (sometimes abbreviated as *fan fic*) to refer to stories produced by fans based on plot lines and characters from either a single source text or else a "canon" of works; these fan-created narratives often take the pre-existing story world in a new, sometimes bizarre, direction (2011:3). With the rise of the internet, access to this fan fiction has increased dramatically, as has the writing of the fiction.

Fan fiction was previously a fairly underground and marginalised activity. With the help of popular web-sites like *fanfiction.net*, fans are able to access these communities online, and can publish and share their interests simultaneously. Thomas explains that online fan fiction writing has become so popular that "much excitement has greeted this explosion of fan activity…within fields of academic inquiry such as literary and narrative theory, ethnography, feminism and queer theory, and cultural studies" (2011: 3). Seeing that this fan fiction is written from within active fan communities, Thomas further points out that this focus on fan fiction positively reminds us of the importance of social and cultural *context* in the understanding of texts:

> Perhaps one of the main reasons why people are saying such nice things about fan fiction is that it takes us away from the notion of texts as static, isolated objects and instead reminds us that story worlds are generated and experienced within specific social and cultural environments that are subject to constant change (Thomas 2011: 7).

Fan fiction has the ability to highlight the motivations and desires of readers:

> Online Potter fandom is an invaluable repository of the creative and critical responses of the series' most dedicated and engaged readers. Online Potter fandom makes accessible the responses of the real, rather than the imaginary, audience. Fans' immersion in the texts and attention to detail often results in sharp, rigorous analysis; much fan work is concerned with romance and sexuality, fans' discussions of these issues with regard to the Potter books are especially thoughtful and nuanced (Tosenberger 2008: 201).

Examples of *Harry Potter* fan fiction include romantic pairings ('ships') of characters like Harry and Hermione, who are not romantically linked in the novels. Fans tend creatively to write their own versions of film and books scenes, link clashing characters together into a romance, or reinvent characters and scenarios.

Tosenberger's article, "'Oh my God, the fan fiction!': Dumbledore's outing and the Online *Harry Potter* Fandom" (2008), explains how fans do not passively absorb texts but rather actively respond to them. Among many of these participatory fans were slash fiction writers (fan-invented stories focusing on homoerotic relationships between media text male fictional characters) who were constantly on the look-out for characters who shares chemistry or for possible interactions that contained undertones of homoeroticism.

> Slash fans are always on the lookout for hints of homoeroticism in the source text that can be spun into a story, and the description of the relationship between Dumbledore and his boyhood friend-turned-enemy Gellert Grindelwald proved especially fruitful in this respect; fans began creating stories, art, and critical essays concerning their relationship immediately following the release of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* - anticipating Rowling's announcement by three months (2008: 201).

The *Harry Potter* universe comprised an increasing number of books and films, but there were temporal spaces between these – long spaces, as far as fans were concerned - and these fuelled the rampant growth of many fan fiction sites. J.K. Rowling was very much aware of slash and fan fiction and actually encouraged this activity amongst fans. Among participatory fans, one contingent was unsurprised when Rowling, during an appearance at Carnegie Hall, announced that Hogwarts headmaster Albus Dumbledore was gay: writers and readers of "slash" fan fiction. Perhaps her confirmation of Dumbledore's sexuality lends support to Jones' (2002) articulation of slash not as a perverse "resistance" to a given text's presumed heteronormativity but rather "an actualization of latent textual elements" (Jones 2002: 82).

Fans are able to tap into a character and explore the various facets that aren't clearly explained or focused on within the original story. For example, Dumbledore's loneliness and his heart break as a teenager when his lover turned evil, as well as Dumbledore's role in having to sentence his lover to life imprisonment, are pertinent aspects of his character that are not revealed until the later books in the *Harry Potter* series. His solitary life as a wise, old man who has lost his family and loved ones and only has his school and students to absorb his time, were some of the aspects fans explored before confirmation of his homosexuality was revealed by J.K. Rowling.

A study by Rogozinska (2007) also focused on *Harry Potter* slash fiction. Rogozinska analysed *The Potion Master's Office* and *Ink Stained Fingers*, sites which host slash fiction,

and are popular especially with female readers - also known as Femme slash. The study sought to discover the popularity of the women-written stories on these sites and how their fictitious stories of homoerotic relationships between male characters are shared amongst fans.

Through internet ethnography, Rogozinska explored how sites are utilised and how slash fiction is created online, containing its own internal hierarchies, values, understanding and jargon language that writers incorporate. These fandoms online show how audiences and producers of fan fiction, gathered into a writing and reading community, express the ideals of nothing less than a participatory culture (2007: 4), made up of innumerable texts created by fans. With slash fiction, fans' desires are fore grounded as active and indeed excessive, spilling over into the kind of powerful and transgressive force given expression in Barthes's notion of "jouissance" (Fiske: 1989). Rogozinska's study is helpful for my own study, as it contributes greatly to our understanding of the nature of fan online activities and its broader cultural significance.

Textual boundaries are intentionally pushed to create crossover[2] stories (The pairings of characters from different principal texts); AU's ('Alternate universes' in which major changes have been made to the primary setting or storyline);actor slash (fiction involving real life actors, not their characters); "First time" (first sexual encounter between protagonists); "PWP" ("Plot, what plot?" with emphasis on a sexual encounter, described in graphic detail); "Issue" (stories that deal with political issues like gay marriage or gay pride parades); "Angst" (importance on the emotional connection); and "Death" (where one or both protagonists die). Genres such as "Hurt/Comfort" ("H/C") in which one protagonist is injured and then comforted by the other, is considered slash if the act of offering comfort is sexual. These many genres can all be seen on sites that host fan fiction like *Fanfiction.net*, *Archives of Our Own* and *Live Journal*, where fiction gets categorised for easy searching by fans who wish to read something more tailored to their interests.

Although later fandoms adopted the slash punctuation mark for all romantic pairings (i.e. Hermione/Ron), the term "slash" stuck, retaining its original meaning of homoerotic romance. I have chosen to concentrate in this chapter on male/male slash, as these pairings constitute the majority of Potter slash fan fiction. However, female/female slash—often

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[2] Crossovers are stories involving characters from more than one fandom. For example, having Frodo from Lord of the Rings and Harry Potter team up in a single story.

marked as "femslash," "femmeslash," or even "saffic" (a portmanteau of "Sapphic fic") - certainly exists, the most popular Potter femslash pairing being Hermione/Ginny (Tosenberger 2008: 186).

With regard to *The Vampire Diaries* and slash, there is a large collection of stories with a wide variety of pairings, since the show is abundant in male characters, both human as well as vampire and werewolf. Many of the characters are drawn differently in the novels and subsequent TV series, and this distinction can also be found in the voluminous fan fiction. One of the most famous slash pairings in *The Vampire Diaries* fandom is between a human History teacher, Alaric Saltzman, who is a vampire hunter, and an old malevolent vampire named Damon Salvatore, who both form a sort of 'bromance' on the show, drinking away their sorrows at the local bar on a regular basis. Fans have somewhat unsurprisingly translated this relationship into a potential slash relationship. No studies have been conducted on this fandom due to its relatively new status, and a part of my study will be interviewing a slash fan fiction writer who enjoys writing 'Dalaric' (Damon and Alaric) slash, these being characters in *The Vampire Diaries*. These fan-produced narratives also underscore that work focusing on how story worlds are triggered by textual cues must be supplemented with research addressing the whole question of what readers and audiences do with those worlds - how they inhabit them, transform them, make them their own. (Thomas 2011: 8).

Fan Art

Another manifestation of the productively creative fans is fan art, which are drawings made by fans based on characters and/or events from the admired fictional universe such as the *Harry Potter* novels and films, and which vary from the crude to the quite magnificent. Many fan-artists have now taken to digital media and use programs like Photoshop to create their work, while some use normal art materials to draw and thereafter scan their work to be displayed online for fans to see. Manifold (2005) discussed the appeal of fan art and how media technologies have enabled fans to recreate and retell stories from their perspectives using fan art. Many fan artists incorporate themselves into their work, mentally placing themselves within the realm of the fandom which they support; rather than reading or imagining a story, they visualized themselves as a part of it, becoming "themselves their own fictive realities" (Manifold 2005: 9). The usefulness of Manifold's study to my *Twitter*

project is found in how individual fans insert themselves into the fictional world of media texts, creating 'fictional' identities for themselves. Many fans that are able to draw or paint have used novels and films and their imaginations as inspiration for a great deal of the fan art that is produced. There are now also many fan artists who draw inspiration from fan fiction as well.

There is general consent among media theorists that young people with leisure time and sufficient access to media technologies, have begun to manipulate these technologies in newly expressive ways (Jenkins 2006b; Johnson 1999; Rushkoff 1999; Stephens 1998; Tapscott 1998). These include computer generated images, digital videos and flash animations, Web 'skins', podcasts, and vodcasts (Stephens 1998; Pollack 2001; Jenkins 2008). Henry Jenkins, director of the MIT Comparative Media Studies Program, suggests it is not the invention of new art forms that distinguishes youth culture of the twenty-first century; rather, he argues, it is the way young audiences actively engage with commercially produced, media-made narratives that evidences a new type of culture creation (1992; 2008).

Manifold's study (2009) 'Fan art as craft and creation of culture' explains how young people are able to create ideas of themselves and their society through craft and media technologies of the 21st century.Having conducted an investigation of youth who identify themselves as fans of various media-conveyed stories, and who create fan art (i.e. artwork that copies or is inspired by commercially produced materials), and share their activities with others in online fan communities or fandoms, Manifold's study gained insight into the ways these particular youths were identifying with stories and characters from popular culture, understanding something about the social implications of their activities, discovering how they learned and developed the skills of fan-based art making, and determining the extent to which these activities might be interpreted as culture creation (Manifold 2009: 8).

Fan art that adapts images of characters from visual stories or the commercial media may be understood as a creative (anti-passive) response to popular culture, and nearly all my respondents indicated that they had been drawing favourite characters from popular culture since they were very young children. In Manifold's (2009) study, over 66 per cent of the study subjects reported that they did not become fans of specific stories until they reached early adolescence, usually between the ages of 12 to 14. Being a fan meant the relationship to

a phenomenon had effectively shifted from appreciative awareness to an emotionally charged hold and potentially life-changing engagement. Most of the subjects in Manifold's 2009 study that drew fan art felt more connected to the fandoms they drew characters of, especially because they felt a desire to emulate fictional characters as they wished to possess the qualities or powers these fictional characters possessed.

In terms of *Harry Potter* fan art, there are thousands of images which readers have drawn to re/create how they imagined scenes from the novels as different to how they were portrayed in the films. Fans have also drawn scenes which were never recreated in the films that they enjoyed from the novels. Fans that have created 'ships' ('ships' are romantic relation-ships between two fictional characters) also draw their favourite characters interacting, even though they may share very little interaction in the novels or films, thus contributing to extending the *Harry Potter* universe beyond that envisaged by its author, J.K. Rowling. Fan art forms a large part of fan expression amongst the novels' fans, and a great many of them are hosted on sites like *Fanpop!* and *Deviant Art*, sites which encourage artists and fans alike to upload their images. Fans, who are not also fan artists, rarely give constructive criticism of technique but tend to be highly complementary of fan artists' efforts to accurately reproduce images from favourite visual narratives (Manifold 2009: 13).

Fan Videos: Vids

A much more complex fan practice which can be seen prominently on *YouTube* and is habitually shared on *Twitter* are fan vids – videos made by fans that incorporate and manipulate (and thus re-signify) music and footage of one or more visual media texts associated with a fandom, creating original films that intertextually refer back to the original, but which nevertheless more often than not address new issues not dealt with by the source texts. It is a perfect example of Fiske's 'shadow cultural economy', where ordinary people treat culture industry texts (usually from films and TV shows) as 'raw material' to be actively and creatively 'appropriated' to construct a properly popular culture reflecting subaltern interests autonomous of the 'power-bloc' (1989; 1992).

This fan activity is known as vidding, and the creators, who are referred to as vidders, have the luxury of exploring any media fictional character or theme they like by cutting and

pasting scenes and images (from different episodes of the same show, from different scenes in a film, from different shows or films entirely, or even splicing in home-made footage), and adding extraneous music and dialogue. The result is a different story is told, which could have nothing to do with the original, such as a vid using *Star Wars* characters to promote gay rights, or it could re-write a TV series or film by creating a romantic relationship between two different characters (a 'ship') which was non-existent in the original show or film. Despite the wide range of themes, shipping appears to be the main focus of fan vids. In semiotic language, the images are stripped of their original signifieds, and re-distributed in a new syntagmatic chain to generate a new signified (and hence sign) fabricated by the vidder. Re-editing footage to produce parodies of films of TV shows or music videos is also common.

On *YouTube*, fan vids can be seen across multiple fandoms and vidders. "Vidding began in 1975 when Kandy Fong synced *Star Trek* stills on a slide projector with music from a cassette player" (Coppa 2008). Technological and artistic skill is required to re-make videos; usually vids take 6–8 hours to create, with more elaborate ones taking significantly longer. Nevertheless, video creating/editing software such as iMovie and Windows Movie Maker is freely available for computers and relatively simple to use, and have made the making of these videos infinitely more accessible to fans than the days of Super 8 film (Russo 2009: 125).

Vidders are predominately women who have passed their knowledge along to one other (Walker 2008). Russo (2009) explains that although online videos have been around since the late 1990s in forms like QuickTime, Flash animation and downloadable files, *YouTube*'s launch in 2005 made it much easier for users due to its embedded software that allows for simple uploading and exhibition. These studies of fan vids are relevant because the integration of online media and fan participation has resulted in large fandoms, and has reinvented the image of fans: "The status of fandom and the culture of the fan are far more pervasive than we have in the past" (Gray, Sandvoss, Harrington 2007: 1).

With widespread access to computers and cell-phones and the Internet, the essentially *interactive* nature of digital media has combined with the essentially *active* nature of fandom to generate an avalanche of fan creativity on the Internet, and has enabled the very existence

of often gigantic and thriving international fan communities, such as those to be found on *Twitter*.

Shipping

Fans that watch and study a media text are able to discern chemistry between, or take a liking to, certain characters which they start pairing together romantically, even if they interact very little in the TV show or film. Ships (from 'relationships') are almost like match-making that fans arrange for themselves, extending the fictional world of the media text into areas untouched by the original text, and thus clearly demonstrating yet again how fans become co-owners of fictional texts through their creativity. Depending on what fans takes a liking to, the fans are able to reject pairings that are written between two characters in the media text just because they may take a liking to two very different characters. The different kinds of ship vary, from heterosexual ships to slash ships (gay and lesbian romances non-existent in the original media text), crack ships (the pairing of two very unlikely characters), and crossovers, which involve characters from different fandoms being brought into a single story.

Shipping essentially begins as a personal preference or opinion that the fan may have about two particular characters within a media text. Shipping manifests once the fan starts to create something new based on what they envisage, through drawing fan art, writing fan fiction or making fan videos of their favourite characters in a romantic pairing. This can be seen by the 30, 081 romantic stories written about Harry Potter and Hermione Granger on the Fanfiction.net site as of December 2013. While these 2 characters are best friends, there has been no further exploration of a romantic relationship in the books or films. Fans have thus taken it upon themselves to write their own stories and create their own content based on the kinds of stories they would prefer to read.

Anti Fans

Anti-fans are people with clear dislikes. They are people who, for a variety of reasons, hate or intensely dislike and have a strong negative view or feeling about a certain text, genre or personality. (Gray 2003). Anti-fans do not dislike popular texts for nothing. On the contrary,

they are more familiar with their objects of disinterest and sharply aware of the reasons for their dislike.

For example, many of the *Harry Potter* fans consider J.K. Rowling's novels to be superior to the *Twilight* series written by Stefanie Meyer, which are stories involving a human girl falling in love with a vampire and contains fantasy elements of vampires and werewolves. Many of the female *Harry Potter* fans have read the *Twilight* books (including myself), as well as watched the films, and find certain aspects of the series very different to the standards which the *Harry Potter* story has set.

The anti-fan is first and foremost a fan, and resorts to anti-fandom so as to defend his/her fan object from the threat its "counterforce" poses. This suggests that in cases of extreme antagonism between two fan objects, fans love to hate the "opposing threat" and use their anti-fandom to bolster their own fandom (Gray et al 2007: 325). This explains that certain people who are anti-fans of a particular fandom, (for example, *Harry Potter* fans not liking *Twilight*) have had to read or have familiarised themselves with media texts (e.g. *Twilight*) in order to make comparisons and find something to dislike about the story. This is done to counteract the many *Twilight* fans who argue that *Twilight* is superior to *Harry Potter*.

Gray points out that:

> Anti-fans must find cause for their dislike in something. This something may vary from having previously watched the show and having found it intolerable, to having a dislike for its genre, director or stars; to having seen previews or ads, or seen or heard unfavourable reviews. (2003: 71).

There is often a comparison between the fantasy elements of both sets of novels; however, fans of *Harry Potter* feel that the *Twilight* series is limited in its magical elements, thus making *Twilight* incomparable to Rowling's fictional world which the fans have grown up imagining and loving.

There is a certain amount of intertextuality which takes place online between fans in terms of their *Twilight* VS *Harry Potter* rivalry. The fans are extremely knowledgeable of the literary texts, films and TV shows of both series, and they often incorporate this information through comparisons and relations to imagined role play situations which shall be explored within the findings.

There are also certain users who can be categorised as 'Haters'. Haters spread malicious comments about specific characters within fandoms and may even spread this hate to role players of certain characters and even the actors that portray these roles in films or TV series. Haters seem to have no particular relevance apart from viewing and openly announcing their dislike with no substantial proof for their subjective behaviour. They differ from Anti Fans in the sense that they do not understand the text nor have they read or watched the specific media, but state their opinions as fact. Many haters only seem to have the purpose of stirring up trouble online and verbally attack and bully others seemingly due to their subjective opinions of a certain media text.

Role play

According to Urban Dictionary, one of the many definitions of role play is: To assume or act as though you are the character you are portraying.[3]

Role play can be divided into physical and virtual role play. Physical role play consists of face to face interaction and LARPing. Live Action Role Play (LARP) is usually when a group of fans who share similar interests on a certain topic, meet and together re-enact scenes within books or movies. It is common within the U.S where teenagers dress up as their favourite characters and then interact with other 'characters'. Similarly, their role play may have a physical aspect to it through dressing up, but whether the person adopts the mannerisms and personality traits of the character who they are imitating may vary depending on how seriously they are taking the role playing (Falk & Davenport 2004: 131).

Online role play is usually related to video games, where a participant requires a computer or a game console, along with the purchase of a game or the software downloaded to the computer in order to participate. Most games visually recreate locations so that role players feel like they are actually in a specific environment - an attempt at a real world setting is therefore made in a video game. The online role play discussed in this study is quite different. Online role playing games require the participant to enter a virtual world that has been formulated for them to play within, containing a set of rules that restrict and control their actions, along with interactions that occur with other players. The role play that will be

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[3] Taken from: http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=roleplay
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explored in this study is of a literary kind. Instead of entering a virtual world that was specifically created for role playing, like many RP games, the *Twitter* site is the domain for these participants of text-based RP.

In this case, since the role player is communicating through writing, they can formulate their own environment and actions through words. They are able to do so through the set up of an online profile for a fictional character. With an avatar, a person pretends to be a character from a particular fandom and types messages which sound in character. This is the most basic form of literary role play. This is also taken to whole new level when role players of fictional accounts interact with one another, communicating in the shape of a dramatic dialogue which occurs in real time, and can go on even for weeks (McIsaac 2010).[4] This can be seen most easily on *Twitter*, but also on blogging and social networking sites like *Tumblr, Facebook* and private fan forums.

Fan identity will be explored and in terms of role-play, the study enquires as to what experiences users seek through creating a profile for online role-play, rather than being one's 'offline' self. It shall also ask what type of characteristics fans and users would base a 'good role-player' on (how accurate are the portrayals of the character's they choose to role play), and the appeal of 'following' other role-players. Research has also been pursued into the precise nature of these online 'identities', provisionally assumed to be instances of the 'performance' of identity in line with both Goffman's concept of 'role-playing', and recent Cultural Studies approaches to the media that emphasise how the media is actively used in the making of individual identities (Gray 2003). What online role playing seems to make visible is the very machinery of identity 'self-fashioning'. The intriguing relationship between online ('fictitious') and offline ('real') subjectivities will be researched.

Through the incorporation of users spreading their messages behind fictional characters, role-play not only brings the characters to life, but redefines their role from the novels, transforming them into members of present society, thus adding a fictional as well as real context to their online role-playing existence. Users are able to embody their favourite characters as well as personalise them through their own individual agendas. Role players choose to spend their time online behind fictitious characters because they derive meaning

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[4] Text-Based Role playing; A Beginners guide – http://ifanboy.com/articles/text-based-roleplaying-a-beginners-guide/

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from their interactions. It is an enjoyable practice where one is able to show a greater understanding of a show that one loves while meeting and interacting with fellow fans from across the world

It is important to note that the role play on *Twitter* is primarily a kind of literary role play, where fans are creating stories and scenarios through writing, using the social networking site as a mental fantasy world as compared to other role play sites and games where there is an actual replication or a map or scenes of a world in which the users move around and interact. The wonder of *Twitter* role play that it is a wholly creative experience in the minds of role players, who are able to immerse themselves in this world by relying on nothing else but the portrayal of the characters in the books, films, or the television shows, and the role players' imagination.

An online community functions just as normally or even dysfunctionally as a real life community would, except that its location has been switched to an online domain. The idea of a virtual online world in cyberspace for fans brings into question the incorporation of reality and a fan's imagination. 'RL [real life] is just another window [on his computer's monitor]' (Turkle 1995: 13). This quote captures the potential for changeability and assortment of identities available to Internet users. It also suggests that the net is yet another example of postmodern media's tendency to dissolve strictly bordered and substantive culture and identity. (Chamberlin in Hodkinson and Deicke 2007: 200).

Previous Studies of Contemporary Online Fandom

Many studies have been conducted about online fandom that have been helpful to my own, particularly in relation to communities where fans are able to build relationships with one another and communicate their opinions and shared experiences.

Nancy Baym

Nancy Baym in her study on soap fandoms, discusses how TV shows produce talk amongst fans themselves, which then moves online. In her book *Tune In, Log On: Soaps, Fandom, and Online Community* (1995), she argues that soap opera fans form "a dynamic community of people with unique voices, distinctive traditions, and enjoyable relationships" (1995: 4).

What makes Baym's book vital to this study is that the book "is an ethnographic study of internet soap opera fan groups. Bridging the fields of computer mediated communication and audience studies, the book shows how verbal and nonverbal communicative practices create collaborative interpretations and criticism, group humour, interpersonal relationships, group norms, and individual identity."(1995).This study was one of the first to report on fandom communities that began online.

Baym conducted an ethnographic study of the online interactions of a Usenet group devoted to the discussion of soap operas. For over three years in the 1990s, Baym monitored and analysed the content of 33,000 messages and 100 qualitative surveys answered by participants in the group. Baym's thesis explains that fans create online communities and rich social environments through their discussions and interpretations of the story lines of soap operas. Because these fans and members of sites share common meanings, practices and identities, their discussions lead to the existence of an interactive environment. Baym documents the interpersonal relationships which are formed between members as well, and how similar interests such as a soap opera or interest in a particular actor is able to bring people together online. Online fandom affects people's lives because, "When good or bad things happen online, the emotions they create play back into participants' offline lives." (Baym 1995: 205).Henry Jenkins in *Fans, Bloggers and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture* similarly states that fandom sites are places, "that serve multiple functions in the lives of its members and becomes a site of meaning and emotion" (2006b: 20).

Bury and Female Fans Online

Bury spent 7 years gathering information and researching *Cyberspaces of Their Own: Female Fandom's Online* (2005), which provides an in-depth ethnographic investigation of two online communities based on the popular television shows *The X Files* and *Due South* -The David Duchovny Estrogen Brigade (DDEB) (!) and slash fiction writers who write homoerotic stories who belong to an online community known as Militant Ray Kowalski Separatists (MRKS). Most importantly, Bury examines the relationships between television viewers and their interactions in a virtual community, and how their shared interest brings groups of people together online, thus forming and maintaining communal virtual relationships.

Bury explains that as an internet researcher, there are complexities of virtual identity, community and space to be dealt with. While much of the research is focused on hypothesised differences between 'real' (or offline) and online identities, Bury explains that they actually have many similarities. Members perform a range of identities associated with real life while making sense of the TV shows they watch, offering advice, support, avoiding conflict as well as engaging in polite behaviour. Similarly, real life middle class identities are extended to cyberspace through these activities (2005: 210).

In the chapter 'Cyberspace as a virtual heterotopia' Bury explains the specific appeal of the internet, and how its instantaneous nature enables shared experience for fans from all over the world. For many, the internet doesn't just help connect, but enables people with a shared interest to form their own online community.

Many fans around the world feel isolated and alone in terms of their interest and usually find like-minded people online. It is a form of communication that transcends boundaries, literally as well as figuratively (Bury 2005: 202). Outside of the site, they are very much ordinary people. Bury explains that these female fans are "mothers, daughters, girlfriends, wives, administrative assistants, fundraisers, computer analysts, doctors, students, costume designers, and technical writers, just to name a few roles/identities" (2005: 210).As Henry Jenkins puts it, fandom is ultimately about relating to other fans, and Bury's study focuses heavily on the relationships between fans and how they relate to each other online through their shared creativity and communications. One of the key points I draw out from studies such as these is how the 'new media' of the Internet has enabled an enormous shift in (power) relations between the culture industry and fans. The sheer quantity of fans who are now able easily to gather 24 hours per day from every corner of the globe on *Twitter* to share their fandom is a world away from the 'old media' fandoms of small magazines sent by post to fans who perhaps at best knew a handful of people in their local area who shared their enthusiasm for a TV show.

Fans of American TV shows that lived in say New Zealand or Egypt would have had almost no contact with any organized fandom, let alone with the makers and actors of the TV show. In that environment, the culture industries loomed large, and fans were dispersed. With online fandom, however, fans build and sustain through their own energies massive *Twitter* fan

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communities generating not only endless conversations and debates about the object of their fandom, but also, as we have seen, prodigious amounts of aesthetic objects from stories to videos to music to art work. All of these activities produce *autonomous* fan communities, autonomous that is of the culture industries and the very popular culture texts to which they are so affectively attached. These autonomous worlds take on lives of their own, become centres of remarkable grassroots creativity, even to the extent of gently parodying the objects of veneration, and eventually it becomes apparent that the construction of the fan by capitalism as an extreme consumer elides the deeper, perhaps more subversive, truth about fans – that their productive creative activities (including the building of fan communities) enables them to *exceed* such limited positioning, their very 'fanatic' semiotic energy placing them at the vanguard of what we can with Jenkins call an emergent 'participatory culture' made by ordinary people themselves.

Marchione and Participatory Culture

Marchione (2009) argues in her thesis, *Participatory Culture and Commodification in the age of the "Digital Revolution",* that internet culture makes necessary new and different ways of reaching the television consumer audience as they become more devoted users of the new media accessible to them and the consequent new ways of interacting with each other over the internet (2009: 4). The appeal of the internet enables fans to interact in spaces where they are free of judgement and can meet like-minded people who share similar interests as themselves. Her thesis examines the force of Web 2.0 technologies such as viral marketing and blogging and their impacts on television fan communities.

Television producers are now able to access conversations, and message-boards can now be "overheard," by those in the television industry through observing social media. "The fact that producers now have access to "fan feedback," in other words, the immediate reactions of fans on the internet either while they are watching the show or immediately following, is of the greatest importance, as it is a phenomenon completely new, solely occurring as a result of the internet" (2009: 13). Word travels fast on the internet, and by way of fan sites and blogs and social networking, fans' viewing practices and opinions can be recognized.

What Marchione points out is something quite relevant to my study, since the executive producers and actors and writers of *The Vampire Diaries,* along with many of the *Harry Potter* cast, all have *Twitter* accounts. "The creative process of fan input into how a show may play out is therefore merely a vehicle for producers to keep the fan engaged as a loyal consumer by feeding him or her what he or she desires to see" (2009: 15). These producers interact with, and receive opinions, praise, and hate from fans. They use their accounts to stimulate conversation while also generating instantaneous feedback from thousands of fans who are watching the show live, thus providing instant reactions which producers can process.*Twitter* is an essential outlet used by film and TV show fans because there are actors and producers who are associated with their favourite films/shows, are on the site. The information they share and the feedback they generate from fans are instantaneous in this scenario, making the *Twitter* site an ideal place to conduct research when it comes to audience and fan reactions to their favourite films and shows.

More important is the way in which, due to the increasing online presence of audiences, television producers began to take note of them in an exceptional way. Marchione points out that "fans, as they are the most dedicated and therefore valuable members of those audiences (in other words, the most heavily targeted by the industry), are those from whom the TV industry took cues as they were the first to develop websites to accompany television shows (or just pay homage to them)" (2009: 14). Producers and Television networks developed websites of their own. In particular, producers in the industry created "official" websites as they became increasingly aware of the growth potential which boomed in internet spaces which worked to displace and distract attention from more "home grown" sites developed by fans:"Official fan site formation was prepared in order to gather the potential and ever-growing benefit of the "commodity audience;" in other words, the internet provided a further possibility for the television industry to reach its fans" (2009: 5). Television web sites have consequently modelled themselves on sites produced by popular fan communities. So, fan activity is a great deal more visible to both internet users and the media industry. Fandom's extensive web presence resulted in a permanent alteration of how the media industry does business; this alteration continues to take on new dimensions with new advances in web technologies. (2009: 6).

Fans, then, are a key demographic for television show marketing. These loyal consumers who "show active engagement with media content" and "display willingness to track down content across a range of media platforms" (Jenkins 2006a: 67) are the ones who frequently display their opinions, give feedback and support a show. In this way they are the most valued consumers of the television audience, as they will dedicate the majority of their resources to the pursuit of their favourite show and its accessories or memorabilia. They are both emotionally and monetarily dedicated. Fans must therefore be not only targeted vigorously and successfully, but also consistently pleased with the programming available to them. The heightened value of fans in the television marketplace is a clear enough reason for the burgeoning emphasis on fans in advertising campaigns on the internet. Courting fans in the current saturated media marketplace is increasingly valuable; to win them over guarantees (as much as a guarantee is possible in this context) stability for the television industry as well as profitability for advertisers and marketers (Marchione 2009: 8).

Hilmes

In *The Television History Book,* Hilmes remarks that "fan communities that had taken months, years to develop have now developed overnight across time and geographical distances" (2003: 137). The internet is thus responsible for "normalizing" fan interactions; what was once a rather alternative, subversive or underground culture has now turned into something more dominant, filtering into mainstream society. It has become popular for fans to interact with television texts. The "subcultural reading practices" (2003: 137) or fan interpretations and discussions of their beloved texts, are more available and accessible online than they would be in literature like fanzines, and the internet has become an invitation to participate for those who would not otherwise know of fan fiction.

> In the 1960s and 70s, television enjoyed a reputation as a "vast wasteland" (Hilmes 81) that wreaked havoc on traditional culture and held mass audiences in its clutches. Not only were audiences held captive by the television programs themselves, but they were also lured in by advertisers who sponsored those programs and took full (and progressive) advantage of an audience via the medium of television (Hilmes 2003: 122).

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- that is, until now. With internet culture, fans are now free to do as they wish online through the creation of blogs and social sites which help them connect and interact, thus changing the very landscape of audiences and what they were usually assessed on. These studies which all correlate to the aspect of online fandom express unique aspects of fan activities and the communities they inhabit, which manifest and thrive upon their consumption of media texts.

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Chapter 3: Theory

"Fandom is focus. Fandom is obsession. Fandom is insatiable consumption. Fandom is sitting for hours in front of a TV screen a movie screen a computer screen with a comic book a novel on your lap. Fandom is eyestrain and carpal tunnel syndrome and not enough exercise and staying up way, way past your bedtime.

Fandom is people you don't tell your mother you're meeting. Fandom is people in the closet, people out and proud, people in costumes, people in T-shirts with slogans only fifty others would understand. Fandom is a loud dinner conversation scaring the waiter and every table nearby.

Fandom is you in Germany and me in the US and him in Australia and her in Japan. Fandom is a sofa bed in New York, a road trip to Oxnard, a friend behind a face in London. Fandom talks past time zones and accents and backgrounds. Fandom is conversation. Communication.Contact.

Fandom is drama. Fandom is melodrama. Fandom is high school. Fandom is Snacky's law and Godwin's law and Murphy's law. Fandom is smarter than you. Fandom is stupider than you. Fandom is five arguments over and over and over again. Fandom is the first time you've ever had them.

Fandom is female. Fandom is male. Fandom lets female play at being male. Fandom bends gender, straight, gay, prude, promiscuous. Fandom is fantasy. Fandom doesn't care about norms or taboos or boundaries. Fandom cares too much about norms and taboos and boundaries. Fandom is not real life. Fandom is closer than real life. Fandom knows what you're really like in the bedroom. Fandom is how you would never, could never be in the bedroom.

Fandom is shipping, never shipping, het, slash, gen, none of the above, more than the above. Fandom is love for characters you didn't create. Fandom is recreating the characters you didn't create. Fandom is appropriation, subversion, dissention. Fandom is adoration, extrapolation, imitation. Fandom is dissection, criticism, interpretation. Fandom is changing, experimenting, attempting.

Fandom is creating. Fandom is drawing, painting, vidding: nine seasons in four minutes of love. Fandom is words, language, authoring. Fandom is essays, stories, betas, parodies, filks,

zines, usenet posts, blog posts, message board posts, emails, chats, petitions, wank, concrit, feedback, recs. Fandom is writing for the first time since you were twelve. Fandom is finally calling yourself a writer.

Fandom is signal and response. Fandom is a stranger moving you to tears, anger, laughter. Fandom is you moving a stranger to speak.

Fandom is distraction. Fandom is endangering your job, your grades, your relationships, your bank account. Fandom gets no work done. Fandom is too much work. Fandom was/is just a phase. Fandom could never be just a phase. Fandom is where you found a friend, a sister, a kindred spirit. Fandom is where you found a talent, a love, a reason.

Fandom is where you found yourself. "(Hesychasm2006)

This chapter will focus on the theoretical framework that enables fan studies to take place. My thesis addresses the various manifestations of fan activity and the effects that social networks have in spreading these activities to generate online fandom communities. This chapter will concentrate on previous studies relating to online fandom and fan activity, displaying the importance of these activities in relation to the formation of a fan's identity.

Fandom theory generally begins with a crucial (and theoretically liberating) break from two important taken-for-granted assumptions: the first is that audiences are passive 'couch potatoes' who simply accept the meanings given to them 'from above' by the culture industries; and the second is that fans of popular culture texts are marginal and eccentric people who have substituted their fandom for 'having a life'.

With regard to the first challenged assumption, fandom theory is therefore a significant branch of 'active audience' studies which is central to the theoretical fabric of cultural studies (Fiske 1989), and involves a conceptual and political rejection of the notion of a passive and uniform audience or consumer entirely manipulated by the interests of an omnipotent capitalism. Against such structural determinist accounts of popular culture, fan studies begins with the assumption of individual *agency* - that, despite the power and influence of now globalized media corporations, ordinary people have the ability to act in and upon the world; not only to be shaped by history, but also to make and re-make it. Against the gloomily pessimistic accounts of say the Frankfurt School (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1979), fans

celebrate their intense enthusiasm for a TV show or rock band, but they also appear to be celebrating their autonomous agency, their *active* ability to build cultural communities that transcend the interests of the commercial mediascape.

Regarding the second questionable assumption, Henry Jenkins has been at the forefront of fandom studies, and in a host of books and articles (see for example Jenkins 1992; 2006a; 2006b; 2009), has rescued fandom from a pervasive condescension, and instead drawn our attention to the creative productivity of fans in a host of expressive forms; the making and sustaining of fan communities; and the central importance of the emergence of a 'participatory culture' within fandom that vigorously challenges taken-for-granted notions of the 'passive audience' and places fans at the forefront of a more widespread 'democratization' of culture: "Fans produce meanings and interpretations; fans produce artworks; fans produce communities; fans produce alternative identities. In each case, fans are drawing on materials from the dominant media and employing them in ways that serve their own interests and facilitate their own pleasures" (Jenkins 1992: 214). His work, built upon a foundation erected by John Fiske (1989, 1992), has established a powerful framework and provided illuminating case studies upon which this research will extensively draw.

The Fan

There are various definitions of what it means to be a "fan." Even though there are various academic debates surrounding the definition of fandom itself, this study shall use the definition that fandom engages a "collective of people organized socially around their shared appreciation of a pop culture object or objects" (Baym 2007: 14). Fandom studies looks at devotions to objects in multiple areas of interest such as television, films, comic books, literature, music, sports, celebrities and entertainment. People who study fandom look at these groups to better understand the way they classify themselves and the activities they occupy themselves with, in relation to their specific community or pop culture object of choice. Fiske explains that "Fans create a fan culture with its own systems of production and distribution that forms what I shall call a 'shadow cultural economy' that lies outside that of the cultural industries yet shares features with them" (Fiske 1992: 30. It is this *autonomous* space made 'from below' by ordinary fans – and made possible by the social networking technology of the Internet – that this thesis will examine.

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Fandom

Fandom refers to a subculture or group of fans sharing a common interest. It more often than not can be described as a group of fans of pretty much anything inhabiting the terrain of popular culture, from TV series (*Star Trek* fans being by far the longest studied and almost perhaps the template of all future fandoms) to films, actors, soccer teams, racing-car drivers, and even novels (the *Harry Potter* series). Fiske (1989) explains fandom as being "automatically more than the mere act of being a fan of something: it is a collective strategy, a communal effort to form interpretive communities that in their subcultural cohesion evaded the preferred and intended meanings of the "power bloc"" (1989: 36).The "participatory culture" of fandom that Jenkins described as a border subculture in 1992 is now increasingly part of the mainstream.

Fandom and the Internet

Before computer mediated communication and the Internet, fan communities were centred on face-to-face or written communication sent through the mail (which of course eliminated 'real time' interaction between fans) and prearranged around fan clubs and conventions (Bacon-Smith, 1992; Jenkins, 1992). Conventions have been a key component of fan communities, with U.S. conventions for some genres dating back to the 1930s (Bacon-Smith 1992: 9). They "spatially and temporally organize the interaction between the community and potential new members, and serve as formal meeting places for the various smaller groups of fans who follow a convention circuit" (Bacon-Smith 1999: 9). But this is not possible for many international fans that are unable to attend conventions held in various parts of the world due to lack of money or even time.

The emergence of the Internet, and more particularly Web 2.0, has revolutionized fandoms, where fandoms continue to grow exponentially around an endless range of popular culture texts and people. If globalization has meant that the output of the culture industries such as TV programmes are now experienced on a global scale by audiences, then fandoms have themselves through internet-based communication become immense global communities (active 24 hours per day), where users can come together over a wide array of themes and interests, and bridge geographical distances (Baym, 2007). This is very useful for fan communities as before the explosion of the internet, fans of a particular media text might

have difficulty finding others with whom to share their interest. The internet is therefore a significant location for the academic study of fan communities (e.g. Andrejevic 2008; Baym 2000; Bird 1999; Jenkins, 2006a, 2006b; Shefrin 2004).

Web 2.0, which brings about information sharing, makes possible a participatory internet experience where the content is now largely created by the 'consumers' themselves (see *YouTube, Facebook, Twitter*, etc), and where on-line sociality is of central importance. Online fandoms are very popular and depending on the fandom, numerous sites are created for fan interaction and expression. Fan sites allow for discussion, debate and sharing of ideas with fellow fans from around the world. Due to easy accessibility and the gap of time and space being diminished, fans are able to communicate in real time and share their experiences with other users (Gray et al 2007: 6).

It has been established that the presence of "nurturing interactions" (Menon 2007: 341) and "agreed-upon, specific rules for speech and behavior" (Burke: 2001: 7) indicate that fan spaces (e.g., conventions, fan-focused web sites, fan gatherings on *Twitter* and *Facebook*, mailing lists, zines, online message boards) function as communities. Social interaction which takes place amongst fans has become an ever more integral part of everyday life in modern globalized societies:

> Most people are fans of something. If not, they are bound to know someone who is. As much as we all have a sense of whom fans are and what they do, the question arises as to why we need to further study a phenomenon we seem so familiar with… The laconic answer to those questions is that fandom matters because it matters to those who are fans (Gray et al. 2007: 1).

The internet has made the world a much smaller place. It allowed fans from all over the world to sit down in front of a computer, whether at 3am in the morning or 8pm at night, and live stream or download episodes to enjoy, all the while sharing their reactions, their opinions and their criticisms with each other online, simultaneously in 'real time'. Online fandoms have now become so popular that commercial media outlets have begun to use sites like *Twitter* as sources, and also use the opinions and questions from fans as a starting point for conducting interviews with actors and producers. There is an intense level of scrutiny of the fans which is clearly visible online. Media creators cannot ignore the existence of fans and their feedback and reactions to plotlines and character development within a show as they require high

levels of viewership to maintain the success of the show on their respective television networks. TV channels like MTV, the CW and various other American networks use *Twitter* as a major source of monitoring fan responses during the airing of their shows. Viewers are able to tweet their reactions to what they are watching instantaneously, whether through PC or mobile, through the hash tag (#) function that the site has enabled to track what is being tweeted about on the site and can track feedback and reactions.

Because fandom is constantly changing - to what new Internet phenomenon will fans gravitate next, opening up new possibilities for the expression of fandom? - any talk of it is probably already outdated (Hellekson and Busse 2006: 6). While consequently trying to avoid a homogenous reading or attempting to essentialize fandom, this study hopes to articulate a knowledge of fandom in its present manifestation as an autonomous online community activity 'from below' on social networking sites such as *Twitter*.

Fan Productivity and Meaning Making

Popular culture is produced by ordinary people out of the products of the cultural industries: it must be understood, therefore, in terms of *productivity*, not of reception. Fans are particularly creative, and Fiske (1992) categorizes their productions into three areas while recognizing that any example of fan productivity may well span all categories and he thus refuses any clear distinctions among them: Semiotic Productivity, Enunciative Productivity, and Capital Accumulation. I will draw attention to the first two of these categories.

Semiotic productivity, according to Fiske, refers to ordinary people – audiences - using media texts to *make* meanings regarding social identity and social experiencefrom the semiotic resources of the cultural commodity. This is an internal process, and when the meaning making turns external, it transitions into what he calls, 'enunciative productivity': "When the meanings made [in semiotic productivity] are spoken and are shared within a face-to face or oral culture they take a public form that may be called enunciative productivity" (Fiske 1992: 37). Semiotic productivity is an attribute of popular culture overall rather than of fan culture exclusively.

Early representatives of this 'enunciative productivity' were 'Star Trek' fans (Jenkins 1992; Penley 1990) who wrote full-length novels filling in the gaps in the original narrative, and thereafter circulated these novels, and other writings through the fan network. Media texts turn 'producerly' (Fiske 1989), as they are analysed and critiqued and then re-written by fans. Fiske argues these media texts have to be open-ended, have loopholes and flaws and contradictions to allow and invite semiotic/enunciative productivity. They are activated, worked upon, and circulated by fans so that they can actively produce their own cultural capital.

For many scholars therefore (see Jenkins, 1992; Fiske, 1992; Pearson, 2007), to be a fan means that one must do more than simply consume a cultural object or text; it significantly requires a degree of fan *activity* that eventually leads to the making of meanings that becomes embedded onto their objects of fandom. As Jenkins argues:

> Fans actively assert their mastery over the mass-produced texts that provide the raw materials for their own cultural productions and the basis for their actions. In the process, fans cease to be simply an audience for popular texts; instead they become active participants in the construction and circulation of textual meanings (1992: 23-24).

This is a view agreed upon by Kelly:

> Fans emerge out of mass culture audiences in search of intensified meanings and pleasures. They selectively appropriate from among this mass culture, and creatively rework their selections into a stylized matrix of practices and identities. They consume mass culture, but in their voracious and determined consumption, they produce both social communities and cultural artefacts. Fans' relations to the persons and products they "fan-tasize," to the Culture Industry itself and to the normal audience, are variously dependent and autonomous, even antagonistic (2004: 1-2).

As "meaning makers," fans are said to then broadly manufacture two categories of things: "social communities and cultural artefacts", and these two indeed were the focus of my ethnographic research. For both, fans are determinedly connecting the focus of their fandoms to "their own lives, experiences, needs, and desires" (Grossberg 1992: 52). The fan text

becomes expanded and translated. Expanded in the sense that because it turns into an occasion for an endless set of improvised fan-created texts like videos, fan art, and fan fiction, drawing the original text into the texture of fans' everyday lives (the text becomes part of a larger fan cultural texture); and translated because the fans' affective investment in the media text is turned into an actual and active community of fans talking incessantly on sites like *Twitter*. In these processes, fans are transformed from being consumers into producers – of meanings, and of communities. These fans become active consumers and prosumers since they engage in a variety of creative practices to express their fandom in order to construct identities for themselves. This is primarily focused on the aspect of meaning making.

Fan communities and meaning sharing

Fan communities are sustained by fans themselves, where they produce through incessant voluntary interaction and affective commitment shared meanings and practices.

> Cyber-communities are, like any group, a community represented by both its social imaginary and its empirical reality that functions in traditionally expected modes with the notable modification that the communal experience is often hyper-mediated. This mediation is an important element of online groups, not to be overlooked. (Wiatrowski)[5]

Returning to Fiske's characteristics of fandom, enunciative productivity can also be referred to as meaning sharing, highlighting the moment when the fan moves thoughts from his or her own head to someone else or into the shared space of a fan community. It is the act of taking meaning making from an internal to an external state, or the act of sharing it with others. As Jenkins argues: "the moment of reception is often also the moment of enunciation…Making meanings involves sharing enunciating and debating meanings. For the fan, watching the series is the beginning, not the end, of the process of media consumption" (1992: 278). For

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[5] http://www.academia.edu/491940/The_Dynamics_of_Fandom_Exploring_Fan_Communities_in_Online_Spaces

example critiquing a TV show, a popular act within fan communities, reveals semiotic and enunciative productivity. Although fans have often been depicted as "worshipping" their textual object (Jenkins, 1992), this is far from the truth; critique and analysis are central to fandom:

> Organized fandom is, perhaps first and foremost, an institution of theory and criticism, a semi-structured space where competing interpretations and evaluations of common texts are proposed, debated, and negotiated and where readers speculate about the nature of the mass media and their own relationship to it (Jenkins, 1992: 86).

Thinking critically about a text and sharing those critiques with others - and thus making meaning rather than simply deferring to the meanings of the culture industries - are essential parts of the fan experience.

Conversation based on the text is a key component of most fan communities, but is important for the individual fan as well. In fact, some fans will engage with a text for the sole purpose of discussing it within their fan community later (Andrejevic 2009; Baym 2000).Fans have written reviews and recaps of films and shows that they wish for others to read and talk about online. Indeed, much of the pleasure of fandom lies in the *fan-talk* that is produced, and many fans report that their choice of their object of fandom was determined atleast as much by the oral community they wished to join as by any of its inherent characteristics (Fiske, 1992: 38).That is, the driving force behind watching a television program or seeing a film is not the experience in and of itself, but rather the anticipation of being able to engage with other users in discussing that text and belonging to a particular community: "fans debate and even police elements of the canon, for example by complaining that a story is OOC (Out of Character). The term 'fanon' is used to refer to the process whereby over time certain plot or character elements become established within the fan community - even when those elements never appeared in the source text, or radically depart from it" (Thomas 2011: 9).

Participatory Culture

Participatory culture, most notably developed as a concept by Henry Jenkins (1992; 2006a; 2006b; 2009), can be described as a culture which is no longer content to accept a cultural

landscape structured according to an elitist logic where cultural production is almost entirely in the hands of large media industries (CBS, Disney, Warner Brothers, SABC, News International, etc.), and where ordinary people are almost entirely the passive receivers of that cultural production, defined therefore as cultural 'consumers'. Instead, argues Jenkins, ordinary people, assisted by the interactive logic of the digital media, are generating culture at the grass-roots level in unprecedented levels, whether it is running your own blog, uploading your videos onto *YouTube*, or even regularly maintaining your *Facebook* profile. Hence the hybrid term, 'prosumers'. This tendency is perhaps most visible amongst fans, defined precisely by their indefatigable need to generate 'secondary' texts such as fan fiction, videos, music, and indeed entire communities, from such objects of fandom as TV shows and films. These developments, Jenkins concludes, are progressive, suggesting a democratic demand by ordinary people actively to partake in the production of their culture – hence 'participatory culture', which is patently leading to a blurring of the traditional distinction between professional and amateur cultural production:

> The term participatory culture contrasts with older notions of passive media spectatorship. Rather than talking about media producers and consumers as occupying separate roles, we might now see them as participants who interact with each other according to a new set of rules that none of us fully understands (Jenkins 2006b: 3).

In participatory culture "young people creatively respond to a plethora of electronic signals and cultural commodities in ways that surprise their makers, finding meanings and identities never meant to be there and defying simple nostrums that bewail the manipulation or passivity of 'consumers'" (Willis 2003: 392). Fans, in other words, do not merely accept a media text as is, but rather engage and re-define its content – they *re-signify* the text to be shared amongst other contributors, and in so doing signal a desire to be active participants in the making and re-making of contemporary culture.

With participatory culture and diverse media resources in the 21st century, comes a deeper social change. Until as recently as the end of the 20th century, Rheingold (2008) argues, a handful of generally privileged, generally wealthy people controlled nearly all forms of mass communication - newspapers, television, magazines, books and encyclopaedias. Today, however, tools for media production and dissemination are readily available and allow for what Rheingold labels "participatory media" (2008).The easier participation becomes, the

greater the diversity of voices that can be heard, thus leading to an expansion of democratic expression at the level of culture. Even a single person now has the ability to spread information around the world. The advance of digital technology gives every user the ability to spread and interact with information instantaneously, including because video and still cameras, and film and sound editing software, are now dramatically more affordable (and often – like movie and sound editing software – free).

Participatory culture also extends to the lessening of media communication as a one-way (one to many) communication system, since the very productivity of fans now becomes information feeding back into commercial media productions and leading sometimes to the alteration of plot directions and characterizations. This is especially true if fan creations are based on media texts that are simultaneously in production. For example, a popular television show like *The Vampire Diaries* can gather ideas from what fans create as their fan's ideas necessarily reflect an audience choice, as well as what they feel and express about the show as viewers.

Vincent Miller in *Understanding Digital Culture,* shows how the lines between producer and consumers blur. Producers traditionally are those that create content and cultural objects, and consumers are the audience or purchasers of those objects. By referring to Bruns' idea of 'prosumer,' Miller argues that:

> With the advent of convergent new media and the plethora of choice in sources for information, as well as the increased capacity for individuals to produce content themselves, this shift away from producer hegemony to audience or consumer power would seem to have accelerated, thus eroding the producer-consumer distinction (2011: 87).

Bruns also refers to "produsage", therefore, as a community collaboration that participants can access in order to share "content, contributions, and tasks throughout the networked community" (2008: 14). Produsage occurs when the users are the "produsers" and vice versa, essentially eliminating the need for these "top-down" interventions. Bruns describes the empowerment for users as different from the typical "top-down mediated spaces of the traditional mediaspheres" (2008:14):"In a community of learners, collaboration through produsage can provide access to content for every participant, not just those with some kind of authority. Every participant has authority" (Bruns 2008).Because there are no more

categorical distinctions between producers and consumers, every participant has an equal chance to participate meaningfully in "produsage" (2008: 25).

Participatory culture has been hailed by some as a way to reform communication and enhance the quality of media. According to Jenkins, one result of the emergence of participatory cultures is an increase in the number of media resources available, giving rise to increased competition between media outlets. Producers of media are forced to pay more attention to the needs of consumers who can turn to other sources for information. (Jenkins 2006b).

Inter/Active Audience

The theory of the "active audience" emerged in the 1980s within cultural studies: ordinary people actively receive and interpret messages within the media differently, depending on the demographics of the audience through age, sex, ethnicity, social class, cultural capital, and various other factors (Hall 1996; Fiske 1989): The theory of the active audience suggested that people were neither homogenous nor passive when it came to the media. This theory developed before the 'digital revolution'', which is to say it focused on how ordinary people responded to the "old" dominant centralized media (television, newspapers, radios), showing conclusively that audience reception was active and diverse, a "de-coding" that may or may not agree with the ideological orientation of the mass media. There was no question of members of the public altering the texts of the mass media in any significant way. At best, newspapers had a small space for letters from the public, while radio stations had phone-in programmes controlled by the radio stations themselves.

With the emergence of the 'new media', particularly of computer-mediated-communication (CMC) and the Internet/World Wide Web, this notion of the "active audience" shifted another gear, since what was clearly happening was that audiences were not only responding actively to the messages or texts of the media industry, but were actually *manufacturing* texts themselves. Audiences were now described as 'interactive': "interactivity implies some sort of transformative relationship between the user of the media and the media form itself. Encoded into new media is the capacity to transform the actual flow and presentation of the material itself" (Marshall 2004: 13). The content of *YouTub*e is transformed whenever a member of the public uploads a video onto it; the content of *Facebook* is transformed every time someone uploads a photograph or changes her status. *Wikipedia* is entirely written and therefore perpetually transformed by members of the public. Fans interactively 'transform'

both the original media texts of which they are fans, and of course also 'transform' the media sites to which they contribute by creating stories and art-work, conversing with other fans, and developing online identities. Contemporary fan culture is an interactive culture.

Twitter is an online micro-blogging platform that contains both mass-media roles and interactive communication options through sending tweets. Research has found a positive connection between active times spent on *Twitter* and the gratification of a need for "an informal sense of camaraderie"—social connection—with other users. Furthermore, the frequency of tweets and number of replies and public messages facilitated the relationship between *Twitter* users. This helped the growth of both the uses of the media and the gratification it provides by satisfying the need for connection (Chen 2011), which is of course another way of talking about the founding and sustaining of online fan communities and the appeal of their voluntary and de-centralized sociality.Communication researchers have examined interactive media since the late 1990s, but their analysis has focused on how the audience uses these media (Singer 1998), not whether people gratify a need to connect with each other through the medium, which is the focus of UGT.

Twitter, founded in 2006, is one of the fastest-growing social-networking sites; as of September 2013, the company's data showed that 200 million users send over 400 million tweets daily. In a marketing study, Zarella (2009) found that 90% of the 5.4 million *Twitter* users he studied had tweeted at least 11 times and had at least 11 followers.With so many people using *Twitter*, understanding whether people can gratify a need to connect with other people through Twitter is a meaningful addition to the body of knowledge about how people interact online.

Identity

In contrast to 'determinist' theories which stress the ways in which identities are shaped by social structures, the emphasis in cultural studies is upon the processes of active identity *construction:*

Identity could be seen as dragging cultural studies into the 1990s by acting as a kind of guide to how people see themselves, not as class subjects, not as psychoanalytic subjects, not as subjects of ideology, not as textual subjects, but as active agents whose sense of self is projected onto and expressed in an expansive range of cultural practices, including texts, images, and commodities

(McRobbie 1992: 730. See also Bocock 1993).

Shields similarly argues that:

The postmodern turn is also argued to have had a considerable impact on the notion of individual identity, the erosion of those ideological forces that once proscribed identity giving rise to an endless array of possible identities from which individuals are able to choose, thus assuming multiple and shifting personas (Shields, 1992: 33).

This focus on self-fashioning of "possible identities" through "an expansive range of cultural practices, including texts, images, and commodities", leads to a focus on the manner in which fans actively use the 'raw material' (Fiske 1989) of their fan texts like *Harry Potter* to construct online identities. Markus and Nurius (1986: 956) argue that "an individual is free to create any variety of possible selves, yet the pool of possible selves derives from the categories made salient by the individual's particular socio-cultural and historical context and from the models, images, and symbols provided by the media and by the individual's immediate social experiences". The fan text provides the "models, images, and symbols" to make possible a process of self-construction, particularly through online role-playing.

The web represents a space in which people have the possibility to express and expose their self-fashioned identity (Marcus, Machilek&Schütz 2006) in a social context. An online identity or persona is a social identity that online users select when entering social networks or websites. It is an actively constructed presentation of oneself that is displayed to other users when online. Although some people prefer to use their real names online, some internet users prefer to be anonymous, identifying themselves by means of pseudonyms, which reveal varying amounts of personally identifiable information. An online identity may even be determined by a user's relationship to a certain social group

they are a part of online, using pictures or names of famous people and even fictitious characters in order to create an image and display their personal interests through an online profile so that they can be easily spotted by others who share similar interests.

Participatory culture changes the perception of identity, online. A user can hide behind an avatar, false profile, or simply idealized self when interacting with others online. There is no accountability to be who one says one is. The ability to slide in and out of roles changes the effect of media on culture, and also the user. Now, not only are people active participants in media and culture, but their imagined selves are as well (Larabie 2011: 73).

This identity flexibility engages with the work of Erving Goffman (1956) who has famously brought to our attention the ways in which individuals actively perform various identity-*roles* in different social contexts, raising the issue as to whether there is any 'essential' or 'real' self apart from these dramatic performances. A young woman plays the role of a waitress in a restaurant in the evening, and then plays the role of a student on campus in the morning. As the former she may smile sweetly at big-pocketed diners, while as the latter she may be a particularly angry anarcho-feminist. In both she is acting out identity-roles. This dramaturgical concept of identityis particularly helpful in trying to comprehend the nature of online role-playing, where a dramatized (fictional?) self is for example created on *Twitter*.

Our identity in 'real life' is heavily dependent on physical attributes and displayed personality traits when individuals interact with each other on a regular basis. It is an aspect which we are not able to hide as it is presented and exposed for people to see. However, multiple identities can be displayed online. Cyberspace offers a niche for each of these specific facets of selfhood (Suler 2002).Turkle, author of *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (1995), has famously analysed Internet sites such as chat-rooms and similar sites devoted to online sociality in terms of their potential for the performance of multiple identities: "the new practice of entering virtual worlds raises fundamental questions about our communities and ourselves" (1995: 232). It is these 'fundamental questions' about identity in the digital age that this thesis will also consider.Turkle explains how, in cyberspace, the self is fragmented. Among other things, the user may select an array of identities which can radically differ from one another when online, but the most crucial aspect to this all, is that all these identities differ from one's

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RL (Real Life) self.[6]"The one can be many and the many can be one" (Turkle 1995).

Turkle claims our notions of identity were in the past forged by our communities and culture: they are in a real sense determined by powerful social structures. In cyberspace however we "self-fashion" and "self-create" as we decide what kinds of online personas we can assume. In cyberspace in general, it is possible to create personas which express new or different aspects of oneself. For this reason Turkle believes online identities imply "difference, multiplicity, heterogeneity, and fragmentation."(Turkle 1995: 185). This is very much a post-modern notion of identity which is realised on the internet, which allows for anonymity, multiplicity, and invisibility. The very absence of one's physical self on the Internet allows for this exploration and accentuation of multiplicity selves which are largely self-fabricated. To this extent, identity interestingly declares its *fictionality*, which is to say its inventiveness.

Turkle explains that the internet is like a "laboratory for the construction and reconstruction of the self." This is a particularly relevant comment, since the internet seems to provide a means for people to explore aspects of their identity which are impossible, or at the least not easy, to construct in RL (1995: 17). It is impossible for someone in RL (and Real Life is looking increasingly less like Real Life, which is more usually found in cyberspace, where human beings nowadays *actually* live) to be immortal, as is common in *The Vampire Diaries*. On *Twitter*, however, vampires, werewolves, witches and wizards with supernatural powers, and the occasional gay vampire hunter, mingle happily together and role-play through the endless night of the Web.

When combined, multiplicity and invisibility in cyberspace provide even greater opportunities to acquire self-knowledge (Turkle 1995: 19). For example, this theory can be applied to my own experience of how an online identity is able to help me overcome certain barriers that I may face in real life. I am 23 and I enjoy writing fantasy fiction. I am aware that an online identity makes it easier for me to voice and write in a particular manner without fear or judgement. Since I am also a role player, I utilise my love of fantasy fiction by role playing through a character who is a witch and who practices

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[6]RL stands for Real Life. The term RL refers to the distinction between the offline world and being in cyberspace. Both RL and cyberspace are real aspects, however the term refers to one's physical life away from the internet.

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magic. This is multiplicity, where on the one hand, I am a college student in real life, but also a role player and writer. The web is able to open windows in terms of identity, thus creating multiple selves derived from different aspects of one's personality, some of which would otherwise remain dormant (which is not always a bad thing!).

While studies of fan behaviour have become more popular within academia in recent years (see Harris in Harris & Alexander, 1998, p. 4), the study of online fandom is only beginning to flourish (see, e.g., Gray, Sandvoss& Harrington, 2007). A notable early work about fans online is Baym's study of soap opera fans (2000). She discusses elements of online community and tactics of communication within it. Much has been written about online identity including a large literature on the issue of deception (see, e.g., Birchmeier, Joinson& Dietz-Uhler, 2005; Gonzales & Hancock, 2008). The study of online fan identity is important to internet researchers for two reasons: first, to understand more completely the fans of celebrities, bands, and television shows who form a large subgroup of interest groups online; and second, and even more crucial for this thesis, to add to knowledge on how people combine their offline presentations of self with their online interests. Because fan sites and fan communities in particular so obviously link a group (the band or performer) to the individual (the online participant), they represent the opportunity to learn about how people relate to others with common interests online (Baker 2009: 8).

Blended identity

Fans who display some of their real identity information on *Twitter* can be described as expressing a "blended identity". The concept of "blended learning" has appeared in the literature on online education for years (see e.g., Kirschner, Clark and Sweller, 2006). It means there that a combined form of instruction takes place in both the virtual world, online, as well as in the physical classroom. Following Walther and Park's notion of "mixed mode relationships" (2002) to denote connections that span the online and offline worlds, here the concept of "blended identity" refers to online self-presentations that include *both* online and offline aspects of themselves. To understand the process of the creation of blended identity is to know how people (a) derive identities online related to

their offline experiences and the online community they have joined; and then (b) migrate from online to offline bringing with them the online identities that they then introduce to others whom they have met first online(Walther and Park 2002: 533).The importance of "place" or location online is similar to an offline setting, in that the goals of people drawn to a particular space, and the modes and styles of interaction, are greatly affected by the conventions of the particular online space (Baker, 2008). For example, people meeting online either in a dating site or in a more naturalistic (McKenna, 2007) manner in a game, chat room or discussion board engage in very different processes to become acquainted and to set up offline meetings (Baker, 2005, 2008).Perhaps the default today, at least for groups with common interests, is the "blended identity" type, where elements of online and offline selves combine to reflect the role of the online community member.

Chapter 4: *Twitter*

Mirko Tobias Schäfer (2011) contributes to our understanding of the interactive audience of Web 2.0 social networking media by making a distinction between what he refers to as 'explicit' and 'implicit' participation. Explicit participation describes the conscious, active and creative engagement of users in online fan communities, while implicit participation instead refers to the software and other technological methods of directing user activities through a design interface. Implicit participation is more subtle and unfolds often without the user's knowledge. Schäfer argues that the success of popular Web 2.0 social media applications thrive on implicit participation. The notion of implicit participation expands theories of participatory culture as formulated by Henry Jenkins and Axel Bruns who both focus most prominently on explicit participation. Considering implicit participation allows for a more accurate analysis of the role of technology in co-shaping user interactions and user generated content (2008: 51-52): the explicit participation of fans on social media is actually dependent on the implicit participation enabled by Web 2.0 technology.

The ability of ordinary people to be media producers was highly constrained during the epoch of the 'old media', where nation-focused media institutions (such as the SABC: television, radio) with extremely high entry costs worked within a monopoly telecommunications regime of centralized and standardized production (SABC studios), distribution (the BBC controlled the transmitters), and consumption (audiences largely watched the same few television programmes), thereby constructing the audience as passive consumers in a vertical relation of power of one-to-many communication.

By contrast, the new media is designed to have both decentralized and diversified production (the low-cost-entry cottage and DIY industries of *YouTube* film-makers and bloggers and fan fiction writers), distribution (the World Wide Web, with its endless sites) and consumption (the endless options when surfing the Internet, emphasising *individual choice*), thereby constructing the audience as interactive and creative and global-focused, in a web of horizontal many-to-many relationships that enable audiences to construct worlds autonomous of centres of elite power (Lister et al, 2009).

If the Internet has made communication and creative production amongst ordinary people so much easier and effective, this process has recently accelerated with the increasing

miniaturization and mobility of Internet 'delivery platforms' in the form of smart cell phones and tablets, which are replacing what is ironically being seen as the elephantine PC:

> Indeed, mobile devices are the web surfers of choice these days. First thing in the morning, maybe before they're even out of bed, people are checking their cell phones for messages. Kids are complaining they don't get enough attention at home anymore. At dinner parties, between courses, some of the guests may be surreptitiously glancing at their BlackBerries and iPhones, texting, checking e-mail, browsing the web. People are doing it during meetings at work too, as if wherever they are online is more important than where they are physically. Even drivers on the turnpikes and thruways, including those driving 18-wheelers, are—frighteningly—tweeting, texting, and checking e-mail as they drive. People are already going to jail for this in England. (Cross 2011: 3)

These material conditions of the new media and their delivery platforms have enabled communication between ordinary people to be so much easier and effective (I can be connected to the Internet all day wherever I am via a cell-phone); have also enabled a massive increase in the active creative production of media content by ordinary people; and have enabled ordinary people to open up autonomous cultural spaces where meanings and identities distinct from the interests of the elite can be negotiated. It is for this space that Fiske reserves the title of 'popular culture': not the texts of the culture industries, but the autonomous world of ordinary people who make their own meanings and pleasures different to the semiotic dominance of the elite, even if the 'raw material' for that subaltern re-signifying comes from the culture industries (Fiske 1989). This shift in media power is also similarly seen in Jenkins's situating of the fan experience significantly within social networks rather than in isolated relation to a television show. Within 'fan cultures', he argues, one's relationship to the show serves as a form of currency that enables participation in a fan community at least as rewarding as the show itself (2002: 16).

To discuss contemporary fan communities is therefore also to discuss the Web 2.0 sites that as it were create the material conditions for these fandoms, and the best web site to see this at work is *Twitter,* where an uncountable number of global fandoms exist like self-contained galaxies spinning within the *Twittersphere* universe.

Chris Anderson has interestingly argued that social networking media are enabling people from around the world to be "connected less by geographic proximity and workplace chatter than by shared interests", leading to them "re-forming into thousands of cultural tribes of interest" (2006: 63). This is an apt description of *Twitter* fandom, where fans from all corners of the globe build and sustain fan 'tribes of interest', which my research focused on identifying. To counteract those who are appalled at what they see as cesspits of alarmingly banal chatting on *Twitter*, it must be remembered that conversation, however dull – whether among friends in a lounge after dinner or between two friends chatting on a telephone - is often the glue that plays a significant role in generating the larger goal of sociality. As is always the case in cultural studies, the 'text' of the conversation cannot be divorced from its 'context '(sociality). Mary Cross helpfully therefore describes the *Twitter* phenomenon as 'the online water cooler' (2011:139) where sociality – 'tribes of interest' - constantly materializes through innumerable everyday conversations between people. Those observers who bring high literature assumptions to *Twitter* and are thus outraged at its quotidian ordinariness entirely miss the sociological reality of this social network, that it is essentially about *connecting* with others of a like mind.

The Twittersphere

Because, as we have seen, the virtual fan communities such as I researched would hardly exist, and certainly not in their present forms, without the Internet and the Web in general and *Twitter* in particular, and because the *Twittersphere* is as it were a world of its own with its own software tools, rules, protocols and procedures, this chapter will serve as an introduction to *Twitter* and how it works and is worked by fans.

In terms of social networking sites, *Twitter* is fairly new, having been launched in 2006 and is said to be the Internet equivalent to 'SMS', as only brief messages are allowed to be 'tweeted'. As a communication platform, it can also be seen as a site hosting a myriad of micro-blogs where users can update statuses (what they are up to) and speak about things that interest them, but without the luxury of the limitless content of a full-size blog. It is an extremely effective tool that enables instant communication to (and with) large groups of people.

News reporting is also a major factor in the appeal of *Twitter*. Being 'new media' and not part of the traditional form of news reporting with its professional journalists and gate keeping of information, the site is immediate, rapidly spreading news to a large group of people as compared to newspapers or television audiences. Citizen journalism has risen due to the efficiency of the medium, with users able to relate stories, experiences, share pictures and videos from on-site locations and major events before news crews can report a story.

The site is also highly effective in terms of social media marketing. Barack Obama used *Twitter* as one of his primary media messaging tools to communicate with the youth of America, displaying and promoting his presidential campaign at targeted youth circles in order to get votes. With the help of highly sought after celebrities and famous personalities, the site is able to effectively market books, films, TV shows, businesses, products, non-profit organisations, charities and a wide array of media and business texts. This is confirmed by the staggering number of books being published of late devoted to strategies for marketing on *Twitter* (which far out-number media studies books on *Twitter*).

To every user, the site means something different. *Twitter* is a tool that can be used to keep in touch with family and friends, or for users to be informed about entertainment news happening around the world. For businesses, it is an excellent tool for monitoring interest and audience reception, and can help to focus marketing strategies. This thesis will focus on *Twitter* as a space where fan communities gather at a global level. The site is used as a fan base, where fans have a direct link to communicating with people who are directly involved in the creation of their favourite texts – these being actors and actresses, famous personalities, authors, writers/producers and directors.

For many, *Twitter* is considered to be something more than simply a social networking site. It is an online world where fans can escape to meet like-minded people and talk about their favourite fandoms without fear of criticism or judgement. Many fans often refer to *Twitter* as being 'The Closet of Narnia', as the experience is so much more vast and unparalleled in comparison to what the site looks like to an outsider. In order to understand the *Twitter* universe and how fans are able to thrive in digital communities, it is essential to be immersed in such a world and understand its workings. No justice can be done to an online fandom simply from mild observation – one has to pay careful attention to each user and their individualistic impact on the site as well those whom they interact with. This deep

observation is the central method I used to understand the behaviour of fans and users of the site. Every user is different and perceives the site in his or her own way, and every person possesses an online persona when using a site. Users can choose how much information they wish to reveal about themselves and they can construct a self-presentation that can help others from a certain social or cultural grouping to identify with that representation, and thus connect with each other.
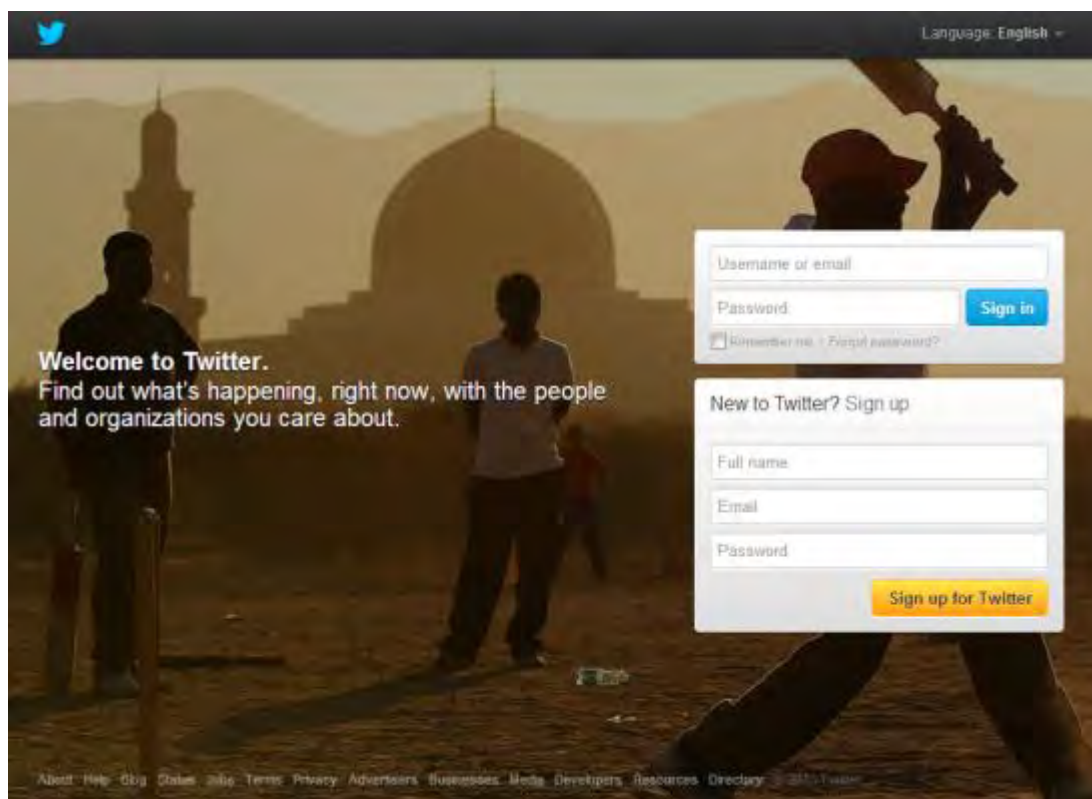
Introducing Twitter

Figure 6: how to join up and construct a personal profile.

The *Twitter* home page on display for anybody who visits the site, and which must be filled in in order to join, is fairly straight-forward (see Figure 6). Upon constructing a profile and personalising many of the details, a Timeline becomes visible (see Figure 7).The timeline shows tweets of all the people you follow is the form of a list, the latest tweets showing at the top, so that as one scrolls down, you view older content from your followers.
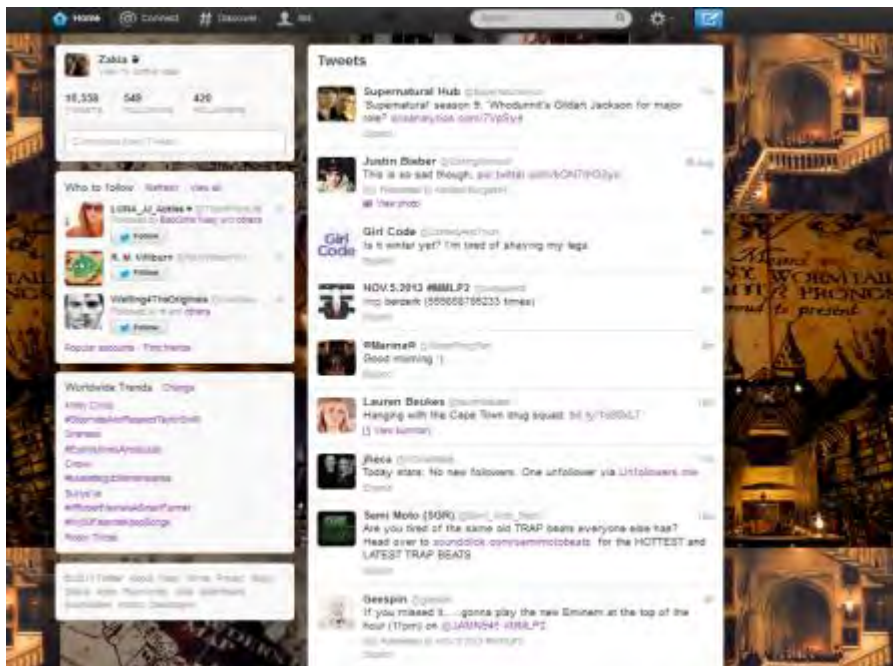
Figure 7: the Timeline, your personal communication record.

At the top hand right of every profile are 4 icons.

Figure 8: the four icons

The "@ Connect" icon is used to check any interactions and tweets that have been sent to you. These received messages are called 'mentions' by users because your username has to be included in the message for you to receive it.

The "# Discover" icon is used to view a list of topics which are of high interest on the site. The topics under this icon become tailored to each user, depending on who they follow and the kind of content one searches for on the site. For example, if a person chooses to follow athletes and sports channels, the topics under the Discover icon will relate mainly to sport and will also show popular topics amongst those who one follows.
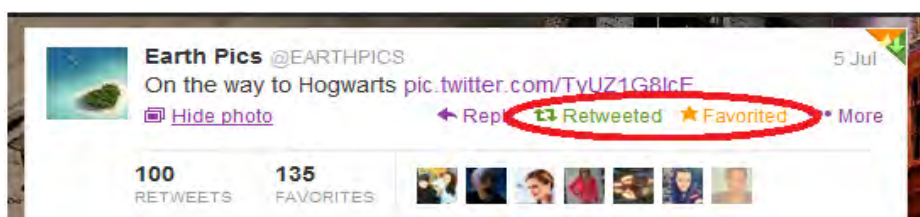
"Me" is the icon for viewing your own profile.

Figure 9: Retweeted and Favorited.

Users have two options of sharing another person's content on the site. They can either 'Retweet' or 'Favourite' a person's tweet which may contain a message, a link or a picture (see Figure 9). Retweeting automatically has the entire tweet shown on your own profile without needing to copy or paste any information, saving one the time of copying and pasting. Favouriting allows the tweet to be added to a list of favourites which the user may view at any time they wish on their profile.
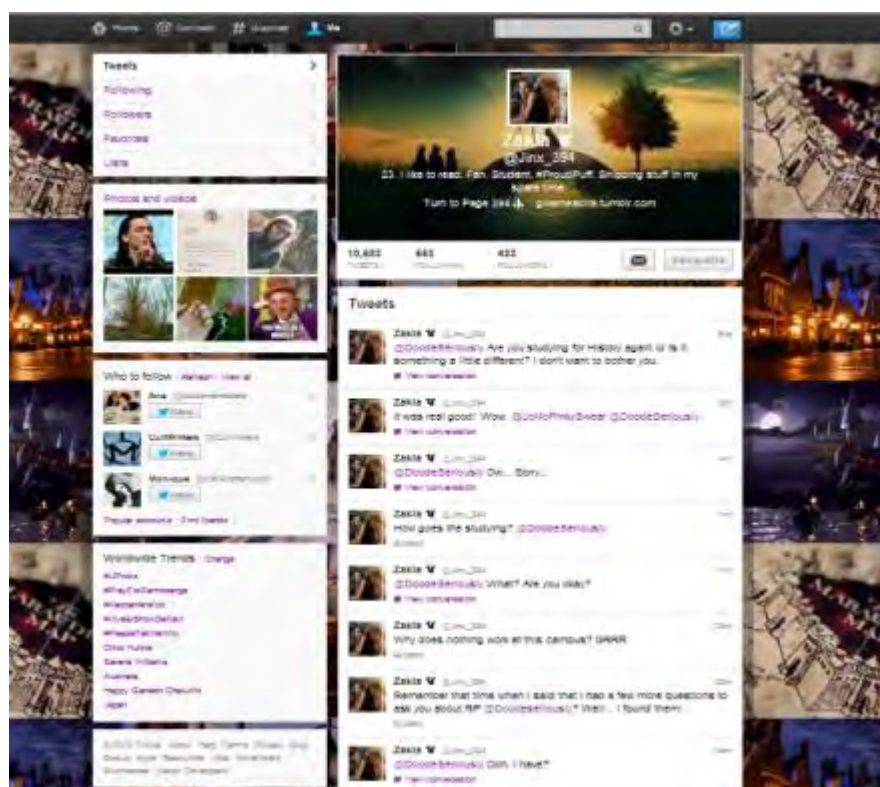

Figure 10: the personal profile.

Every person's profile is different to another's, the degree of individuality depending on how customised it is. The image of the timeline is from my own profile and I have created my own background and profile picture to suit the image I wish to portray to other users who

may visit my profile, this being: A Harry Potter fan. I use imagery that only these fans can recognise.
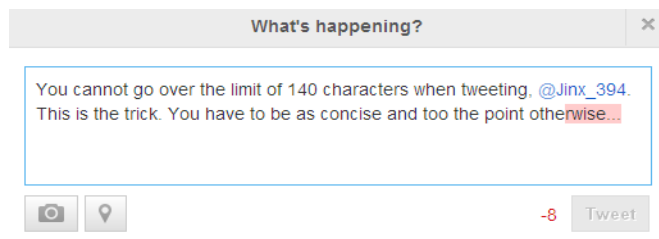

Figure 11: the maximum allowed size of a tweet is 140 characters

Twitter users communicate through 'tweets', an informal term used to describe messages.A tweet consists of a maximum of 140 characters and is your status update. It is this aspect which makes it the SMS equivalent of the internet. Users can tweet their messages and should they exceed the 140 character limit, they can simply continue by writing a new tweet. Users often have to be very precise, which inclines users to think more creatively. All users select a name for themselves, and when sending a message to another user, the receiver's name becomes part of those 140 characters, which is highlighted for easier reading. When a text exceeds 140 characters, it becomes highlighted in red (see Figure 11).
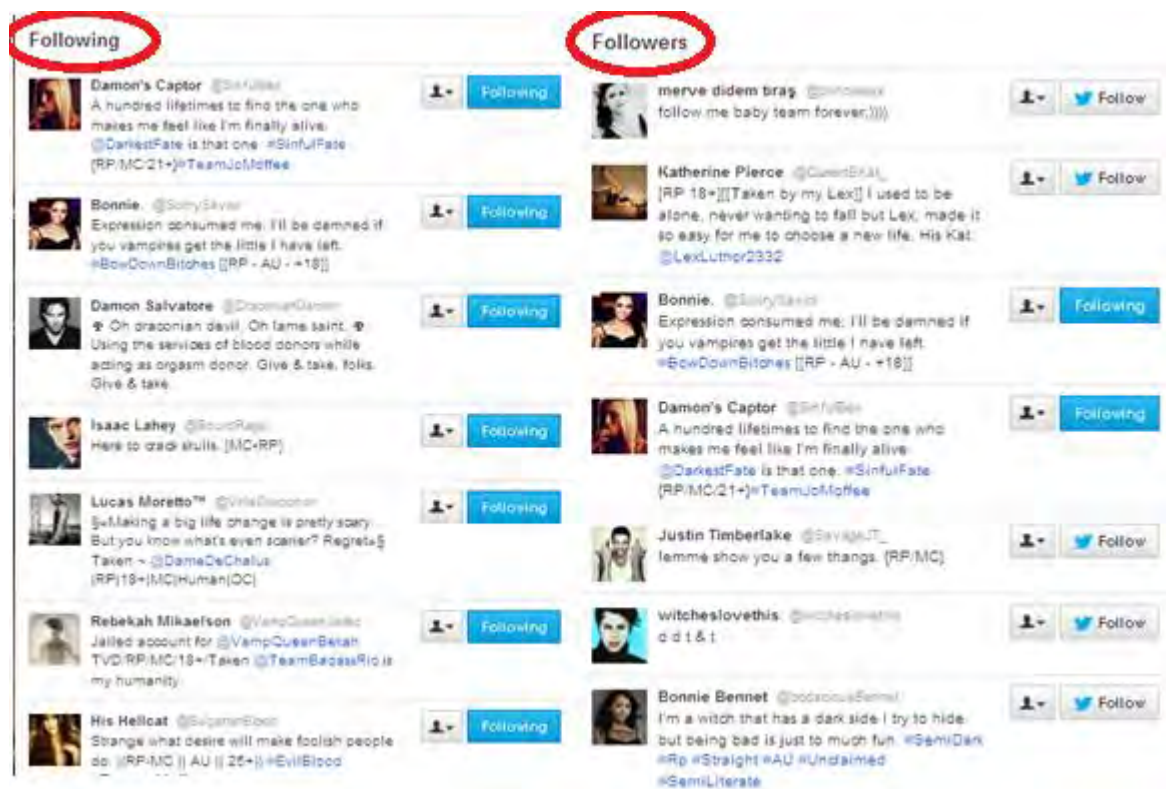

Figure 12: Followers and Following

Social Network Fandoms & Online Role-Playing: *Harry Potter* and *The Vampire Diaries* Fans on *Twitter*

Twitter users can 'Follow' users as well as have their own 'Followers' (see Figure 12). This simply means that as a user, you choose whose messages you wish to subscribe to, so when other users post messages, their 'tweet' appears in your newsfeed. These are the people you choose to 'follow'.

Followers are other users who subscribe to your profile, so whatever messages or pictures you tweet, your followers are able to view this content. It is assumed that the more followers a user has, the more popular and entertaining his or her content is amongst audiences. Even though you may not follow a certain user, it is possible to view their content as it is publicly available, unless the user has changed their privacy settings. There is an option to have a locked account, where a person's content is private and only after a user submits a request to follow it and the user approves, can one see it.

Twitter is famously used by brand companies, celebrities and famous personalities due to its ability to gain large followings through the use of its simplified features, which are easy to use and enable communicating simply and effectively to fans directly within real time. There is a large amount of interactivity, but that depends on whether users choose to reply to each other at any given time. The advantage of famous personalities using *Twitter* is that they are able to inform their followers of their activities without having to worry about privacy issues and protocols such as waiting after sending a friend invite or accepting numerous friend invites, like the *Facebook* site does, which can be time consuming and frustrating due to notifications. Verified accounts are a direct source for fans and celebrities can post updates, confirm or deny rumours, and post first hand news for their followers without having the truth of their content questioned.

When one signs up for a profile on *Twitter*, there is a simple, step by step procedure to help new users get started. Here is an example (Figure 13):
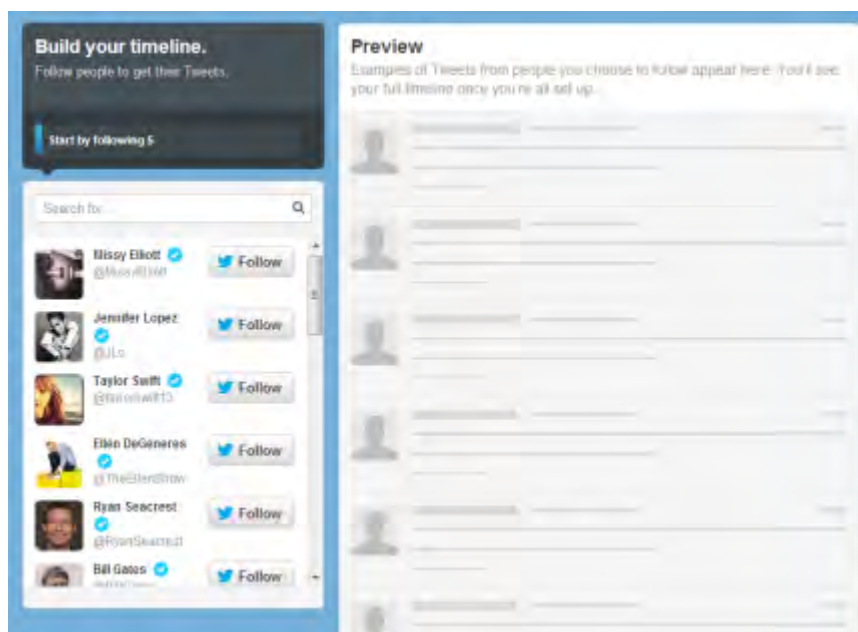
Figure 13: getting started on *Twitter*

Usernames

When creating a profile on *Twitter*, you have to go through a certain procedure. You need to select a Username (UN) which others will notice when you tweet on the site.

Here is a list of typical Usernames:

@Zakia_Jeewa

@Jinx_394

@SuperFan99

@DarkFallsWitch

The "@" that is seen at the start of every name becomes a sort of tracker that helps for a person to be identified or found on the site. It's the same with the # (Hashtag) which is used to monitor content and generate a cloud of words that are most used on the site. "The *Twitter* hashtag is a unique tagging format linking Tweets to user-defined concepts. *Twitter* hashtags can assist in archiving twitter content, provide different visual representations of tweets, and permit grouping by categories and facets" (Chang and Iyer 2012: 248). The Hash tag is a

tracking tool used to monitor and capture what is being said on the site. The hash tag and the trends on a person's profile coincide because the trends show what is being most talked about. Hash tags can also be used to have a collective audience contribute to the conversation.

You then select an avatar, a picture which represents the user on the internet. People can choose to upload a picture of themselves or of anyone or anything they wish to, which is able to tell us something about that person.

What fans tweet about

Fans are ordinary people who happen to be passionate about their fandoms. So while they may tweet about regular events in their lives, fans generally have a tendency to really get vocal about their fandom online, typing out their thoughts and opinions and criticisms. In terms of content, fan related themes have been analysed from many fans and these aspects were found to be some of the most popular:

Quotes

Quotes are taken from the movies, TV shows, actors, authors, books, or from anywhere considered important or relevant to some aspect that has been tweeted on the site. Fans tweet quotes simply because they may feel inspired by certain sayings, and also incorporate them in their everyday interactions to support their opinions, and use quotes to substantiate arguments online as well. Fan artists often incorporate quotes into their work to make the imagery more personalised.

Opinions

Opinions vary on many topics and can spark debate or camaraderie on the site, linking people with similar opinions within similar fandoms. Opinions mostly revolve around shipping[7] and character comparisons.

Pictures

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[7]Shipping - Derived from the word 'relationship.' Refers to two characters linked in a romantic pairing.
   Social Network Fandoms & Online Role-Playing: *Harry Potter* and *The Vampire Diaries* Fans on *Twitter*

These pictures can either be of actual stills from a TV show or film, or they can be fan art. A number of *Twitter* applications enhance communication capabilities to issue tweets with photos like *TwitPic*.

Video links

These links can be trailers, promotions, interviews, music, fan vids[8] and any kind of footage associated with the TV show or films. The majority of video links are directed from *YouTube* or *TwitVid*

Links

Links to blogs, fan fiction, articles etc.: anything interesting in relation to the fandom which the user wishes to share with their followers.

Twitter Trends

Twitter Trends are present on every person's *Twitter* profile. It is a window that can be seen on the bottom left hand side of the profile (Figure 14), which is a list of words and topics that have been generated from all the tweets posted on the site incorporating the hash tag (#).

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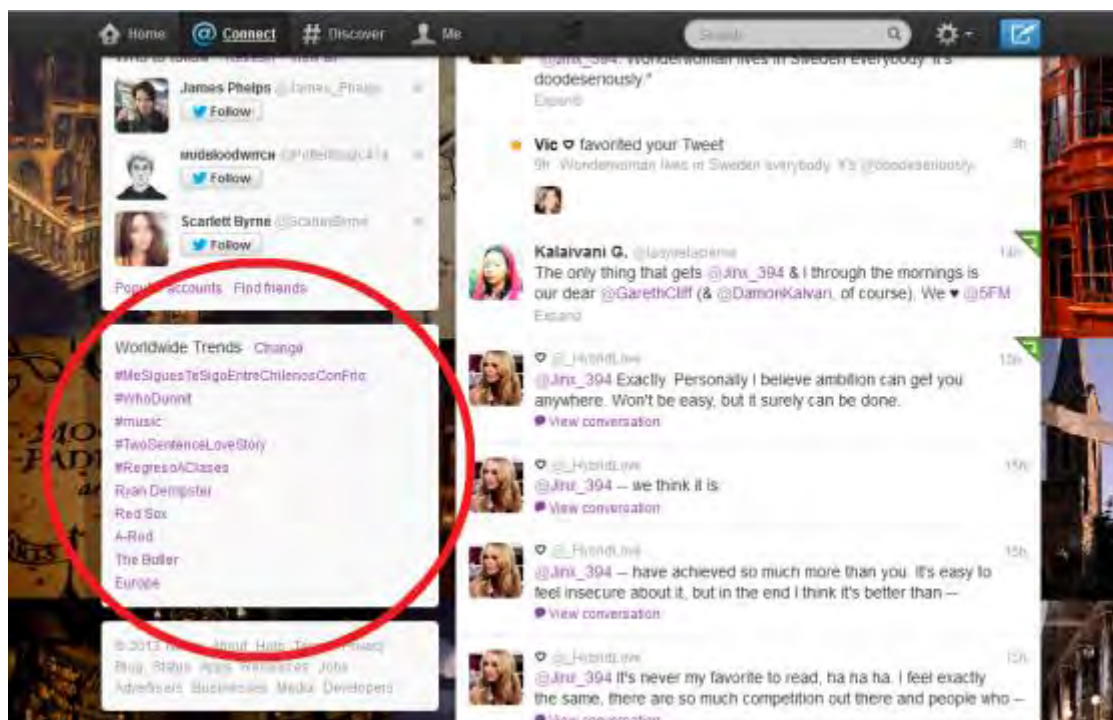
[8]Fan Vids – Videos made by fans.

Figure 14: Twitter Trends

The list shows what is being most talked about on the site. The trends vary from news events to celebrities to random topics, depending on what is happening at the time and what people are tweeting about. Trends are a great way for users to be kept up to date with anything important that is happening around the world or in a specific region of their choosing. For example, during the Boston marathon on April 15th 2013, 2 bombs exploded which killed 3 people and injured 264 others[9] (Kots 2013). The trend '#prayforboston' appeared on the trend list within minutes of the incident (Figure 15).

Worldwide Trends - Change
#prayforboston
#LoQueHubieraTuiteadoDeNiño
#ItBeginsA7X
#5WordsiHateToHear
#DePedroInfanteAprendí
An 8
Бостоне
Feliz Cumpleaños Kimberly Dos Ramos
No New Friends
DJ Khaled

Figure 15: a global trend

This happens with nearly anything remotely important or newsworthy, as well as for other snippets of news, like the casting of Ben Affleck as Batman (for the sequel to the Superman film, *Man of Steel*) or Kate Middleton and Prince William's new born son. Anything or anybody that generates conversation over the site through tweets based on a particular algorithm can appear on the trend list for a certain amount of time.

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[9]D. Kots (2013) http://www.bostonglobe.com/lifestyle/health-wellness/2013/04/23/number-injured-marathon-bombing-revised-downward/NRpaz5mmvGquP7KMA6XsIK/story.html

Figure 16: sponsored tends

Unless they are sponsored, the trends on *Twitter* are generated by the users themselves. Above (Figure 16) is a trend which was promoted to raise awareness for World AIDS Day on 1 December 2012. The yellow arrows beside the words indicate that it has been promoted to appear on the Trend List for a certain amount of time. Unless a person searches for it, *Twitter* rarely clutters a person's profile with advertisements and this is one of the forms of advertising on the site.

Twitter trends are very important because not only do they inform users of newsworthy content, they also generate public discussion, and one is able to derive insightful opinions as well as first hand reactions and ideas from thousands of users around the world on a certain topic. For example, the following tweets (Figure 17) were read by thousands of users and were a first-hand account of what happened in Abbottabad, Pakistan when Osama Bin Laden was killed, by a person living near to the Laden residence.

Figure 17: 'live' tweeting

This *Twitter* user was used as an official source on NDTV[10] and he gave quotes to many newspapers and radio stations, relating what he had heard and saw happening in his town on the morning the news of Osama Bin Laden's death was made official.

Since trends are generated from a variety of algorithms, fans are able to have their own trends show on the Trend List, depending on certain aspects. A planned trend in more likely to register on the list depending on a large number of users tweeting at the same time rather than the number of tweets per person. Time zones also play a part in this process as trends in the US which happen in the morning are more likely to show much quicker than others around the world due to people waking up and tweeting about a certain topic. Geographical regions also play a part in this. Users have the choice of selecting a geographical region when online, which then generates trends from that particular area. *Twitter* trends start off continentally, then divided into countries, which are further specified to towns that users can select for more localised trend information. It is also possible for users to simply select the 'Worldwide' trend option which shows trends occurring on *Twitter* from all over the world. Below (Figure 18) is an example of the more localised geographic regions I have available on my profile for *Twitter* trends. They are referred to as 'Tailored Trends':
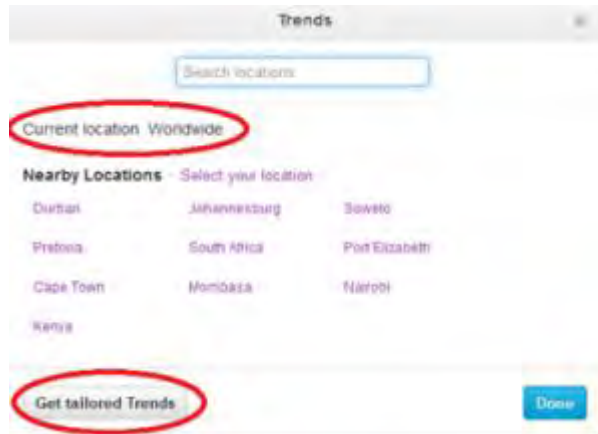

Figure 18: Tailored Trends

Similarly, with the use of the hash tag, fans have been able to generate trends for their respective fandoms through a planned trending method. Because it takes a certain amount of tweets per minute to have a trend show up on the trend list, fans plan out a day and time and a

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[10]Seen here: http://www.ndtv.com/article/world/osama-raid-this-man-live-blogged-history-102836

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trend which they encourage other fans to participate in, so as to bring attention to what they wish to trend worldwide.

Below (Figure 19) is an example of trends which fans planned for a week in May for the actor Joseph Morgan. The actor's birthday was on the 16th of May and he had tweeted about fans sending him gifts, requesting that if they wished to do something for his birthday, they could donate to the organisation 'Positive Women', which he supported. The trends which were planned had raised awareness as well as wished the actor Happy Birthday.
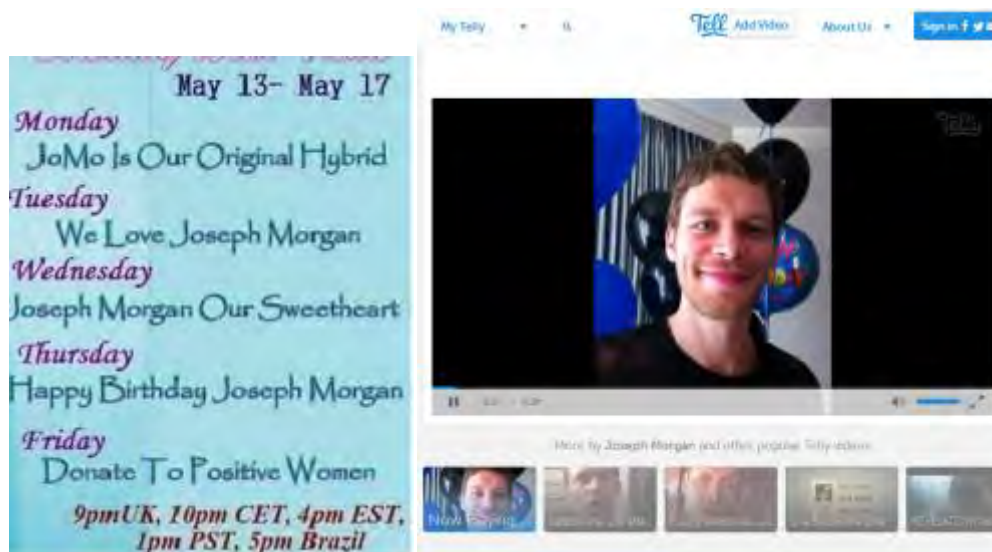

Figure 19: Fan Trends and Celebrity response

The pictures explain the words that fans wished to trend each day, along with a time so that everybody could collectively participate worldwide in order to have the topics trended. Each day with its intended phrase managed to trend on the worldwide list and the actor also noticed the attention from the fans. Morgan posted a video to thank the fans on his *Twitter* account.

Actors and producers have also used *Twitter* as a site for exposure, often live-tweeting during airings of their shows and encouraging fans to trend certain words so as to get more viewers and gain popularity. With over 500 million tweets generated on the site daily, one of the disadvantages of the trends on *Twitter* is definitely the speed at which news event coverage and topics change on the site. It is rather hard to keep up with all the trends which fans have been able to tweet about, seeing as many of the trends do not last for longer than half an hour, so the only way for them to be captured is to be online at the time. I have successfully

managed to capture many of the main activities which fans have tried to raise attention to in both the *Harry Potter* and *The Vampire Diaries* fandoms.

Celebrities on Twitter

One of the main appeals of *Twitter* is the presence of famous personalities on the site. Celebrities and famous personalities and even political leaders who are on *Twitter* need to 'Verify' themselves, a term used to prove their identity as well as authenticity of content to followers. Many well-known personalities get themselves verified so as to differ themselves from fake users who may formulate messages and content about them. The verification process is not publicly known, however it is possible to assume that the person going through the process undergoes a type of identity inspection to ensure their identity on a certain profile.

There are many imposters and fake accounts found on the site that do not have credibility to their content which can lead to rumour mongering. The user could simply be a fan of the real life celebrity, tweeting information that is relevant to the celebrity (this is also a form of role-play, however incorporating a real life personality!). The verification process is therefore very important not just for political leaders and news accounts, but for celebrities as well, whom fans are able to feel closer to and have a platform to connect directly with.

Celebrities who have been verified have a logo which is a small blue circle with a white tick that is displayed next to their names on their profile (see Figure 20 below). This verification process gives fans the ability to communicate with their favourite personalities on a first hand instantaneous basis, knowing that content is being uploaded personally by them and also makes fans and celebrities mutually closer to each other through online communication.

Figure 20: Verifying the famous

There are many celebrities and people within the public eye who have not been verified yet, however, they are often tweeted by other famous, verified actors and a lot of their content, videos and pictures are proof of the user behind the account, making them seem more legitimate despite not having the Verified icon next to their name.

A person can be denied verification for a number of reasons, such as not having one's correct name on the profile, or having details changed unexpectedly. Verification cannot be done for the average Twitter user unless the person is particularly high in social circles and has some sort of acquired status in their relative fields, whether in media, business, politics or other genre.

One of the many appeals of the site is due to the verifying of accounts which enables fans to read and communicate with famous personalities from a diverse range of fields. Personalities from television like Ellen DeGeneres use *Twitter* as a way to share opinions with fans and even give away prizes to competitions. Leonardo DiCaprio and Edward Norton are just two actors out of many who use *Twitter* as a way to raise awareness to causes and charities that they are affiliated with. Local personalities like 5FM DJ, Gareth Cliff and East Coast Radio's Darren Maul, use the site as a way of gathering opinions and fun content from users who often listen to their shows live and communicate instantaneously.

One of the advantages of Twitter is the simple layout of the site. Because the status limit is 140 characters, a person can shorten his or her message or post a number of tweets. However, one of the nice things about the condensed message is that, if you do not like what the person

is saying, it can easily be skimmed through, compared to a person's long and tedious story which they would usually go to other blogs and sites like *Facebook* to post.

Fan Reactions

Fans react almost instantly to celebrities associated with *Harry Potter* and *The Vampire Diaries*. Since this study focuses on *Harry Potter* fans and *The Vampire Diaries* role players, information which follows shall concern fans, actors, actresses, producers and writers associated with both fandoms, along with the participants of my study. J.K. Rowling, author of the Harry Potter series, rarely tweets. However the author has said the following on her *Twitter* profile (Figure 21 below):
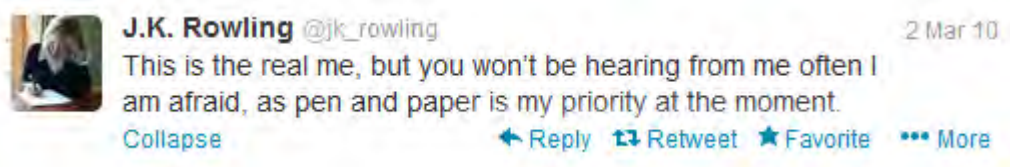

Figure 21: J.K. Rowling addresses her fans on *Twitter*

However, when the author does tweet, it generates a buzz amongst many online fans, as JK Rowling almost always only tweets to update fans about new events happening with her books or her site and *Pottermore*.[11] This happens similarly with any of the Harry Potter cast, some of the actors more than others, depending on fans who happen to be online at the time the actor/actress tweets, and how much the fans want to communicate with them. Certain celebrities, depending on their personality, are more open to chatting to fans and responding to tweets that are directed at them. The more popular the person, the harder it usually is to get a reply to one of your tweets since they are usually being flooded with mentions from people.

Joseph Morgan, an English actor on the show, *The Vampire Diaries*, often replies to his fans and has even asked on many occasions for fans to submit questions to him which he chooses to answer in his spare time. Here is an image of the quick fan response after his tweet was posted (Figure 22 below):

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[11]"Pottermore is a website focusing on the unknown parts of the Harry Potter books 1-7 and re-telling the story in an interactive way." (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pottermore)

Figure 22: *Twitter* communication between stars and fans

Many fans, myself included, find that the actor provides an opportunity for fans to get closer to him by communicating through *Twitter*. As a fan of Joseph Morgan, I have been lucky enough to have one of my tweets replied to, although the tweet concerned nothing about academics or this project at all, but on one of my pastimes – reading fantasy fiction. Joseph Morgan happens to be a big reader and he's asked book fans from all over the world on his *Twitter* profile to participate in what he calls his virtual book club by using the hash tag #BookRevolution. Any person can add a book title along with the hash tag attached. When the hash tag is searched on the site, any person who used the words #BookRevolution would show up in the search results. I had merely recommended a book title and to my utter surprise, Morgan replied (Figure 23 below: I do hope he enjoyed the book I suggested…).

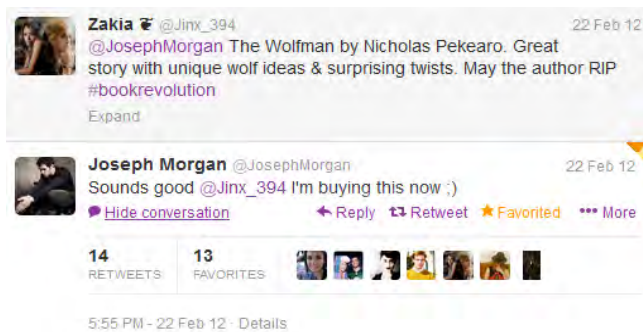Social Network Fandoms & Online Role-Playing: *Harry Potter* and *The Vampire Diaries* Fans on *Twitter*

Figure 23: *The Vampire Diaries* actor replies to the researcher

Below (Figure 24) are two lists of some of the *Twitter* accounts associated with The *Harry Potter* and *The Vampire Diaries* (TVD) franchise. It is important to note that not all the *Harry Potter* actors have *Twitter* accounts – Daniel Radcliffe and Rupert Grint do not have *Twitter* accounts.

Social Network Fandoms & Online Role-Playing: *Harry Potter* and *The Vampire Diaries* Fans on *Twitter*

Figure 24: People from the *Harry Potter* and *The Vampire Diaries* franchises on *Twitter*

Many of the TVD actors tweet information relevant to the shows, as well as any information related to themselves. If actors are involved in new projects or if they have magazine or photo shoots, they usually post pictures or links so as to share their activities with friends and fans who follow them. Many of the actors post pictures between shooting so that fans are able to experience first-hand what happens behind the scenes. Nearly 90% of the cast and crew, extras and directors from TVD have *Twitter* accounts, and since they tend to talk about their acting and producing on the show, a lot of their content is circulated amongst fans.

It has been said that Julie Plec and Kevin Williamson, executive producers of The *Vampire Diaries,* enjoy using *Twitter* and pay close attention to the fan base and their reactions on *Twitter* when episodes are screened every Thursday night. "The whole TV and film industry is built on focus groups and test screenings," Plec said. "In my opinion, watching a *Twitter* feed during an episode of our show is a built-in focus group. They react to everything . . . and it's fascinating because (over time) you get to witness your fan community as it builds and grows."[12]

Of course, the explosion of social media and the capacity of writer-producers as well as the actors to speak in *Twitter* time to an endless number of fans have done wonders to raise the profile of the TV show. This can also be a double edged sword for producers and writers, since it also becomes a link for fans to rally and direct their disliking for plot twists, character deaths and many other aspects, as fans are not shy about letting the creators know what they like and dislike. A fandom like *The Vampire Diaries* is just as multi-faceted and riddled with conflict as any other fandom that can be seen online, and this shall be explored in the research findings chapter.

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[12] http://vampirediariessource.wordpress.com/page/120/?ref=spelling

Social Network Fandoms & Online Role-Playing: *Harry Potter* and *The Vampire Diaries* Fans on *Twitter*

Chapter 5: Methodology

Qualitative ethnography

According to Denzin and Lincoln:

> Qualitative study is a positioned activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (2005: 3).

This focus on "attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" is echoed in Pickering's summary of the focus of Cultural Studies:

> While cultural studies is in some respects close to other forms of social enquiry, its special point of interest is with how particular social worlds are experienced, and how the diverse stuff of that experience is subjectively felt and articulated by those who live it, and not by any others, neither sociologists nor historians nor whoever else may be involved in the enquiry in any particular case. It is the subjective dimension of lived social worlds that experience occupies, and it is this which is central to the concerns of cultural studies. Theory provides us with a map to help us understand how social worlds are configured, but unless we attend to experience we will not be able to follow the map into the living landscape to which it relates (2008: 24).

It is this "*subjective dimension* of lived social worlds that experience occupies", which emphasizes the respondents own *interpretations* of their "lived experience", that this qualitative ethnography will research with regard to fandom on the Internet. It involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials that account for meanings in individuals' lives. (Denzin and Lincoln 2005: 24).

The four main research questions of my study were investigated by using the methodologies that shall be explained in this chapter:

Q1: What constitutes fandom and the notion of participatory culture?

Q2: How has *Twitter* – as a New Media platform - shaped online contemporary fandom?

Q3: How are *Harry Potter* and *The Vampire Diaries* fandoms manifested on the *Twitter* website?

Q4: How does role-playing manifest on *Twitter* and how do fans actively refashion identities online?

Qualitative research claims to describe life worlds 'from the inside out', from the point of view of the people who participate. By so doing it seeks to contribute to a better understanding of social realities and to draw attention to processes, meaning patterns and structural features (Flick, Von Kardorff, Steinke, 2004: 3). When I first started my *Twitter* account, I had a very limited understanding of how the site worked and what it actually contained, having only heard of the site and knowing only its most basic features, and how it differed from the only other social networking site that I was familiar with at the time, which was *Facebook*.

Compared to *Twitter, Facebook* is fairly private and restricted, where the sharing of information is strictly limited to the amount of 'Friends' one has. It was for this reason I had started using *Facebook*, the idea of privacy being something I found reassuring. It was also for this reason that I became increasingly bored and decided to try something different a few years later.

It took me a few weeks to adjust to *Twitter* after opening my first account in 2010. This was because everything was pretty much public to other users and I didn't have the confidence to share or speak my mind for fear of not being interesting enough to anybody who may read my tweets. But that quickly changed after I discovered that there were hundreds of other users who felt just as inadequate at first after getting an account on the site.
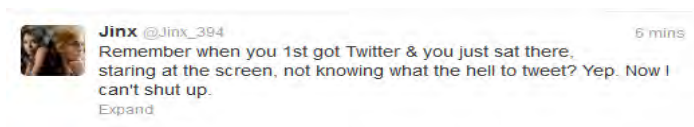
Figure 1: the author on *Twitter*

The site was filled with verified celebrities, people posing as celebrities, sports personalities, parody accounts, hate accounts, fan boys and fan girls, businesses, products and everything in between. The bracket that I found myself most comfortably categorised in, was the fan group. Anything that I ever liked or loved was being talked about, scrutinised, criticised and adored. About a month later, I considered myself addicted to *Twitter*. I was also confident enough to speak to other fans, including about what they were doing online, and later I wrote my Honours research project on online fandom. This was three years ago.

Personally, the appeal that I found in the site lay in its ability to be quick and succinct. The site has limitations, and as a user, you learn to work around them instead of looking at them negatively. One of the limitations of the site is that users cannot tweet over 140 characters. You learn to convey your message is a much more articulate manner. Or you simply type your message, one tweet after another.

One of the most daunting things new users first experience about *Twitter*, is the idea of 'Followers'. Because your profile is visible to others (unless you choose to have a locked account: there is an option for privacy that one can use under the profile settings), anybody is able to view your content and often, users can feel judged and unpopular if they don't have a lot of followers. Depending on the user, this can affect how they interact on the site. Some people are not interested or bothered by the amount of followers they have, perhaps due to always speaking and interacting with friends they know in real life on the site.

My personal reaction at first was intimidation. I looked at profiles of people who had many followers, wondering what it was that made them popular, only to discover that they were being extremely witty, passionate and honest about things they felt important to them. This feeling of being intimidated I had quickly dissipated after I started taking an interest in speaking to fans like myself, who chose to follow me after having a conversation, later

becoming vital subjects for the study and friends I could speak to whenever I logged onto the site. Being a conversational person, I found it easy to make friends on the site. I had a genuine interest in what they thought and what they were doing, which only made my research easier to gather and an absolute pleasure to write about. Many, if not all these friends I have gathered online, are first and foremost fans just as I am.

Participant Observation

Brewer offers a succinct definition of participant observation:

> Participant observation is perhaps the data collection technique most closely associated with ethnography… It involves data gathering by means of participation in the daily life of informants in their natural setting: watching, observing and talking to them in order to discover their interpretations, social meanings and activities. The intent behind this close involvement and association is to generate data through watching and listening to what people naturally do and say, but also to add the dimension of personally experiencing and sharing the same everyday life as those under study (2000: 59).

I have conducted participant observation on *Twitter* for over 2 years, speaking to fans and role-players every day as they generate new content such as fan art, fan fiction, analysis, debates, arguments and opinions about their respective fandoms and characters, as well as the sharing of this content with each other on a daily basis. *Twitter* is a massive site, with millions of tweets on a myriad of subjects happening daily, and I was focussed on two small galaxies of *Harry Potter* and *The Vampire Diaries* fandoms within the larger universe of *Twitter*. Because of the global reach of *Twitter,* these 'virtual communities' were humming with activities 24 hours per day, enacting a wide range of fan activities which I systematically observed for a long time.

Participant observation produces a combination of cognitive and emotional information that ethnographers can use to understand the community they are studying (Denzin and Lincoln 2005: 474). *Twitter* users, specifically fans and role-players of *Harry Potter* and *The Vampire Diaries*, their conversations, tweets, and content which they chose to upload on the site, were recorded through participant observation. Many of these fans display a passion for their fandoms through the sharing of links to pictures, interviews, fan fiction, fan art, fan videos, blogs, and various other related online content that they dedicate to the respective *Harry*

Potter and *The Vampire Diaries* fandoms. Their tweets also reflected how deeply they felt about their fandom, whether it was romantic relationships between their favourite fictional characters, or a death in the story that deeply affected them. Many samples of these fan manifestations were recorded.

Fan content generated on *Twitter* was observed to see specifically what each fan does with his/her own profile. I followed the more popular *Harry Potter* role players' accounts. These were accounts that pretended to be certain characters from the novels and films (their assumed names would be characters from the *Harry Potter* universe), and posted content that was often witty and contained a lot of intertextuality relating to *Harry Potter,* popular culture generally, as well as their own characters (the tweets posted by role players were more often than not written from the perspective of the fictional character, and could for example comment on topical issues of the day).

One of the great attractions of *Twitter* for its users is that conversations happen in real time. Since fans from around the world lived in different time zones, I found that at any time of the day and night that I logged on I was able to gather data and information for the project, since I spoke to fans from the U.S.A who are at least ±7 hours behind local time, many European fans who are either slightly behind or ahead, or in the same time zone as South Africa, and a few fans in New Zealand, Australia and Malaysia who are at least ±7 hours ahead. It had become a daily routine for me to check my *Twitter* account at the start of every day, until I increasingly visited the site at all times of the day or night.

When first accessing *Twitter* and noticing the amount of content which fans were producing that was greater than the average *Twitter* user, my interest peaked. These users were calling themselves 'Fangirls' and 'Fanboys' and constantly displayed their passion for their respective fandoms everyday through tweeting their opinions, thoughts and anything they wished to communicate to other fans. These passionate fans often customised their profiles, altering their names and profile pictures to the fictional characters belonging to their fandom.

Figure 2: *Harry Potter* fans on *Twitter*

The above image (Figure 2) is an example of a *Harry Potter* fan who is communicating to her followers openly as a *Harry Potter* fan. This can be seen through the use of her profile picture being one of the lead characters, their user name being '7YearsOfMagic'[13] and her display name being 'Dobby's Sock' which refers to an elf character[14] in the series named Dobby. The use of the word 'Potterhead' in her tweet addresses fellow fans online. This is the simplest example of a *Harry Potter* fan's interaction with their followers.

User profiles (particularly those involving role-playing and visible fan accounts), their conversations and other content on the Internet (the "natural setting" of the research) formed the main part of the participant observation research. For the online study, user profiles, their tweets and content which they wrote about as well as their interaction with other fans, and their interaction with other fan content such as links to official fan sites and fan created communities all formed part of the participant observation.

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[13]In the *Harry Potter* novels, the wizarding school, Hogwarts offers 7 years of education to its students.
[14]Elves in the *Harry Potter* series devote their lives to servitude. Elves may only be freed if presented with clothes from their master. Dobby was presented with a sock as a mark of his freedom. Metaphorically, it can be concluded that this fan finds the *Harry Potter* series to be their kind of freedom.

Figure 3: the author's *Twitter* profile

The above image (Figure 3) is one of my *Twitter* profiles which displays my online activity on the site. Users are given the chance of displaying their individuality through the chosen backgrounds, headers and profile pictures of their choice (Jinx_394, my username on *Twitter,* is a reference to the *Harry Potter* books. Jinx being a word used for a curse or spell, and the number '394'which coincides with "Turn To Page 394", a line used by Alan Rickman's character, Severus Snape, in the film series of *Harry Potter*, where the phrase features frequently in a particular scene.)[15]. The profile picture which I created is an originally formed image, which can be described as fan-made and contains the faces of two of my favourite characters from both *The Vampire Diaries* and *Harry Potter*, the two areas I have explored in this fandom thesis. Fans that are familiar with both texts are able to pick up on the intertextuality seen within my profile.

The particular manifestation of fan behaviour on the site is open and quite friendly, which most fans felt was the ideal way to meet and make friends with people who shared similar interests. Having immersed myself in this online community for a while, I was able to make a lot of friends and speak to many people who offered me diverse information, but I also was able to see how they portrayed themselves as fans through their profile identities on *Twitter*.

The sheer volume of content that was available from these fans was constantly updated daily, which kept me hooked on the site. This collective interest which I shared with many of the fans thus made me accustomed to the way information was distributed on the site. I would be online for many hours during the day observing, tweeting and speaking to fans. After

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[15]Watch here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YllKLLkvulY

 Social Network Fandoms *&* Online Role-Playing: *Harry Potter* and *The Vampire Diaries* Fans on *Twitter*

deciding to do this project, I was able to keep up with what these fans were speaking and tweeting about to others. As a fan, who understands the worlds of *Harry Potter* and *The Vampire Diaries*, it was easy to pick up and understand what fans were speaking about, and as a *Twitter* user, I was able to move around the site with ease, thus eliminating any difficulties I may have experienced when first joining the site during the research process.

The amount of people I followed thereafter increased as I tried to speak to as many fans as possible, trying to identify diversity and creativity amongst the more passionate fans and those who were able to immerse themselves within the fandoms much more than others. The image below (Figure 4) of fans which I follow is a visible display of their *Harry Potter* fandom present in their online profile.
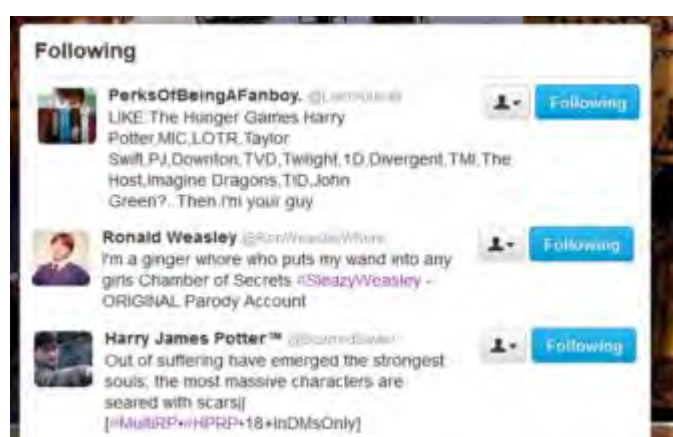

Figure 4: *Harry Potter* fans on *Twitter* proclaiming their fan allegiances

The quickest and easiest way to record conversations on the site was to simply screen cap them; since the site moves at such a rapid pace, my conversations soon became lost due to the amount of people I spoke to and the tweets they sent every day, and so saving text through screen-capping was invaluable for my research.

One of the reasons why fans are able passionately to express how they feel about each respective series is because many of the writers, producers and actors from both *Harry Potter* and *The Vampire Diaries* have verified *Twitter* accounts. This adds a whole new dimension to the online fans experience on *Twitter,* as any fan is able to feel closer to their fandom as they are in direct contact with the professionals associated with the show or film. Fans are able to tweet their opinions, reply to tweets and updates made by these celebrities and many even send links of their own fan created media such as fiction, fan art, or fan videos to these

actors in hopes of getting a response from their favourite celebrity. I myself have tweeted many actors and producers and have fortunately received replies on a few occasions. These actors and producers are quite observant of their fan base online and use *Twitter* as a tool to communicate to their fans, at times sharing personal information about their whereabouts, tweeting links to photographs of themselves, or requesting fans to send in questions they may answer.

Fans are thus able to feel closely connected to the objects of their fandom because of this flow of information generating conversation amongst fans when their favourite actors share information about themselves, or when the writers or producers of the TV show share spoilers to new episodes or updates. This information comes directly from the source, and for fans this is one of the main appeals of being on *Twitter*.

The instantaneous nature of the site brings a feeling of being up to date with news as information gets tweeted when events happen in real time. This isn't just for fans but for any user on *Twitter*. Global news often breaks out on *Twitter* very quickly due to the sheer volume of users on the site that tweet, thus raising awareness about anything important going on around the world.

Twitter is able to interlink numerous sites to one's profile, such as *Facebook* (Social network), *Instagram* (Image sharing), *Tumblr* (Blog), *YouTube* (Video hosting), and various other sites which allow for the sharing of information. These sites, separate from *Twitter,* could be integrated with one's profile and often users are encouraged to link and join with these sites to enhance the *Twitter* experience. I myself started a *Tumblr* blog, and a fan fiction account which I could later include on my *Twitter* profile for people to click if they wished to read or see articles and stories I had written. This convergence of online sites thus made it easier for fans who were interested in certain aspects of fan creation to find others who shared similar interests.

One of the difficulties about online research that I experienced was that certain people I started talking to fans who lived in different time zones to my own. In the beginning, a lot of the people I spoke with were from the USA and Canada, and I was only able to speak to them after 7pm because they usually came online after 12pm, their time. I soon found myself staying online until 2-3am in the morning chatting to these people because for them, it was just reaching evening. Another problem was that I couldn't simply rattle off interview

questions when respondents came online, because they often tweeted about things they found recreational and used the site as a distraction from their real life; as a researcher, I had to be sensitive to their needs as participants at first. I chose to first observe their behaviour and simply chat to them casually before actually deciding to tell them that I was a researcher as well.

 I spent many months doing my own tweeting and role-playing whilst simultaneously watching other users come and go, slowly picking up patterns of people and what they tweeted about as well as when they usually came online. I also realised that many people had formed clusters and often tweeted a similar group of people regularly. I later discovered this to be a virtual community of friends who knew each other outside of the *Twitter* site and after many months of tweeting and observing, I'd spotted a few individuals who were from around the same time zone I was. Eventually we became good friends who spoke and still speak to one another every day. This virtual community is something that exists on the internet alone and sustains the endless communication of its participants who are living out their fandoms. I revealed to my friends that I was also a university student who was researching online fandom and thus sought permission from them, asking if they wished to be in my study – only to find that they were actually excited and happily agreed to answer any questions I presented to them.

To fully grasp online observation as a data collection technique, discussing observer roles in relation to offline observations is vital. In general, observation can be either Overt or Covert (Stafford & Stafford, 1993). The research is considered overt when the researcher makes his/her intentions and objectives known and obtains permission to observe a situation, i.e. the subjects are thus aware that they are being observed/studied. The research is considered covert when the researcher becomes an insider, i.e. the subjects are unaware of the researcher's identity and consider him/her as a group member (Jorgensen 1989).

In between these two extreme roles, the investigator can assume hybrid observer roles, i.e. be an outsider or an insider to different degrees. Accordingly, four general options for (offline) observational approaches are found in the literature. They differ in terms of the degree of the observer assimilation into the observed field and fall into the following categories: 1. The complete participant; 2. The participant-as-observer; 3. The observer-as-participant; and 4.

The complete observer (Gold, 1958; Spradley, 1980; Babbie, 1986; Jorgensen, 1989; Stafford & Stafford, 1993; Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 1996).

In terms of my online interaction with other fans and role-players that were used in this study, it can be said that I have taken the role of the 'Participant-as-observer' when it comes to studying these fans. I am first and foremost a fan, as I have been a part of this online community before deciding to do research on the topic of online fandom.

My role as a participant-as-observer was a combination of both covert and overt. I would read the tweets of many fans, and converse with them at first, based on what they spoke about. This, in the beginning, made it very easy for me to get along with fans and see what they liked and how they spoke to their followers, thus allowing me to adapt to their style. It also made it much easier for me to ask for their permission because after gaining familiarity, I would reveal that I was working on a project pertaining to fans and they all would, at this point, display a certain amount of enthusiasm for my work. Doing a project about what one is most passionate about is the ideal to many people. Revealing that I was fan and that I was working on a study about fans made the people I spoke to feel willing to participate, since they felt that they would be voicing their opinions and shedding light on a collective community of which they were so excited to be a part of online.

Figure 5: How to combine the researcher's online observer role with offline research techniques in order to diminish threats to credibility and transferability. (Norskov and Rask 2011)

Social Network Fandoms & Online Role-Playing: *Harry Potter* and *The Vampire Diaries* Fans on *Twitter*

This diagram explains the four different kinds of participant observation within online studies. The more active the participant, the higher the degree of online interaction. The more observant the participant, the least likely are they to develop an online identity through less interaction as compared to the complete participant, unless they chose to reveal details by their own choice.

I have mentioned earlier that the world of role-play was a restricted part of the online community on *Twitter* that only seemed to be available to role-players alone. I was curious about this section of fans, as they were overtly passionate enough about their fandoms to actually create accounts and speak as though they were fictional characters. This led me to create my own role-play account, so as to experience what these fans went through, but also to go behind the curtain and try to understand the appeal and what the people behind these accounts felt about their fandoms.

Thus my experience as a role-player on *Twitter* started off as being purely observational, as I wanted to get a feel of this world and how it operated. Gradually I began interacting with other role-players, and felt easier after reading their content and familiarising myself with the process of how role-play was conducted in the site. I chose to role-play a character from *The Vampire Diaries*(TVD). My character is female and is a witch. In order for my profile to be noticed, I chose to be as authentic and loyal to my character as possible, adding all the details she possessed to my profile, such as a picture of her face, her correct name and details to the bio that each profile contains. I also chose to follow only role-players from the TVD fandom rather than *Harry Potter* or any of the other fandoms online to ensure that there were no crossovers that would make my research more complex and detailed, since I was aware of many other fandoms, but wished to keep it strictly reserved to the TVD fandom alone.

It is important to understand that *Twitter* is a public domain with content available to other users, thus increasing the amount of exposure and interaction of participants as compared to other social networking sites like *Facebook*, which allows the users to decide on how much privacy they wish to have over their messages, who they choose to have as friends and who sees any or all of their content. This kind of exposure on *Twitter* thus makes the diffusion of information and what fans are doing much more visible to others and thus allow for an expanded version of interaction which enables the researcher to have relatively easy access to fans and gather rich data from this interaction.

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My role-play account soon picked up as I got followed by other role players from the TVD fandom, just as I followed many others. It needs to be understood that every person has a different persona when they are present online. With online communities came a lot of drama and opinions and perspective about the TVD fandom. People would role play with one another whilst many would spectate, judging as to how in character the role-play was. The more followers a person possessed, the better the role-player was considered, as this meant that they were quite popular. This was all quite a daunting process for me in the beginning, but since I was hiding behind a fictional character that I happened to love very much and felt quite passionate about, I chose to depict her the way I had always envisioned her.

Purposive sampling

Fans were chosen for interviews according to the principles of purposive sampling, a form of non-probability sampling in which decisions concerning the individuals to be included in the sample are taken by the researcher based upon the need to identify participants who would be most likely to contribute appropriate data, in terms of both relevance and depth (Oliver 2006). For this study, fans who openly displayed their interest in *Harry Potter* and TVD *Twitter* based fandoms were selected to be interviewed. The sample included, as Kuzel recommends, those who offered 'rival explanations' of the subject of study (37-41), which relates directly to Saukko's validity requirement of 'poyvocality' (see below).

Furthermore, Lincoln and Guba recommend sample selection:

> to the point of redundancy…In purposeful sampling the size of the sample is determined by informational considerations. If the purpose is to maximize information, the sampling is terminated when no new information is forthcoming from new sampled units; thus redundancy is the primary criterion (1995: 43).

I chose three role-players from the TVD fandom as well as three TVD fans, and three fans from the *Harry Potter* fandom to interview. The criteria for their selection was that they were fairly active on *Twitter* daily, as well as hard core fans who were passionate about their respective fandoms and created unique fan content as a result. They were all female. The three role players that I chose to use for the study also participated in other fan activities apart from the online role play. One is a fan-vidder in her spare time, the other writes fan fiction/slash. The reason why these fans were chosen was because they displayed a keen

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interest and shared very interesting opinions and observations that they made about other fans, what they saw online, and their own opinions about *TVD* and *Harry Potter*. These fans tweeted regularly about what they were doing in real life and also what they felt about their respective fandoms. Topics such as the actors, their opinions, merchandise, any news relating to the franchise, new pictures, fan art, fan fiction and fan videos that they saw online, were often shared so that other fans that followed them were able to interact and participate in an online discussion about these issues.

Semi-Structured interviews

Qualitative interviews play an important role in ethnographic research. Since qualitative interviews seek to understand selected people "on their own terms and how they make meaning of their own lives, experiences, and cognitive processes" (Brenner 2006: 357), semi-structured interviews were conducted. This type of interview, according to Yin, has three advantageous characteristics: (1) there is no tightly-scripted questionnaire: "The researcher will have a mental framework of study questions, but the specifically verbalized questions as posed to any given participant will differ according to the context and setting of the interview" (see also Hammersley and Atkinson, 1993: 152); (2) avoiding any 'uniform behaviour' for all interviews by relying upon a 'conversational mode', the interview "will lead to a social relationship of sorts, with the quality of the relationship individualized to every participant"; and (3) the interviewer uses "*open* rather than *closed*-ended questions" to elicit in-depth answers (Yin 2011: 134-135).

Online interviews have traditionally been hindered by the lack of individual identifiers and body language and they are said to lack value since face-to-face or even phone interviews offer far greater insight. I both agree and disagree with this statement. I have found that through the use of online interviews, the participant is able to give short, quick answers. Kivits (2005) mentions that synchronous, text-based chat tends to offer thin and often rather rushed answers, which makes the interaction seem somewhat superficial. However, I believe that through communication methods online, such as email and online audio/visual connection like *Skype*, and even sites like *Twitter*, one is able to get very detailed and personalised information from the participant.

I was able to obtain answers which were rich in detail and were extremely valuable, since the participants had the time to think about their answers, as well as adding to or editing them, tailoring their reasons which gave more insight and more individualistic answers. Also, with the use of *Twitter*, fans who answered questions tweeted their answers through conversation threads as well as Direct Messages, which were also effective in getting detailed answers.

This also depended heavily on the kind of participant I was talking to. I was fortunate enough to talk to many people who were very conversational and confident online, being very opinionated fans of their respective fandoms, and they did not feel hesitant about providing detailed, personalised answers for my questionnaires as well as in my online interviews.

The questions found within the online interviews were both closed and open ended, enabling these participants to add their opinions and to speak freely without restriction. Participants were also under no time restraints and therefore could answer as they wished in their own free time. Depending on the answers I received from many of my questions, I found it easier to 'dig deeper' and enquire about intricate details from fans based on the understanding they had shown in the many answers they had provided within my questionnaire. Being a part of the fandom, I chose to ask general questions at first in order to get an idea of what type of fan I was interviewing. Despite being *Harry Potter* or *The Vampire Diaries* fans, each individual has their own particular viewpoint about what they watch/read and how they interpret what they see.

Question: Have you read the *Harry Potter* books? If not, why not?

Gryffin: Yes, I have. They are the foundation of the *Harry Potter* series and I don't see why anybody who likes *Harry Potter* hasn't read them.

The above answer to the question is able to convey a lot of information about this particular fan. Gryffin clearly explains how she feels about people who like the series but haven't read the books, even though the question did not ask her what she felt about people who didn't read them, thus making me view her as quite an opinionated fan. This gave me incentive to further question what she felt about fans who *don't* read the books. These kinds of questions allowed the fan to provide definite as well as detailed answers and certainly leave room for further enquiry. I used my own prerogative and judgement when it came to semi-structured interviews, based on how I viewed this particular fan. Had Gryffin not answered in this

manner, I would have surely had to try and question her further in hope of trying to dig deeper, but because she was very open about her thoughts, this made getting feedback from her much easier.

Netnography

The central research technique used for this *Twitter* study was a Netnography. The term netnography refers to ethnographic research conducted on the Internet (Kozinet's term joins "Inter[net]" and "eth[nography]"). It is a qualitative, interpretive research methodology that adapts the traditional, in-person ethnographic research techniques of anthropology to the study of the online cultures and communities formed through computer-mediated communications (Kozinets2002). Netnography as an interpretive methodology for consumer and marketing research was introduced in the late 1990s and it is not confined to marketing research, as it is easily adaptable for 'cultural studies' research (Kozinets, 2002).

As a method, "netnography" can be faster, simpler, and less expensive than ethnography, and more naturalistic and unobtrusive than focus groups or interviews (Kozinets, 2010). Netnography is similar to ethnography in five ways: 1. It is naturalistic; 2. It is immersive; 3. It is descriptive; 4. It is multi-method; and 5. It is adaptable.

In a netnography, data takes two forms: data that the researcher directly copies from the computer-mediated communications of online community members, and data that the researcher inscribes (like explanations, observations and interpretations that need to be explained further in order to be understood). Reflective field notes, in which ethnographers record their observations, are a time-tested and recommended method in netnography (Kozinets 2002: 12). Since this study is located on the *Twitter* site, a netnography is effective and makes research techniques considerably easier. Netnographies allow for the capturing of online data and online interviews in real time. As Kozinets notes, a netnography is "based primarily on the observation of textual discourse" (2002, p. 64).

In order to gather data, netnography-wise, I had to search for and pay close attention to the activities of fans online. These included a variety of activities which they chose to participate in both as groups as well as individually. The *Twitter* trends, the stream of tweets amongst users, the pictures they uploaded as well as the links they posted to other sites incorporating

their fan interactions were all screen captured for evidence of their online interaction. Interacting online as an active participant by contributing my opinion and knowledge about the fandoms on *Twitter*, enabled me to become a valued member of the online community with other fans, making it easier to understand how fans interact and communicate with each other. I was thus able to gain the most relevant, heterogeneous and data-rich information required for the project.

As Kozinets points out, the Internet offers increased opportunities for social group participation, where people form virtual communities of consumption in order to assert social power, to unite, and to claim symbols and ways of life that are meaningful to them and the communities they build. Hence, netnographic studies seem to be able to offer those "thick descriptions" of the life worlds of fans that researchers look for.

Using the netnography as a research technique was vital as the site needed to be monitored constantly. Having a formal type of discussion or interview, hours, even days later wouldn't be the same as capturing the opinion of fans who just witnessed something from a celebrity online in real time, or a story that had just been uploaded or perhaps a video they had just watched that was new. The site had the ability to capture all these emotions and with a netnography, this information was easily captured. This has been one of the most effective uses of the netnography in my study. I was able to capture information as soon as it was released, just by being present online at that time. No other research technique would have been as detailed as the netnography has proven to be for this online study.

Validity

This study follows the tenets of the 'new ethnography', and thus its *validity* has been guided by Paula Saukko's notion of "dialogic validity", which evaluates research "in terms of how well it manages to capture the lived realities of others" (2003: 19), which she argues is pertinent for an 'interpretive' cultural studies ethnography. More precisely for Saukko, 'dialogic validity' is:

> Reminiscent of the old ethnographic goal of capturing the 'native's point of view'. Where it departs from the old ethnographic project is that it does not claim to have access to some privileged 'objective' position, from which to describe the lives of others. Dialogism does not view research in terms of describing other worlds from the

outside, but in terms of an encounter or interaction between different worlds. The main criteria of validity of this approach then is how well the researcher fulfils the ethical imperative to be true to, and to respect, other people's lived worlds and realities (2003: 20).

To transcend the traditional ethnographic notion of a 'detached' researcher capable of achieving an 'objective' account, Saukko adds three further specific criteria for valid research:

1. *Truthfulness:* "This entails collaborative forms of research, such as measures to allow the people being studied…to have a say in the way in which they are studied and represented" (2003: 20).

2. *Self-reflexivity:* "Researchers should be reflexive about the personal, social, and paradigmatic discourses that guide the way they perceive reality and other people" (2003: 20).

3. *Polyvocality.* "Researchers should be conscientious that they are not studying *a* lived reality but *many*. This means that they should make sure that they include the views or voices of major 'stakeholders'" (2003: 20).

Specific strategies were developed to ensure these criteria for 'dialogic validity' were properly realized in the research process: showing interviewees the topics to be pursued in interviews to test their relevancy for fans, and showing the interviewees my data analysis to test their validity; foregrounding my own theoretical assumptions used to understand fandom, and indeed also my own location as a fan (see below); and ensuring a multiplicity of views regarding my research topic were interviewed, including obviously those disagreeing with my theoretical assumptions.

As I have sought out permission from all fans for this project, I have also requested that they read what information about them I have gathered in order to correct any details that they do or do not approve of. This method of clarification also allows them to understand how they have been observed from the researcher perspective as well. This method is also a part of Saukko's criteria to validate the research found, so as to gain the approval of the fans involved in the study.

This self-reflexive method which I had used was extremely effective as fans read through what was written about themselves and thus encouraged more individualistic details as they felt that they were depicted quite accurately. This also enabled the participants to let me know how comfortable they felt by the way they are represented.

The research process

The actual research process followed Yin's 'five phases' model, which can be summarized as:

1. Compiling Data: from field-notes, interviews, observation, archives;

2. Disassembling: breaking down the compiled data into smaller fragments;

3. Reassembling "using substantive themes (or even codes or clusters of codes) to reorganize the disassembled fragments or pieces into different groupings and sequences than might have been in the original notes": (2011:177);

4. Interpreting: analysis of data;

5. Conclusion: the summary of the research findings (Yin 2011: 177-179).

In terms of my data - which comprises of numerous screen captures, word documents of questionnaires and interview questions, the written results of my participant observation (field notes) as well as a review of my message inbox on Twitter - all information was analysed and sorted according to Yin's five step model. This involved 'reassembling' my gathered data into a limited range of important themes and making larger interpretive sense of it.

Researcher as Fan

> Fan-academics are often academics who decide to base their research on a phenomenon or community of which they have first-hand knowledge. They claim the privilege of researching and writing about their fannish passions and interests. Henry Jenkins, a self-confessed fan-academic, has identified this occupation as a fan specialisation, alongside other occupational specialisations in fandom such as fan editor, writer, composer, artist, convention organiser, activist – the list goes on. The

size, diversity and global reach of a contemporary fandom promote such specialization (Nightingale 2008: 119).

I am similarly a "fan-academic", as I am also an active fan of *Harry Potter* and *The Vampire Diaries*, and I have a profile on *Twitter*, where I engage with other fans. This is to be considered an advantage rather than a burden, as it allows for an in-depth knowledge of the research field, and also provides a strong motivation for the study, as I have a strong affective relationship with these particular fandoms. I also find support for the researcher being personally caught up in the culture to be studied in Henry Jenkins' seminal ethnographic study of *Star Trek* fans, written by an 'insider' fan (1992), and Paul Hodkinson's study of the Goth subculture (2002), again written by a member of the Goths. To maintain the position of the researcher, however, requires a 'reflexivity' (see above) which enables awareness that one is at once both a researcher and a fan, and that the two are not the same thing.

The researcher has direct contact with and gets close to the people, situation, and phenomenon under study; the researcher's personal experiences and insights are an important part of the inquiry and critical to understanding the phenomenon (Patton 2002: 40). Gathering information becomes easier since I am familiar with the reactions, questions and complaints that many fans may have because I share and understand those myself. An outsider who is not familiar with the fandom will find it quite a challenge to manoeuvre in and out of the field having not understood the opinion or standpoint from that of a fan.

Personally, it was very important for me to gain the trust of the fans. Not because I required their information for this project, but because eventually, we would form a deeper bond based on our dedication and love for the respective fandoms being reviewed. Watching *The Vampire Diaries* or *Harry Potter* was a way for me to gain a better understanding of people and their relationships that can be built upon the tiniest bit of shared experience. A lot of the fans welcomed the idea of me doing a project on them, so it became easier to get much more detailed answers once they knew what I was doing.
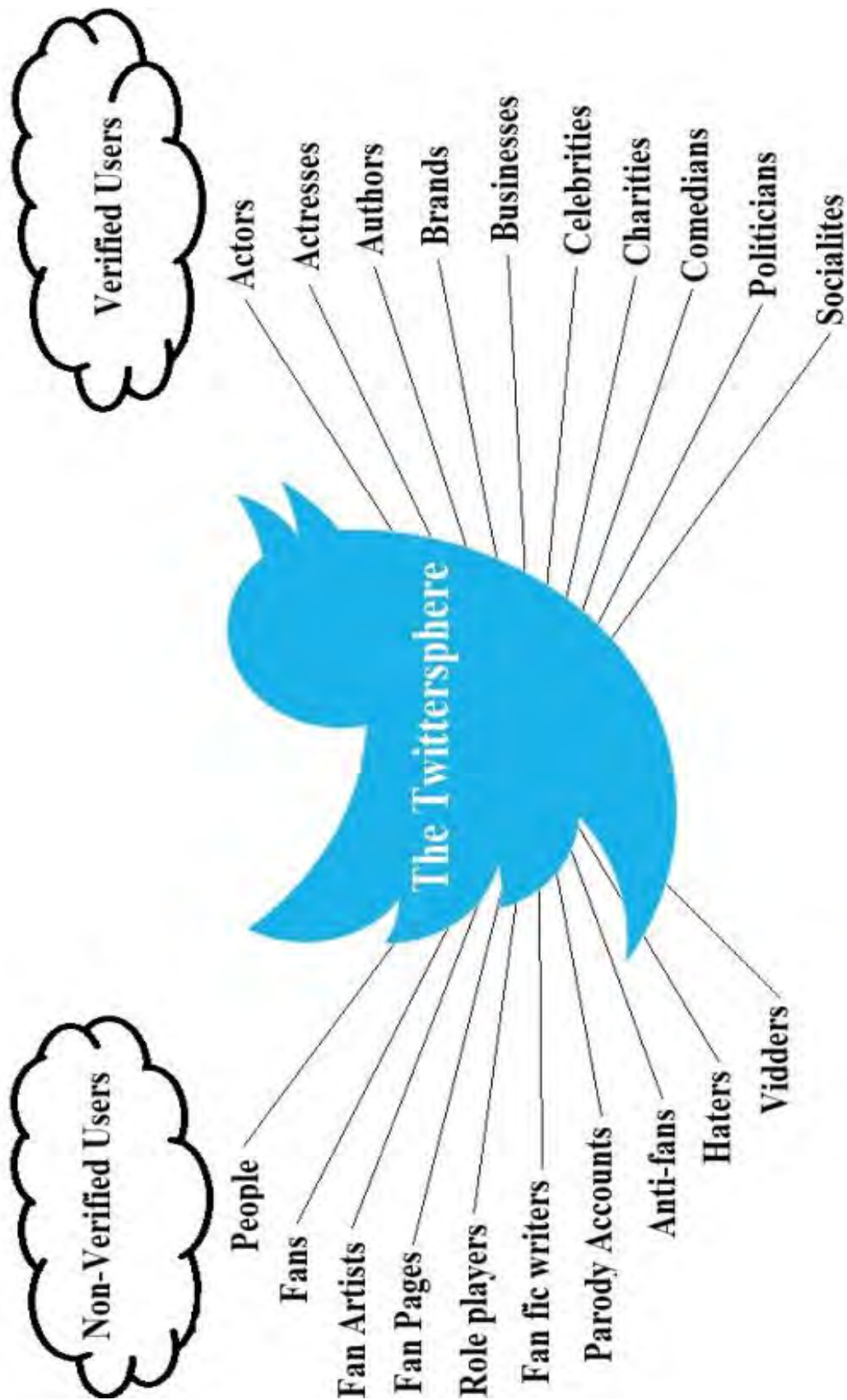
Figure 25: Diagram representing the divide between Verified and Non- Verified users on *Twitter*.
Social Network Fandoms & Online Role-Playing: *Harry Potter* and *The Vampire Diaries* Fans on *Twitter*

Chapter 6: Research Findings

The nature of the internet makes possible the existence of de-territorialized transnational fan communities, and indeed the very ease of going online has itself contributed to the growth of fandoms, and thus the internet has become a significant location for the contemporary academic study of fan communities. The focus of this thesis is an ethnographic study of the two fandoms of *Harry Potter* and *The Vampire Diaries* that exist as virtual communities on the social network site *Twitter.* In this analysis chapter I will look at the *Harry Potter* and *The Vampire Diaries* fandoms separately, emphasising different aspects of fandom in each section. In doing this, I shall draw on data gathered from my long-term participant observation on *Twitter,* interviews with selected fans, and archival research, in order to shine an academic light on two fan galaxies in the universe of *Twitter*. The chapter will specifically address the last two of my main research questions:

Q3: How are *Harry Potter* and *The Vampire Diaries* fandoms manifested on the *Twitter* website?

Q4: How does role-playing manifest on *Twitter* and how do fans actively refashion identities online?

Harry Potter was originally a series of seven magical adventure novels written by J.K. Rowling from 1997-2007, focusing on Harry Potter, a teenager who discovers that he is a wizard, through seven school years. The novels chronicle his adventures with his friends, Ron and Hermione, who are both students at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, with the main arc of the story concerning Harry's quest to defeat the Dark Wizard, Lord Voldemort, who seeks to become immortal and defeat his one true enemy, who is prophesised to be Harry Potter. By the time the fourth book was released, the worldwide release of *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* was turned into a kind of public celebration; fans of the novels were coming out at midnight, dressed up in costumes and as fictional characters not just to get their hands on a copy of the latest novel, but to announce themselves as part of a global fandom. The ongoing novels were then made into an ongoing series of eight equally as successful films (2001 – 2011).

The Harry Potter Fandom on Twitter

Harry Potter has now become an enormous imaginative world of its own, the impetus behind an avalanche of fan-written fictions, fan art, fan videos, fan music, fan discussions, and so on.If for Roland Barthes (1982) the 'death of the author' gave birth to the active reader who took on the joy of (re-)signifying literary texts, thus becoming secondary authors themselves (a key essay in the emergence of 'active audience' studies), then after the completion of the *Harry Potter* novels and films there remains a vast international community of active fans who, through their fervent discussions, fan art, fan fiction and poetry, fan videos, fan music (Wizard Rock or Wrock), role playing, and so on, have kept the *Harry Potter* phenomenon alive, particularly online, to the extent of becoming *co-authors* themselves of the now giant and seemingly endless web of *Harry Potter* fandom (Coppa in Hellekson & Busse 2006: 242).

It is very important for any serious understanding of fandoms to be aware of how a fandom is not only in its extreme enthusiasms a kind of hyper-consumerism (where fans are more affectively engaged with a commodity than the average consumer), but that it is also – and profoundly – a contemporary form of *creative productivity*, where the *power relations* between powerful (capitalist) producer and powerless ordinary consumer have become to be challenged. No longer passively accepting culture from above, fans are *empowered* consumers – or more precisely 'prosumers'- who implicitly denounce in their imaginative practice the omnipotent 'authority' of the original author, sole owner of the copyright of his or her texts whose intentions audiences obediently ingest, and instead they offer us a contemporary metaphor of culture as a popular collaboration 'from below' between the members of the community/fandom, *using*, rather than being used by, the dominant culture industries. In this regard, we may also argue that what fans do as 'prosumers' or co-authors is *resist* the highly limiting subject-position of 'consumer' (defined within capitalist social relations as an passive receiver of goods or meanings), and thus disturb the institutionalized hierarchy of contemporary cultural formations.

The *Harry Potter* fandom began on *Twitter* when *Harry Potter* fans created their own accounts to make their passion and allegiance to all things *Harry Potter* clear and visible to others. I have also displayed my commitment to the fandom through the creation of my own

profile when I first started on *Twitter*. With this being said, there are a variety of ways in which fans can materialize their fandom online.

Declaring one's fandom: the Profile Picture

Many *Harry Potter* fans on *Twitter* show their passion for the fandom through the use of a profile picture, a background image of the profile (known as a header), their usernames, as well as fan information in their Bios (profile biography). A true fan is able to spot the signs of other fellow fans with words like *'Potterhead'*[16], the quote *'Turn to Page 394'*[17] and the hash tag *'ProudPuff'*, which refers to Hufflepuff, one of the founding houses in the Harry Potter series. There is therefore an active *code* at work here only properly understood by fellow fans – a code that immediately sets up a boundary between insiders and outsiders, between the fandom and those excluded from it. One gains recognition as a fan by other fans by displaying a familiarity with the fandom's occult knowledge.
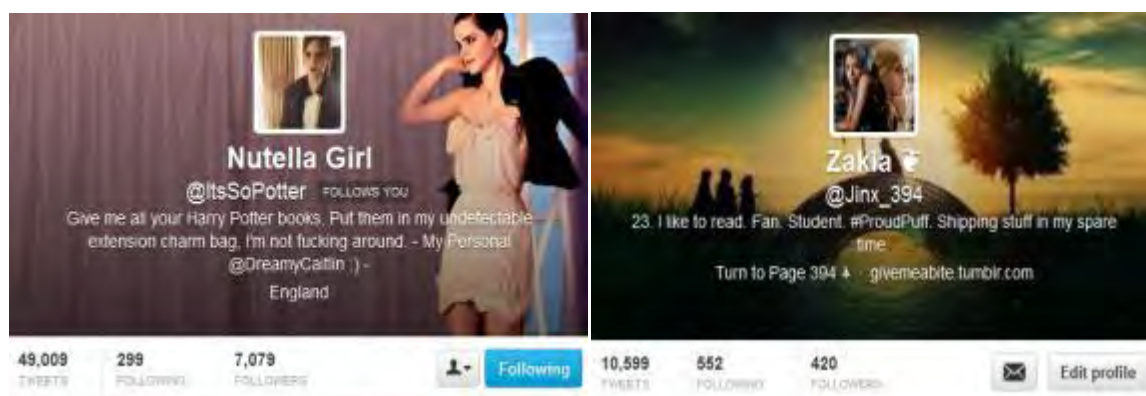

Figure 26: Fan profiles

The header image in ItsSoPotter's profile is of the actress Emma Watson, while the header in Jinx_394 is fan art, depicting the story of the three brothers who meet Death on a bridge, a tale important to *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*.

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[16]Potterhead is a term used to describe a fan who is obsessed with all things related to Harry Potter.

[17] "Turn to page 394" is a quote taken from the films which is said by the character Professor Snape.

    Social Network Fandoms & Online Role-Playing: *Harry Potter* and *The Vampire Diaries* Fans on *Twitter*

Shipping

Before examining some of the key ways in which the *Harry Potter* fandom manifests itself on *Twitter,* it is helpful to introduce a fan creative practice that is found in most of those specific manifestations(in fan fiction, fan art and fan vids) as we shall later see, and that is 'shipping'. Shipping is the fan act of encouraging or supporting the pairing of two characters in a romantic relationship, which may or (more usually) may not have occurred in the original text. Within the *Harry Potter* series, there are many couples who are revealed throughout the story, the main ones being revealed in the last two novels beings Harry and Ginny (Hinny) and Ron and Hermione (Romione). Fans of the series in the 2000s that followed the journey of Harry as it was unfolding as J.K Rowling wrote the novels, often guessed and wished for romantic pairings between certain characters. Even after the novels were published, fans all across the world continue to imagine what the story would have turned out like if their favourite characters ended up having romantic relationships with other characters.

Many ships are 'canon', which is to say they are true to the original story. A popular example would be Ron and Hermione from the *Harry Potter* series, also known as 'Romione' (Ron+ Hermione) by the fans. This pairing happens in the books and is thus transferred to the fan vids and stories. The rest of the ships are referred to as 'crack' ships. Crack ships are an unusual romantic/erotic pairing of any sort that does not exist in the original fan text. Crack ships are subdivided into different categories: slash, crossover and real life ships. Slash ships are homoerotic pairings of usually male fictional characters (the prototype of this being slash fiction focused on an imagined homosexual relationship between Captain Kirk and Dr Spock from *Star Trek*, almost all written by women (Penley 1992; 1997). Crossover ships are where characters from different fandoms are paired together, demonstrating a high degree of intertextuality by fans. Real life shipping is the pairing of two people in real life, for example: Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt, known as Brangelina. Or Tom Felton and Emma Watson, known as Feltson.

Figure 27: A scene from the film, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*

'Canon' shipping: Ron and Hermione from *Harry Potter*

Figure 28: Manipulated images of the stars placed together

Real life shipping: Emma Watson and Tom Felton.

Fan Art

Fan art can be found nearly everywhere on the internet if one searches for it. Sites like *Fanpop!* And *DeviantArt* host fan art specifically and blogs like *Word Press* and *Tumblr* also have a large quantity of fan art posted on these sites by artists and fans in particular. *Twitter* is also another site where fan art is uploaded and shared amongst fans. Fan art, like fan fiction, can be highly specified. There are depictions of scenes which are true to a story, and drawings which are from an 'alternate universe' or imagined in the fans head. As Anders points out, "Fans have a long tradition of creating their own works based on their favourite stories" (2011: 1). Many *Harry Potter* fans create their own portrayals of scenes from the books, as well as digital art using imagery from the films to create their own original content. Many do so because novels allow one the ability to imagine characters and events without any visual guidance. Below is an example of digital fan art, where an artist has fused two

Social Network Fandoms & Online Role-Playing: *Harry Potter* and *The Vampire Diaries* Fans on *Twitter*

images and shared it on *Twitter* on the 1st of September, because Harry and his friends attend Hogwarts School from that date.

Figure 29: An example of digital *Harry Potter* fan art

Fan artists have the ability to transform what they see and thus create their own content which suits their own ideas and expectations of the series. Indeed in fan art – and all the various fan creative activities discussed here – we can identify a creative *transformation* of the original cultural industries' texts by Fiske's 'shadow cultural economy' of fans, generating a 'secondary production' of aesthetic texts that take on their own momentum and autonomy. Below are two images of fan art which represents the Hinny ship. (Harry and Ginny) The first image shows Harry and Ginny with their three children which is shown in an epilogue at the end of the final film of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. The second image is hand drawn fan art that portrays the scene from the novel when the two characters first kissed.

Figure 30: Digital and hand drawn fan art of the Hinny pairing

Fan Fiction

The sheer quantity of fan fiction that is available online is colossal. The quantity and variety and detail that is created caters not just to a general audience, but to *Harry Potter* fans who have specific tastes, whether it be slash, crack or canon stories. Whatever type of *Harry Potter* fan there is, there are fan fictions tailored for each preference. For example, if a fan likes the pairing of Harry Potter and his best friend, Hermione Granger, there are stories available online with these two characters involved in an adventure together, a romance, or possibly even married with children. *Harry Potter* has the largest quantity of stories on the fan fiction site fanfiction.net, with an amount of 663 000+ stories as of 08/11/2013. Fan fiction differs from the original texts in the sense that fans explore possibilities which are only hinted in the novels or films. There are also ideas which fans come up with on their own, and through fan fiction, create a story for these already existing characters which can have them thrown into a different environment or time period, or indeed given a different sexual identity. Below is a screen captured image of the kind of story specifications one can select on the fanfiction.net site.
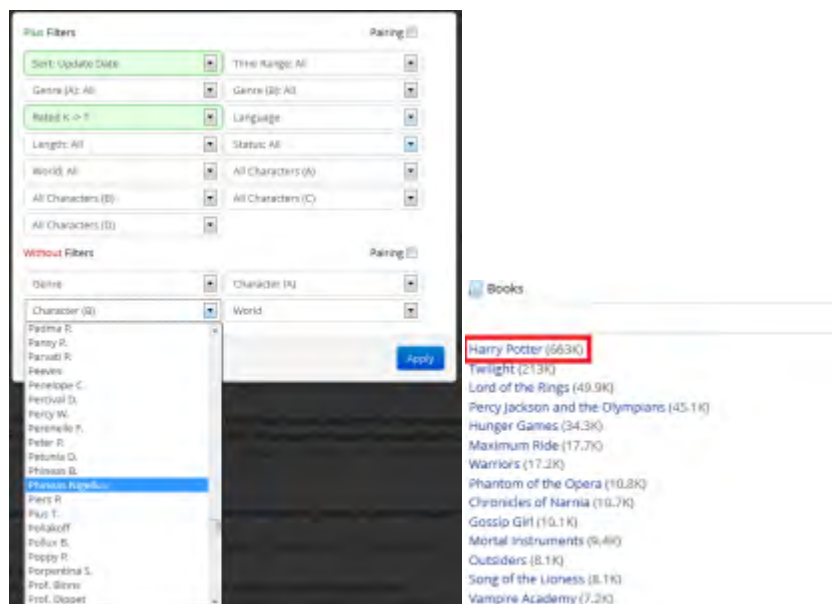

Figure 31: Screen captures images of the search process for *Harry Potter* fan fiction on fanfiction.net. *Harry Potter* has the highest amount of fan fiction that is being hosted on the site

Vidding

Vidding is another popular activity amongst many fans who are able to use software like Windows Movie Maker and many other advanced video editing programs as well as Photoshop to create their own narratives from existing scenes in films and TV shows. Vidders are able to manipulate scenes and form their own personalised stories based on whichever ideas they may take a liking to. Much of this re-created content is shared through links on *Twitter* and the majority of these videos are hosted on *YouTube*. It is remarkable that about 610 000 videos have been uploaded for the *Harry Potter* fan video section alone (as of 2013).
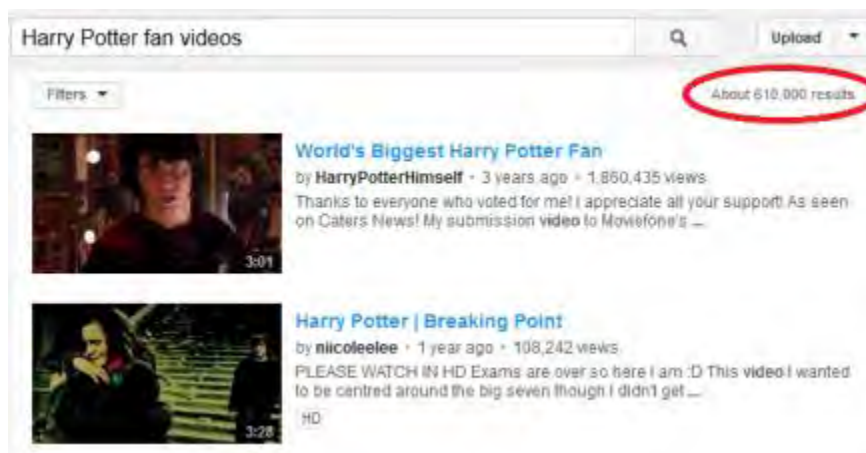

Figure 32: Screen captured image of *Harry Potter* videos on YouTube

Through vidding, a fan can re-edit unconnected footage to produce new narratives that may be of specific interest to the fan. Fans can ship two characters that do not have relationships in the original text, or parody scenes from the original text and even re-enact scenes the way they imagined it to be. The way some fan films encourage other fans to respond sets up an interaction between fans online, rather than simply an interaction with the commercial text. What is most important to note about vidding is that it is strictly a fan created art form which takes many hours, days and even weeks to create. The sheer time consuming aspect of this activity, where fans have to hunt through hours of recorded/saved footage to find relevant images to re-edit, is something that is voluntarily done by fans and they do not get paid for this. Vids are created for sharing amongst other fans who can appreciate and have the chance to visualise something that they wouldn't have otherwise seen on a TV show or film.

Fans' Esoteric Knowledge

Despite JK Rowling's *Harry Potter* novel series ending in 2007, there is a strong sense of fans wanting to keep the magic alive by celebrating some of the more important events which happened in the books. For example, significant characters and their birthdays get celebrated on *Twitter* as well. J.K. Rowling's birthday is on the 31st of July, which also happens to be Harry Potter's birthday in the books. Fans tweeted a lot about it on the 31st of July, and it ended up trending worldwide ('trending' meaning there was sufficient *Twitter* traffic on this topic for it to be globally registered).

Figure 33: Worldwide trends related to *Harry Potter*

One of the more popular activities of fans on the site has been sharing obscure and hidden meanings and the surprising symmetry that is weaved into the stories, and which can only be noticed upon finishing reading carefully all 7 novels. Here is a tweet from a user by the name of Emma Watson – A fan girl, and not the real actress' account!
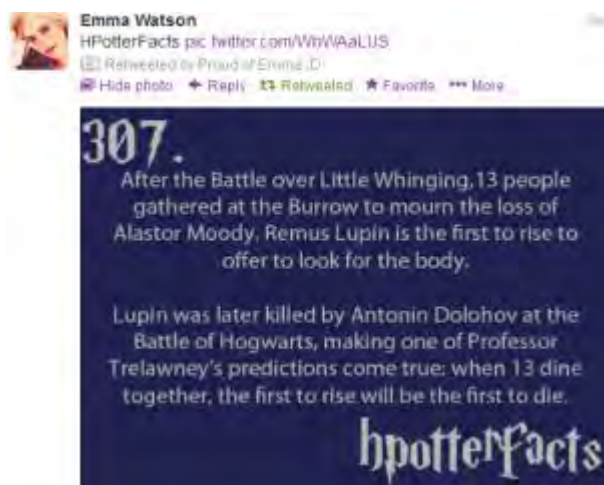
Figure 34: Screen captured image of a picture that a fan tweeted, related to esoteric knowledge

This picture is an example which exhibits esoteric knowledge, which is central to the definition of a fan who thereby demonstrates his or her serious commitment to all things *Harry Potter*, and who is therefore also recognised as a fan by other Potter fans, who may, for example acknowledge a fan's knowledge.

Fans of *Harry Potter* gain esoteric knowledge through studying the novels meticulously and understanding the intricacies of the story and the characters, giving them a much more advanced knowledge of the series as compared to a person who simply watches the films without knowing the deeper meaning behind scenes. J.K Rowling has a created a story with multiple layers upon inspection, and fans are able to appreciate the amount of detail and thought that has been put into it. To this extent, fans are often not unlike literary critics, giving close and intelligent readings of fan-texts that bring out meanings and symbolic patterns largely unnoticed by more casual readers. These may therefore be called 'active' readings.

Role-play

Because role-playing is so central to this thesis, it will be discussed both here and later in the chapter with reference to *The Vampire Diaries*. As was discussed in the Literature Review chapter, there is Live Action Role-Play (LARP) and online role-play, and we will only be interested in online virtual role playing. Online role-play fans create the impression and representation of a fictional character through their displayed avatar or profile. Online role-play fits broadly into two categories: (1) where a fan's *Twitter* account is in the name of a fictional fandom character, such as Dumbledore from *Harry Potter*. The role-player will typically remain in character when tweeting on *Twitter*, even when commenting on topical events; and(2) where fans take on the identity of a fandom fictional character and interact verbally with other similar role-players, creating as it were a dramatic dialogue between two actors that can go on for hours or even weeks at a time, where they have conversations with one another as though their characters were speaking to one another, as well as role playing scenes together that haven't been seen on a TV show or film before. The first type of role

play will be discussed with regard to the *Harry Potter* fandom, and the second, far more complicated, type will be discussed later with regard to *The Vampire Diaries* fandom.

There is in role-playing often a light-hearted (and even respectful) parody of fictional characters, where fan readers enjoy the often comic remarks made by role-players, the humour coming from the interaction between the fictional character as known by the fans, and the particular contemporary interpretation of that character by the role-player that can be seen on *Twitter*. What is also important to remind ourselves of here is that these characters take on a life way beyond the original texts, and often take on a carnivalesque aspect, as Bakhtin (1993) describes, where the seriousness of their original depictions by J.K. Rowling (or in the films) is over-turned in favour of a comedic persona who gently mocks not only the world, but also the character he or she is portraying. Fandom, we need here to say, is therefore not all a mere fawning before the admired text. It also contains a healthy populist carnivalised element of ribald laughter at the original characters, as they move from the culture industries into the domain of popular culture.

Role-players show high levels of knowledge about and dedication to the *Harry Potter* series, including the books, films as well as actors and cast information, through following the *Harry Potter* actors. They do not merely quote sayings of their characters in the series, but personalise their role-play through incorporating an individual character style, mainly sarcasm, and they usually play to the fictitious characters' most dominant personality traits seen within the books and films. Below are a few selected profiles of parody *Harry Potter* accounts.

The Dark Lord
@Lord_Voldemort7
view full profile →

Running around leaving scars, collecting my jar of hearts and tearing love apart...
lv7thinks@gmail.com http://www.lv7thinks.com

| 3,643 | 0 | 1,837,039 | 17,589 |
| Tweets | Following | Followers | Listed |

Figure 35: Parody role play profile

In embracing the title of the 'Dark Lord', Lord Voldemort, both the *Twitter* character and the fictional character, does not 'follow' anyone. Instead, he has a group of loyal supporters in the books and a fairly large following online (the one on *Twitter* does have an email address

and a website though). This Voldemort is a satirical and mocking character not found in the books/films and usually speaks about day-to-day topics and anything news worthy on *Twitter*. It is important to draw attention to the huge amount of followers that some of these accounts have, as they are hugely popular on *Twitter*. As the picture capture above shows, The Dark Lord has over 1.8 million 'followers' on *Twitter*.

Figure 36: Parody role play profile

This user who role-plays the old and wise Hogwarts Principle, Professor Dumbledore, gives the character an evil twist through the amended name as well as by reinforcing his 'evil' through following exactly 666 people, a number biblically associated with evil. His biography conveys that he creates fan art as well as providing a link to view these drawings. There is also the suggestion that this user is role-playing an original characterization of Professor Dumbledore as crass, foul-mouthed and a drug-user (the reference to his marijuana habit is through the use of 'Huffle-Puffin', a reference to Hufflepuff.[18]). This therefore is a typical example of how *Harry Potter* role-players imaginatively re-create J.K. Rowling's fictional characters, more often than not by encrusting the characters with traits and interests peculiar to the fans themselves. The fictional character is therefore 're-signified' and 'glocalized' (a global cultural phenomenon is made relevant to a local culture) and 'customized' by 'active audiences' – acts of appropriation that at once both 'defer' to the host text and 'differ' from it, making it relevant and meaningful for local cultures and individuals by redesigning it.

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[18]Hufflepuff is the name of one of the four founding wizards of Hogwarts School.

Figure 37: Parody role play profile

This *Twitter* user who role-plays the character Hermione Granger has taken one of the character's most notable qualities and exaggerated it online, this quality being her intelligence. The character within the books is noted for being extremely clever and is sometimes bossy. This user has incorporated sarcasm and the character's dominant personality traits combined with the contrasting image of Hermione as an 11 year old child from the films, creating humorous effect. To describe Hermione as 'Hermione Fucking Granger' is of course to take her in a direction quite at odds with her depiction in the novels and films.

It is apposite here to make the point that much public discussion of J. K Rowling's *Harry Potter* novels focused on how well or accurately or imaginatively the films interpreted the novels, and yet what are largely ignored are the extraordinarily prolific *fandom* interpretations of the novels –the fan fiction, the fan art, the fan videos, etc. If the novels and films belong to the culture industries – large capitalist conglomerates that exist to make profit – then this other fan productivity is outside of that, since its labour is amateur and unpaid, and motivated purely by the 'use-value' of the original texts, which are re-made to become meaningful (often intensely so) in the lives of the fans. Alongside the films' interpretation of the Hermione Granger character must also therefore be considered the fans' interpretations of that same protagonist, an example of which we encounter here on *Twitter*. Here Hermione is not only intellectually confident, but also rebellious, an obvious departure from the original script, and, as Fiske argued about populist appropriations of the culture industries generally, a typical sign of a popular culture at odds with the values and interests of the elite (Fiske, 1989a). As we have seen earlier, fans both 'defer' to and 'differ' from the host texts, thus marking out an *autonomous* realm of popular culture, one that is shaped by the interests and values of ordinary people.

If fandom is a branch of 'active audience' studies, then what needs to be emphasised is that the heightened activities of fans is precisely that creativity and energy needed to establish and sustain an autonomous space of popular culture, paradoxically both drawing upon, and transcending through transfiguration, the symbolic commodities of the dominant culture industries.

Figure 38: Parody role play profile

This user role-playing the Potions teacher, Professor Snape, reinforces his malevolent characteristics from the novels and films through the use of a picture of the film character and the film and book quote, "There will be no foolish wand waving or silly incantations in this class." It is important to note that each of these users who are role-playing male and female *Harry Potter* characters do not give any signs of their off-line gender or personal preferences, apart from Evil Dumbledore, who conveys that he or she is an artist who draws, enjoys bacon, and smokes weed.

These role-players tweet about any topic and incorporate the *Harry Potter* world into their content. They do not simply quote lines from their characters within the books and films, but have bypassed that mode of fandom to imagine that their characters are real and very much alive in the real world. Lord Voldemort, Dumbledore and Snape are characters who were killed off in the series, but were very important to the story, and by users role-playing deceased *Harry Potter* characters, it is almost as though they are being kept alive through their input on the *Twitter* network.
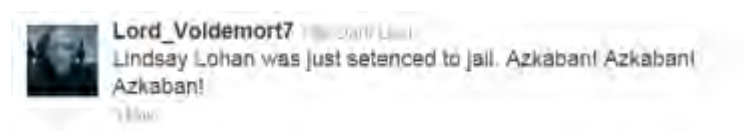

Figure 39: Tweet by role player upon hearing of actress Lindsay Lohan's jail sentence

Here the role-playing 'Lord Voldermort', named after a character from the *Harry Potter* novels, deftly combines commentary on troubled film actress Lindsay Lohan with a reference to the fictional prison of Azkaban[19] in *Harry Potter*.
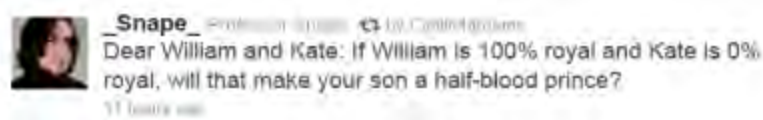

Figure 40: Role players tweet about the royal family's child

Within the novels and the films, Snape is referred to as the 'half blood prince' due to his bloodline. This tweet shows how the role-player sets up a relation between a real life event - the royal wedding -and the character's fictional identity.
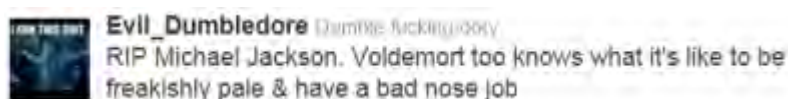

Figure 41: Role players tweet upon hearing of Michael Jackson's death

The 'Trend RIP Michael Jackson' had emerged when Michael Jackson's death was announced. Using the joke of Jackson's nose job, the role-player pokes fun at Lord Voldemort's physical appearance, as within the books and films Voldemort does not have a normal human nose.

When a user tweets a message that exceeds140 characters, there is usually a message which appears, saying 'You need to be more clever with your tweet.' Hermione1979 therefore tweeted:
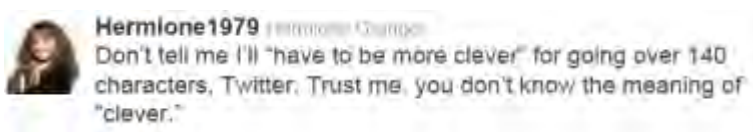

Figure 42: Role player living out her fictional identity

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[19]Azkaban is a wizard prison to which dark wizards who are found guilty are sent. It is said to be in the middle of the North Sea and is guarded by Dementors, faceless hooded figures who suck out hope and happiness from their subjects.

The tone of these parody role-players are highly sarcastic, giving us an idea that these users may not necessarily be children, but rather adult fans who have twisted the original character personalities slightly in order to create content that is different as well as funny. Their entertaining content makes these users popular and they thus gather large followings. These users cleverly formulate their tweets according to real life content and experiences, which make their characters feel more relevant in the real world despite existing in a fictional literary realm.

Hate

It is usually taken for granted that there is a mutual respect and acknowledgement by each fan for others' opinions and likes, even if they may differ. An observation that I have made as a whole of the *Harry Potter* fandom is that fans rarely clash heads over particular aspects, irrespective of what they may ship or what they dislike. The presence of hate however, is simply restricted to personal opinions, depending on how strongly a fan feels about a certain aspect. Other than that, many fans choose to have an 'agree to disagree' attitude online, not wanting to cause tensions amongst fellow fans through a simple disagreement which has the capability to draw attention and cause bigger arguments to occur on *Twitter*. Fans who collectively love the J.K Rowling novels feel that hatred towards something which is 'canon' is considered disrespectful to the author's work. The *Harry* Potter fandom is remarkably free of any rancour to the author, the novels, the films, the characters, the actors and, of course, the other fans and their opinions.

I hate the Harry and Hermione pairing. They exemplify the perfect male/female best friendship, and trying to turn that into a romantic relationship only furthers the idea that guys and girls can't be just friends.

Figure 43: Screen capture of a fan opinion

The above image with the caption below it, explaining a fans opinion of how they hate the idea of Harry being shipped with Hermione is simply an opinion which hasn't raised much debate on Twitter or sparked any arguments between fans. With such a diverse audience of fans, every one of them prefers something different from the next, so, in a story filled with a large amount of characters, a difference of opinion is expected.

Sustaining fan communities on Twitter

 Being online and accessed by millions of fans around the world, the HP *Twitter* fandom is constantly alive 24 hours per day, with discussions, role-playing, the presentation of fan art, fan fiction, fan vids, etc. This incessant activity ensures that the online community is permanently alive, able to be accessed and participated in by fans from around the world at any time of the day or night. A Boy Scouts Hall is just a lifeless building without any Boy Scouts. Similarly, online fandoms like *Harry Potter* are only alive with the persistent involvement of fans who, in their constant interaction, maintain the fan community and entirely generate the shared meanings that circulate amongst the fans. Fandoms – communities of meaning - such as the *Harry Potter* fandom are, it must therefore be noted, entirely the creation 'from below' of ordinary fans. They are not part of some public relations strategy by the culture industries 'from above', but quotidian worlds founded and sustained by fans themselves. Before the Internet this would not have been possible – communication between fans, particularly over larger distances, would have been slow and intermittent, and would certainly not have taken place in 'real time', except for small face-to-face interactions. Web 2.0, with its participatory software, interestingly enables these *autonomous* fan communities to flourish, creating gigantic spaces apart from the commercial culture industries where meanings and practices are generated 'from below' by fans themselves, without any serious interference from the dominant media institutions.

Anti Fans

Anti-fans are people, who, for a variety of reasons, hate or intensely dislike and have a strong negative view or feeling about a certain text, genre or personality (Gray 2003). Anti-fans do not dislike popular texts for nothing. On the contrary, they are more familiar with their objects of hostility and aware of the reasons for their dislike.

For example, many of the *Harry Potter* fans consider J.K. Rowling's novels to be superior to the *Twilight* series written by Stefanie Meyer, the latter being novels involving a human girl falling in love with a vampire, and which contain fantasy elements of vampires and werewolves. Many of the female *Harry Potter* fans have read the *Twilight* books including myself, as well as watched the films, and find certain aspects of the series very different to the standards which the *Harry Potter* novels have set. The anti-fan is first and foremost a fan, and resorts to anti-fandom so as to protect his/her fan object from the threat its "counterforce" poses. It suggests that in cases of extreme antagonism between two fan objects fans love to hate the "opposing threat" (Theodoropoulou in Gray et al 2007: 325):

> Anti-fans must find cause for their dislike in something. This something may vary from having previously watched the show and having found it intolerable, to having a dislike for its genre, director or stars; to having seen previews or ads, or seen or heard unfavourable reviews (Gray 2003: 71).

There is often a comparison between the fantasy elements of both novels: however, fans of *Harry Potter* feel that the *Twilight* series is limited in its magical elements, thus making *Twilight* incomparable to Rowling's densely imaginative fictional world which the fans have grown up imagining and loving. This is a comment made by Griffin, one of the fans I interviewed:

Griffin: *"Twilight is about 2 central characters who are in love. It is a romance with a human girl and a vampire. Harry Potter is far from a romance. Harry Potter is an adventure story that spans 7 years and concerns good and evil, death, loss, love, friendship, and so many other important topics. There are vampires, witches, wizards, werewolves, dragons, mythical creatures... Twilight has got nothing on Harry Potter."*

There is a certain amount of intertextuality which takes place online between fans in terms of their *Twilight* VS *Harry Potter* rivalry. The fans are extremely knowledgeable of the films and literary texts of both stories and they often incorporate this information through comparisons and relations to imagined role-play situations.

Fan hegemony can be described as an act where fans "take up and reproduce the values of antagonism in their construction and expression of fan identity" (Gray et al 2007: 327). It is a form of intensifying the fans' commitments so that their subculture is able to feel superior to another. This unification often leads to the idea of fan hegemony amongst certain fandoms:

HP fans find entertainment from poking fun at various other fantasy media texts, the most popular being the *Twilight* series, thereby consolidating and strengthening their own fandom.

Figure 44: A compilation of images created by a fan to unite *Harry Potter* fans while contesting *Twilight*

The above image takes into consideration the most important aspects which the male leads of their respective stories have to accomplish (these stories being The *Lord of the Rings, Harry Potter, Star Wars* and *Twilight*). It is crucial to know that the lead of the *Twilight* series, Edward Cullen, played by Robert Pattinson, actually had a role in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* as Cedric Diggory, a character who saved Harry Potter's life and got killed by Lord Voldemort. Pattinson thereafter became famous for his portrayal of the vampire Edward Cullen based on Stefanie Meyer's *Twilight* series, which was made into TV shows. At the height of *Twilight*'s popularity, many *Twilight* fans expressed that they found *Twilight* superior to *Harry Potter*, which many *Harry Potter* fans found utterly absurd. The image of Gandalf the Grey, a character from *The Lord of the Rings*, addressing each respective hero, makes a point of the depth of their purpose in their stories, while Edward Cullen is simply mocked for being a vampire who doesn't burn in the sun, but sparkles. What is also interesting here is that these literary critical judgements by fans appear to reproduce the oppositional logic of high culture/low culture, by which the *Twilight* novels are negatively

measured. The difference between *The Lord of the Rings, Harry Potter* and even *Star Wars*, on the one side, and the *Twilight* novels on the other side, is that between serious 'depth' and surface 'superficiality'. In this manner, *Harry Potter* fans can sharpen the nature of their fandom: it attracts better educated people who enjoy well-written literature that deals intelligently with serious themes, unlike those yobbos who in their ignorance find the *Twilight* novels to be great literature.

Griffin: *"I don't see how Twilight is looked at as 'good' literature, especially for teenagers. Bella isn't a proper role model for young girls. I would rather enjoy reading a book where characters like Harry Potter, Hermione Granger and Ginny Weasley, who go through real hardships like death and loss, and who are brave, loyal and incredibly smart - they make the reader admire and look up to them."*

Shared experiences: Games

Many fans like to share their experiences as well as their opinions about what they enjoy most about *Harry Potter*. Below is a game which many fans have played. By simply posting the picture on one's *Twitter* profile, anybody who sees it can participate. All fans have to do is tweet a number to the user who posted the picture, and the person will answer the related question. With the Harry Potter universe being so diverse and detailed, every fan likes something different and these games give fans the opportunity to share their likes with one another.

Figure 45: Picture game played on *Twitter*

Shared Experiences: Quizzes

Many fans participate in online quizzes on *Twitter*, often asking questions and rewarding the winner with points and sometimes, fan memorabilia. Sometimes, the questions can be merely to compare and contrast similar likes or dislikes.
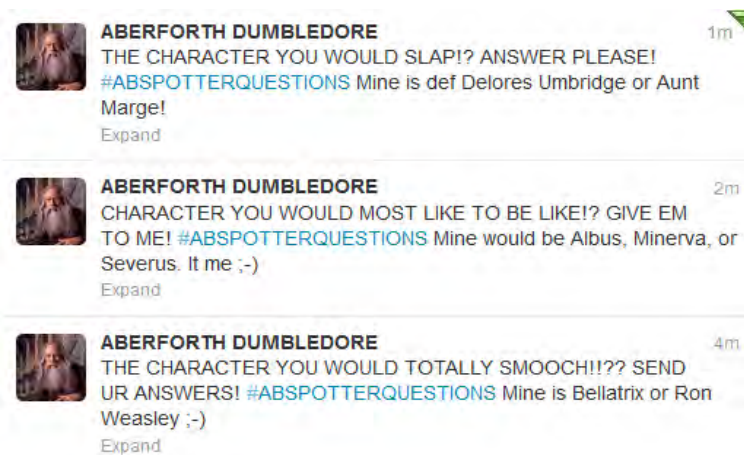

Figure 46: Screen captured image of tweets by Aberforth Dumbledore on *Twitter*

Below is an example of a fan who is asking other users to submit their opinions about which HP ship they like the least. A red cross appears on the ships which have been eliminated until one ship is left.
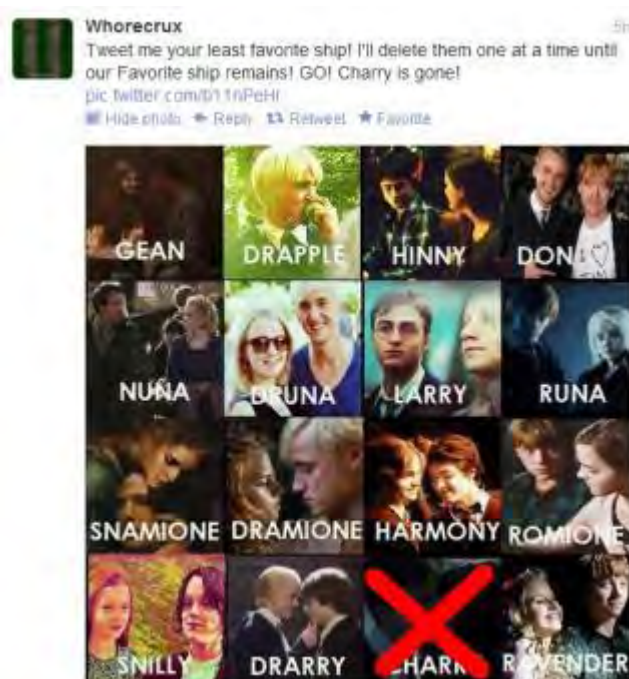

Figure 47: Screen captured image of a fan tweeting a picture related to shipping

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Griffin: *"I think that nearly all the characters that J.K Rowling has created in the Harry Potter story are flawless. I can't blame other Potterheads for shipping certain characters together, because the truth is, they're all compatible!"*

Role modelling: the Emma Watson Complex

Many fans, who grew up reading and watching *Harry Potter*, love the smart and powerful characters and their displays of bravery and chivalry and selflessness. Fans tend to look up to and are interested many of the characters as well as the actors and actresses behind the portrayals. One of the most notable actresses of the series is Emma Watson.

For over 10 years, Emma Watson has played the book-loving, studious witch who had an affinity for the school library and knowing all the answers, helping out her friends and solving magical mysteries along the way. Her character had blossomed into the shrewd, clever witch who got her friends and herself out of life-threatening situations due to her quick-thinking survival instincts. Hermione Granger exemplified the characteristics associated with the boarding-school house which she was sorted into, Gryffindor House, the house of the bold and the brave.

Emma Watson herself is very studious, having passed her final year at school with 12 GCSEs, and also being accepted at Brown University where she is currently studying (2013). Her image, post-Potter, has made her somewhat of a role model and icon, as a beautiful, stylish and quite poised young woman who is very grounded and normal, unlike many other celebrities her age who have found fame and fortune and are often plagued by scandals and negative influences. *Twitter* is one of the places for fans to share their admiration for the actress. Below is a remark of one of Emma Watson's fans, Griffin, whom I interviewed:

Griffin: *"Emma Watson inspired me as a person to go for my acting dreams, I would say. She has great ability and she throws herself in at the deep end and never settles. She always strides for better. I think as a person, she is a great role model for girls because you are told you have to be some delicate girl, and Emma taught us that we can be who we want to be and that 'sexy' is: The less you reveal, the more people wonder. Also, she is grounded – Always has been. The girl has the ability to be articulate and strong yet so down-to-earth and they are two hard concepts to mix, so I have so much respect for her as an actress and person in every way."*

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Dear Miss Watson, I just want to thank you for everything. You have made me work hard at school, I never used to be someone to revise but when I realised how much success your education has brought you, it made me study. I also want to act and you make me continue to try it, I will never give up because a wise 22 year old lady said: 'Believe in yourself and go for it'. I feel like I have grown up watching you do the same, I am so excited for all your new films, you deserve all the success because you are so dedicated to doing a good job. I know that sometimes it might feel strange that so many people look up to you, but its because your a beautiful, strong, successful, articulate, young, talented woman. I feel like all the years went very fast but I am very proud that you have always been my role-model and will continue to be. Love Caitlin x
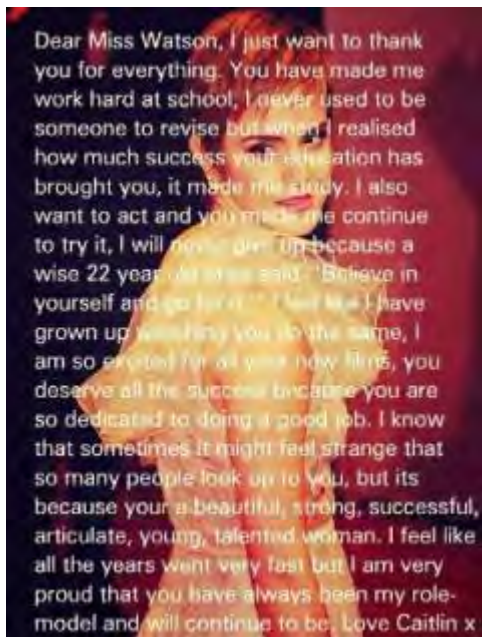
Figure 48: An image created by Griffin that was then tweeted to Emma Watson containing a personal message

The character Hermione Granger, and the actress Emma Watson who portrayed her, have helped give confidence to a great many teenage girls who are now proud of being considered nerdy or book smart amongst their peers at school and who no longer need to feel isolated or awkward, giving them strength to be themselves, despite what is usually dictated to be stylish or the norm amongst teenagers. Young girls are able to feel comfortable in their own skin and less self-conscious about being clever or geeky. Emma Watson has inspired a generation of young women to not be afraid of pursuing their dreams, and taking seriously who they really are underneath instead of resorting to a more superficial approach, proving that brains can be far more potent than beauty. The actress has gone along to act in two films since the end of *Harry Potter*, and has won numerous awards for being an inspiring role model for young women around the world.

Griffin: *"In 20 years, I will be watching the awards with my kids saying: That girl [Emma Watson] has been my role-model my whole life."*

Keeping the Magic Alive

For a lot of people, *Harry Potter* is over. The books have been written and the films have been released and there isn't much to look forward to anymore. However, there is a spirit amongst young fans to keep their love for the series alive, wanting to re-watch the films, reread the books and share their experiences with many other fans online.

Figure 49: Fan art containing one of JK Rowling's quotes.

This image along with the caption is something that many fans of *Harry Potter* hold on to. Taking a lot of the inspiring quotes from the books and films like "I open at the close", "Until the very end" and "We're not saying goodbye, not really", this heading is able to capture all the sentiment of a fan, and along with the picture of Harry, waving goodbye in the final scene of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, not only does it symbolise the ending of a story, but the ability to return to it again and again. One of J.K Rowling's most popular quotes amongst fans has been transformed into fan art: "The stories we love best, live with us forever. So whether you come back by page or by the big screen, Hogwarts will always welcome you home."

There may be no more books or films, but *Harry Potter* seems to have a strong afterlife. King's Cross Railway station in London, which is the spot for Hogwarts Students to catch the train off Platform 9 ¾ in the books and films, now has a plaque that is mounted on the wall

along with a trolley cart half way lodged in the bricks to show the passing through of the platform from the Muggle (non-magical) world into the magical one, thereby confirming how reality and fiction now seem effortlessly to intermingle. Meanwhile in Orlando, Florida, a $200 million theme park and attraction called *The Wizarding World of Harry Potter* opened in 2012. At its opening, fans waited for 9 hours to get into the magical village of Hogsmeade, and were able to quench their thirst with the magical fictional drink which J.K. Rowling created in the books, known as Butterbeer. Butterbeer has become one of the theme park's top-selling items, even though Universal's version is strictly non-alcoholic. It took less than half a year for the company to sell its millionth cupful. The ingredients Universal uses are a secret, and Rowling hasn't forced any guidelines for the drink, mostly because she has none to offer. "I made it up," she once told a curious interviewer. "I imagine it to taste a little bit like less sickly butterscotch." Fans come from all over the world to see a spectacular Hogwarts replica, inside which they can enter an "immersive" experience (*Harry Potter and the Forbidden Journey)* that takes visitors through a dozen scenes from the boy wizard's life, including a close encounter with a Whomping Willow. Elsewhere they can watch a wand choose its master at Ollivander's shop, or listen to Moaning Myrtle as she haunts the girl's lavatory.

The Warner Bros. Studio Tour in London, also known as 'The Making of Harry Potter' is another that opened just before the 2012 Olympics. It is a three-hour tour which brings fans into contact with the sets - including the 40m by 12m Hogwarts Great Hall and Dumbledore's office –and costumes, animatronics, props and effects from all eight movies. The film studios, where the films were created, are in Leavesdon. Below is a picture from one of the *Twitter* fans who was tweeting pictures of the many sets she had seen, and asking for fans to request their favourite sets for her to tweet pictures of.

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Figure 50: Interaction between the researcher and a fan

In 2011, J.K Rowling announced the launch of *Pottermore*. Enthusiastic fans immediately went to the site, only to find a countdown clock indicative of a June 23 launch of... something. After days of frantic guessing, Rowling revealed that she would release her novels' long-awaited e-book versions - considered to be crucial in winning her future generations of Potter fanatics - through *Pottermore.*

Figure 51: The *Pottermore* site

Pottermore opened on July 31 (Harry's birthday, and Rowling's) for the first million fans to find a magical quill in an online treasure hunt. Their feedback shaped the final look of the site before it opened to everyone on October 1. The *Pottermore* shop also opened on that day, with e-books available in five languages. The second novel, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, appeared with its own interactive aspects in 2012, followed, in due order, by *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* and *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* in 2013.

Far more important for fans is the fact that *Pottermore* also functions as an online immersive experience. Rowling has already written almost 20,000 new words about Harry's world for the site. Fans are able to travel through the first book by entering into the 44 interactive "moments" - visiting Gringotts bank to pick up currency for purchases, or exploring a carriage on the Hogwarts Express or approaching the Sorting Hat (he hat asks users a few questions and then assigns them to their school houses – This is by far the best part of the whole experience seeing as millions of fans have always imagined what type of house they would be sorted into, had they attended Hogwarts). What may prove most attractive of all for

a potential new generation of fans is Pottermore's social component - once inside, visitors can see where their friends are in the storyline, and share the secrets they have discovered on the site with each other.

J.K Rowling has released 2 novels since the ending of the *Harry Potter* books. The first was *The Casual Vacancy*, released on 27th September 2012, and the second was *The Cuckoo's Calling*, which was released under the pseudonym Robert Galbreith in 2013, only for Rowling to be revealed as the real author months later. On the 12th of September 2013, the *Twitter* site exploded once more when details were revealed about JK Rowling making her screen writing debut in a spin off film of *Harry Potter*, mainly based on her companion novel to the *Harry Potter* series, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (2001). With all these new accompaniments to the books and films, fans of *Harry Potter* have more to share and more to talk about.

> Harry Potter is now an entire creative universe within which millions of people are writing, reading, drawing, reporting, discussing, analysing, criticising, celebrating, marketing, filming, translating, teaching, theorising, playacting. Although Rowling may be responsible for putting the initial story together, only in the legal sense is she the author of all those creative productions. Other creative players are involved (Hellekson and Busse 2006: 242).

Their persistent attitude to keeping the magic alive is the main reason for the *Harry Potter* fan community being sustained on *Twitter*, two years as I write after the series officially ended with the launch of the final film, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*.

As a fellow fan, Griffin tweets that: *"Harry Potter has brought us together. I was seven when I watched Philosopher's Stone, now I'm eighteen, sitting here, watching the last one. It is our journey too. It's not goodbye, it's only farewell to a childhood which we'll continue to pass on through generations."*

The Vampire Diaries

The Vampire Diaries is a popular American supernatural TV show which began in 2009 and is based on the novels of the same title written by L.J Smith which were first published in 1991. *The Vampire Diaries* is currently (2013) in its 5th season and holds the highest ratings for a series premiere on the CW network with 4.91 million viewers[20] (Ausiello 2009).

The show follows the story of Elena Gilbert, a 17 year old teenager from Mystic Falls, Virginia, who lost her parents in a tragic car accident and is still trying to cope with her grief with her younger brother. Elena meets a mysterious 17 year old named Stefan Salvatore, who she is immediately drawn to. Elena has no way of knowing that Stefan is a 145 year old vampire who is struggling to live peacefully amongst humans. His older brother, Damon, who is the embodiment of vampire violence and brutality and who is behind hideous animal attacks in the town, competes for the attention of Elena and her friends. The title refers to the main protagonists, Elena and Stefan, who write in diaries and journals to account for the events which are happening in their lives, hence the title. The story is narrated from Stefan's perspective and his account of falling in love with Elena.

The fandom has boomed over the last few years, due to the production of the TV show of the same name. L.J Smith had first written 4 books for *The Vampire Diaries* series, but due to the popularity of the show in 2009, she released 3 new books. It was however later discovered by the publishers (Alloy Publishers) that L.J Smith did not own the rights to her own books and thus, in 2011, she was fired from being the author of her novels! Apparently the publishers did not like the direction her novels were taking, and failed to persuade the author to change it. The publishing company thereafter announced that more novels would be released, but would be written by an unknown ghost writer. The novels now have 'Created by L.J. Smith' on their covers. Many fans have different opinions about the authenticity of these new post-Smith novels. The mixed reviews about what the author may have wanted for her story and how things have transpired in the new books as well as the TV show (which picks and chooses what it fancies from the book series, making many of the book fans enraged at its lack of loyalty to the story) is a topic of much debate amongst the various categories of book and TV show fans, and is indeed a theme common to many fandoms:

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[20]http://insidetv.ew.com/2009/09/11/vampire-diaries-ratings-they-dont-suck/

The fans' emotional investment also results in (and is compounded through) an attention to detail and programme continuity which is often at odds with the producers' need to tell new stories over the duration of a TV series. Fans expect adherence to established tenets, characterisations, and narrative 'back-stories', which production teams thus revise at their peril, disrupting the trust which is placed in the continuity of a detailed narrative world by these 'textual conservationist' fans (Hills 2002: 4).

For fans, the TV show brings the novels to life, and since the books have been written over 22 years ago, the TV show has emerged during a time when vampires and the supernatural have seeped (yet again) into popular culture, making what was once frightening to become romantically appealing. The viewers of the show consist of a large age group, ranging from teenagers to people in their late 30's, with females as the majority.

Fan Disagreements: Novels or TV?

It is crucial to know that one of the main reasons why there is so much disparity within the TVD fandom is because of the differences between the TV show adaptation and the novels, complicated by the fact that the majority of TVD fans have not read the novels, and so are only aware of the TV shows. The TV show is only loosely based on the novels. Characters' surnames, their histories and personality traits, and story lines from the novels are drastically altered in the TV show, so many fans of the novels see - and often dismiss - the TV series as an inaccurate portrayal of what L.J. Smith created. Many new characters have also been created in the TV series. The novels and TV shows of TVD are therefore confusedly jumbled up. Notable differences between the books and novels are discussed online in varying degrees of detail[21]; however some of the major differences are mentioned below.

In the Books...	On the TV Show...
Elena Gilbert is blonde.	Elena Gilbert is a brunette.
Elena Gilbert has a little sister named Margaret.	Elena Gilbert has a younger teenage brother named Jeremy.
Elena Gilbert's parents have been deceased for 4 years when the story begins.	Elena Gilbert's parents die before the start of the series.

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[21]http://www.vampires.com/10-differences-between-the-vampire-diaries-books-show/
      Social Network Fandoms & Online Role-Playing: *Harry Potter* and *The Vampire Diaries* Fans on *Twitter*

Elena Gilbert's best friends are Bonnie McCullough and Meredith Sulez. Caroline Forbes is Elena Gilbert's arch nemesis at school.	Elena Gilbert's best friends are Bonnie Bennett and Caroline Forbes. There is no Meredith Sulez in the show.
Elena is deeply in love with Stefan, but soon starts to secretly have feelings for Damon and falls in love with him as well. Damon loves Elena but also has deep feelings for Bonnie McCullough.	Elena falls in love with Stefan and eventually falls in love with Damon as well, breaking up with Stefan to continue her relationship with Damon. Damon loves Elena. No relationship is explored with Bonnie Bennett.
Bonnie McCullough is white, is descended from the Celtic druids and is a psychic.	Bonnie Bennett is African American and is a powerful witch descended from Salem.
Damon and Stefan Salvatore have been vampires for around 500 years.	Damon and Stefan Salvatore have been vampires for 145 years
Damon and Stefan were in love with a vampire named Katherine. Katherine turned the both of them into vampires, then faked her own death when she saw how much the brothers hated one another, in hopes that her death would bring them together.	Damon and Stefan were in love with a vampire named Katherine. Damon and Stefan tried to save Katherine Pierce when she was caught by The Council. They both got killed with vampire blood in their bodies and became vampires. Katherine fakes her own death in order to escape.
Katherine looks similar to Elena Gilbert. There are no doppelgangers in the books.	Elena Gilbert is the exact replica of Katherine Pierce, as they are doppelgangers.
Tyler Smallwood is a ravenous werewolf who works for Klaus and is eventually killed.	Tyler Lockwood is friends with Elena Gilbert and is a werewolf who learns to control his lycanthropy
Klaus is one of the first vampires to exist. No details are given about his full name, date of birth or family. He is powerful and cannot die.	Klaus Mikaelson is a 1000 year old Original vampire and also a hybrid, making him half vampire and half werewolf. He has 2 siblings that are alive, Elijah and Rebekah Mikaelson.
Klaus turned Katherine into a vampire.	Katherine became a vampire after drinking the blood of another vampire named Rose.

(Taken from vampirediaries.wikia.com/)

With the TV show's popularity, it was essential to ask fans in my interviews what they thought of the stories' adaptations from page to TV screen since they were ultimately very different stories with the same title.

DDQ: *"I prefer the show. I think the characters are easier to enjoy, the story isn't as complicated, not as many different sub plots on the show as it is in the books. (The other dimension and the foxes [in the books] are too much for me.) I'm not really into that entire magical fairy-tale world that the books are all about. I enjoy the characters more on the show, because their personalities are more "endearing" than the ones in the books – and this includes the 3 main characters as well."*

ItsABamonProblem: *"If I had read the books, I would prefer it over the show. The show has done a terrible job developing Damon and Bonnie's characters and their relationship, and I believe that the fandom is biased when it comes to Bonnie Bennett's character and would have never been this way with Bonnie McCullough. To be honest, I think the show has a lot of loop holes and that it favour's the popular celebrities so much, that it centres most of the story around them, which is over-shadowing the other more interesting characters or better actors."*

PBK: *"I read the books as a young teenager but didn't think much of them. I don't think they are well-written. However, I would have read a political thriller if it involved vampires. I started watching the show and almost gave up when I heard Matt Davis was playing Alaric Saltzman… and once I saw the dynamic between him and Damon, I was hooked. I prefer the TV series. I think the characters are almost parodies in the books, very one-dimensional, particularly Elena."*

While DDQ expressed a liking for the TV adaptation due to the portrayal and 3 dimensional qualities of the characters being fleshed out and brought to life, PBK took a liking towards a precise onscreen dynamic between 2 of the male characters, Alaric Saltzman and Damon Salvatore. Although the third fan, ItsABamonProblem has found the TV show to be somewhat of a let-down in terms of the relationship development between two characters (these being Bonnie Bennett and Damon Salvatore - which is quite a significant observation that shall be further explored), these fans are drawn more towards particular characters than the actual direction of the show's storyline.

The writers and producers of the show write storylines in favour of the more popular actors, having their characters explored in a variety of ways as compared to many of the steady background characters. Personally, as a viewer of the show and a fan who has read the books, the show does a brilliant job in breathing life into these fictional characters in comparison to the novels where they were extremely 'one dimensional' according to PBK (2013). While the books had very simple, distinct supernatural plots, the TV show has ventured towards intricate, heavily detailed stories that soon turn complicated and many of the background characters have little to no storyline, remaining very close to how they began, 5 seasons on.

There is a large group of fans who have raised their views on the quality of the writing of the TV show, saying that it has progressively weakened as the seasons have passed, with many characters being written out of character or who remain underdeveloped since the first season. There is a large part of the fandom who feels that the treatment of particular characters is poorly done. In the novels, Bonnie McCullough is considered a main character, whilst in the TV series, Bonnie Bennett (surname changed) is a minor witch character who is just a friend of one of the main characters, and is used to help in tricky situations to save her best friends' lives. Neither Bonnie Bennett's character, nor her home life or personal preferences are ever explored on the show. Many fans also find it annoying that scenes in the novels between Bonnie and Damon get given to other characters on the show. Bonnie and Damon in the novels share a romance; however after four seasons of the TV show this is neither hinted at let alone explored.

ItsABamonProblem explained very well to me in an interview how many fans of the series are not able to spot this huge flaw of the show.

ItsABamonProblem: *"When the writers give Bonnie and Damon's source material [novel scenes] to the revival ship [Scenes between Damon and Elena] suddenly that's when the books finally means something to the fandom. But when the Bamon[22] fans demand that our ship gets their source material, all ofa sudden "the show is nothing like the books". TVD should follow the books more closely. Twilight did, and other book adaptations to TV (such as True Blood) did, and the shows had better success, but with that being said, the love triangle on the show should have ended a long time ago because TV watchers get bored with repetitive story lines."*

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[22]Bamon – The ship name for fans who wish to see a romance between the characters, Bonnie and Damon.

ItsABamonProblem is referring to the writing and transference of the story from the novel to the show. Scenes between Bonnie and Damon (Bamon) in the novels were written in the show, but were scenes given to the characters of Damon and Elena instead. This fan is ultimately explaining the unfairness of the situation in terms of how fans view this. While fans of the couple 'Bamon' will look at the show and say that they'd like to see moments from the novels presented on screen between their favourite pairing, fans of the TV show will contest such a suggestion by saying that the TV show is different from the books. The main criticisms thus are regarding the inaccuracy of the story when it is transferred from page to screen and the problem that certain fans have found with the quality of the novels' writing.

While there are many who do not understand the character of Bonnie Bennett on the show (she is hardly explored as a character), there are people who dislike her. There are also people who absolutely love her character from the books as well as the show, and are in full support of having her character shown the justice she deserves by being portrayed just as the other characters.

It is important to know that the actress who portrays Bonnie Bennett, Kat Graham, is the only cast member of colour on the show. The following extract is taken from the site, *TV Trope*s:

> *The Vampire Diaries is known for its portrayal of Black Witches. Witches on the show are predominantly Black, and most Black characters are witches. Witches, the most powerful supernatural characters, are shown to be descendants of slaves, although this is not openly acknowledged or referenced. Although they are incredibly powerful, witches- or Black witches are subservient to the Caucasian characters. What rare insights we are given to the world of witches, we are made to understand that most magic is done selflessly for the benefit of white characters, or to "preserve the balance" of nature. Notably, Emily Bennett worked as Katherine's handmaid. In addition, she used her powers to provide her and other vampires immunity from sunlight. Why she would do this despite obviously not approving of the "vampire lifestyle" is apparently an 'I Owe You My Life' situation that is never expanded on. The subtext isn't really helped by the series being set in the American South.*

> *One of the main characters of the show, Bonnie Bennett, is given very little screen time or character development. Her plot lines are rarely taken out of the context of being a witch. Like the other Black witches, she selflessly aids the Caucasian*

characters in the show. Furthermore, Bonnie is used a vehicle for plot development and white character growth. Bonnie's love interests often use her as a pawn; the love interests are usually villains that first, attempt to get to Bonnie for her magic, and second, and more importantly, their use of magic always involves a Caucasian character (revenge on a vampire, saving Elena, etc.). Bonnie's dynamic reinforces the master-slave dynamic in this way; while Bonnie is powerful, because she is Black and powerful, the purpose of her magic is to serve the white characters." [23]

This racial issue on the show and the lack of interest in her character on the part of the writers make many of the Bonnie fans (both from the novels and TV show) feel that the show has let down its fans in this regard, particularly since the TV show is aired around the world, much of it populated by darker-skinned people.

ItsABamonProblem: *"I enjoyed the show better when I didn't know certain things. Like, I had no idea that Damon loved Bonnie in the books, but now that I know that, I feel that the show is ignoring that storyline because the TV Bonnie is black. I realize that I could be wrong, but this is my assumption so far since I've seen racist blogs and lingo about Bonnie Bennett and because the way the show is being written. Twitter makes the experience worse for me. It's not that I don't enjoy using Twitter, but sometimes it helps to lift my sprits when I'm angry with the direction of the show, but for the most part, Twitter is a negative environment due to the racism I see for Bonnie."*

Many Bonnie fans therefore turn to other sources of fan content like fan fiction, fan art and fan vids to recreate her image and how they feel she should be rightfully portrayed. It is interesting to see how what is perceived to be a racially insensitive portrayal in the TV series is rectified by fans themselves, demonstrating once again how fandom is not simply adoration of aspects of the culture industries, but a highly active appropriation of them in order to enrich the autonomous sphere of the cultures of ordinary people, whose interests are not always those of the elite. This character re-creation of course happens for the other characters as well, and depending on the fans and their particular tastes, their favourite TVD character can often be integrated into different romantic/erotic pairings and even different fandoms. In an important sense, fandom often treats the object of the fandom as pliable 'raw material' (Fiske 1989) to be re-shaped according to fans' (cultural) interests.

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[23]Taken from: http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/MagicalNegro

PBK: "*I love imagining what Alaric (and sometimes other characters) would do, thrust into another TV show – I got on these mad alternate universe rants talking about how it might look. Damon & Alaric on board Battlestar Galactica or trying to fit in as vampire boyfriends hidden in the wilds of 90210.[24]Surviving the apocalypse. Fighting zombies in the Walking Dead.*

"*Alaric's deaths – in episodes 3.20 and 3.22– were a really interesting time, now that I can look back. I have never been so invested in a character before and really, he is one who wasn't thought about much by the fandom. A lot of people have told me that until my obsession with Alaric they hadn't thought about him much at all. But the weekend after 3.20 I was in full-on grief mode. I wrote a lot that weekend and tweeted constantly. Everyone was so supportive. I wrote that story to fill in what we never saw in a certain scene. The first 15K words of a fic I published just before 3.22 happened. Two of my vidder[25] friends made me beautiful Dalaric vids. It was pretty amazing. I felt more connected to the fandom than I had before. It was beautiful. Slashers[26] are a bit marginalized in this fandom – when someone asks me if I ship a straight couple, what do they expect me to say? – but I didn't feel it that weekend*".

True fans of L.J Smith have not read any of the new series written by the ghost writer, since they believe that L.J. Smith wanted to explore Bonnie and Damon (Bamon) while the publishers who fired the author from her books are in support of pursuing the relationship of Damon and Elena (Delena).

Shipping

Shipping plays an important role for many fans of TVD since there is such a wide array of male and female characters, with many romances between these vampire and human characters being explored on the show. Chemistry between characters often is the main reason for fans to ship certain pairings together, as well as characters which fans would presume to get along well with one another or make a good pairing, even if they have never

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[24] 90210, originallymade in 1990, then remade in 2008, is a TV drama about a family that relocates to the posh area code of Beverly Hills, where their children get drawn into the social drama and gossip of the infamous Beverly Hills High School.
[25]Vidders are people who create fan videos.
[26]Slashers are writers of slash fiction.

interacted romantically in the TV series before. One of the most obvious decisions on the show for shipping to arise is due to the fact that the main female character, Elena Gilbert, is indecisive as to which Salvatore brother she wants to be with: does she love the sweet and kind younger brother, Stefan more? Or the mysterious and handsome older brother, Damon? Many shippers root for either *Delena* – Damon and Elena, or *Stelena* – Stefan and Elena, as they are the main pairings that the story is focused on. With every single character on *The Vampire Diaries* being attractive, shipping within the fandom in fan fiction, fan art and fan videos, is widespread and quite fanatical in the sense that many viewers who often root for a certain pairing have been found to tweet the executive producers of the show on *Twitter*, commenting on the show or questioning why their own ships are not being shown on the TV series.

PBK*: "It had been years since I had written slash fiction but watching the chemistry between Damon and Alaric grow was what kept me coming back – along with my growing obsession with Alaric. To me, this show has always been "Alaric Saltzman and the Vampires of Mystic Falls" – one of the reasons I really don't know if I can watch this season without him.*

However a minority dissident voice is also heard regarding shipping:

DDQ: *"I think shipping is good. It shows the creators of a show that you enjoy what they've made and what they're doing. But I don't necessarily think that shipping is of importance to a show's longevity. I watch a lot of shows where I don't ship at all, and for the most part, I tend to enjoy those shows a lot more than the shows where I ship someone or other."*

Despite the conflict about the author and her books, there are fans that support the show since they haven't read the books, while there are book fans who find criticisms with the show and the newer books which have been published. The producers of the show have also displayed subjectivity when it comes to certain characters which fans are able to spot through reading the many interviews and panels at conventions, where the producers and cast get asked questions by fans and attendants. The current producer has displayed favouritism for certain characters, which makes many fans displeased, since their favourite characters are often left out. This creates a very diverse and somewhat chaotic place for fans on *Twitter* as hard-core shippers often clash heads and arguments often break out amongst fans who bash other ships. The majority of 'hate' has been a result of shipping and disagreements between fans and their likes and dislikes. What is also interesting here is that fan activism includes trying to

influence the direction of the TV show – that is, fans confident sense of themselves as co-authors goes so far as writing their own preferred TV show content, and by so doing fans reveal clearly their *autonomy* from the culture industries. They are not there simply to praise.

DDQ: *"I have [experienced hate] many times. And it usually goes as far as name calling and complete bashing of the character of the person behind the Twitter account.*

I don't mind character bashing in general. Characters are there to hate and love; it's what they're made for. Just never make it personal. That's when shipping goes too far.

I do character bashing all the time and I let my friends bash as much as they want. I might ask why if I don't get why they hate on a character, but I will always try to leave it at that, it's never necessary to start an argument over the love and/or hate of a character. I've been told by several people that they don't mind having a different opinion from mine because I always let them have their opinion and we can discuss our love/hate without it turning ugly. But that's what we have shows for as well. To love and hate. To discuss. To meet new people. To find friends.

I have friends in many different ships and fandoms. I will never stop talking to someone because of their preference. BUT, I've had those I thought were my friends unfollow/unsub/stop talking to me/hate on me because I don't think the way they do, or because I don't like what they like. I'd say it's immaturity, and since maturity doesn't seem to come with age and experience, I guess that's correct."

What fans see on the show and most importantly, what they *don't* see, is the reason for what gives rise to fan content:

PBK: *A lot of people who call themselves fans are very passive. Even in online fandom, the people who watch a show each week and then tweet abuse at the creators (the behaviour towards Julie Plec disgusts me in particular) and start ship wars… really, they are the passive fans. My friends are active fans. They run websites and write fan fiction and make videos and role play. If someone ships Delena and an episode is full of Stelena scenes, these people shrug, and go make a gifset or write a story, or roleplay Delena on twitter. They don't fight, they create.*

I also think that fans get to tell stories the writers can't. They get 22 weeks a season, 40 mins a week to tell a particular aspect of a story…

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As an example, in July, I published a monster-sized fic (fictional story) – 66,000 words – detailing Isobel's life from the time she was a child visiting Mystic Falls to the moment she died in the cemetery (and an evil epilogue on the Other Side). It was called "[Head is a jungle, heart is an empty room](.)." I drew a lot from the fandom's knowledge, talking out serious plot holes and stuff and despite the fact that Isobel is an obsession that very few people share with me, everyone was supportive, and ultimately interested.

It got me started thinking though about how the creators of a TV show really do gloss over so much, don't think twice about retconning[27] something or using minor characters to patch holes in their plots, and participatory fans really get our hands dirty, really get in deep and lovingly repair it all. It's play – no different in meaning to the games we favoured as children, making plastic dolls fall in love and create them worlds where terrible things happen but someone keeps them safe.

Plus, not enough slash on TV. Plenty on my hard drive. [wink]

I also like the chance to make a statement. I wrote a chapter of my long, ongoing story [The next hundred years or so](.) called [Compelling arguments for equality](.). Basically, Damon and Alaric (who have at this point been together 9 years; Alaric has been a vampire for 8) go on a months-long road trip to compel select politicians to change their stance on marriage equality, turning the tide nationally. Afterwards, they get informally married (because legal or not, Damon has no social security number). Doing this without breaking character was bloody hard, which made it a good writing exercise, but also, a way to make a lot of my arguments without actually having to spell them out. Amusingly, it was [featured](.) on an equality and diversity blog the week it came out.

I also wrote an interesting story where Alaric had post-traumatic stress disorder. A way of combining a bit of my professional knowledge and hopefully teaching someone something about living with a person who is experiencing mental illness.

PBK's comments are very important here as they describe a particular attitude which fans adopt and how, through their own motivation and creativity, are able to create content that caters to what certain fans find more favourable (in PBK's case, this is slash (homoerotic)

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[27]A situation where a new storyline explains or changes a previous event, making it more interesting or significant is referred to as retconning.

fiction between Alaric and Damon, as well as her love for a certain character, Isobel Flemming, that wasn't on the show for a very long time). PBK has fashioned many of her fictitious stories based on these existing characters, from scratch. She has written and created detailed backgrounds, scenarios and experiences which she imagined these characters go through, taking what small amount of information that has been provided from the TVD books and the show, to construct diverse worlds into which she then writes her characters. As she expressed, an active fan is one who participates in aspects of fandom, rather than only criticising the content, and PBK is most certainly among those who have taken the time and effort to create something original out of the 'raw material' of TV for fans to enjoy at no cost whatsoever. By bringing her own interests – gay marriage, post-traumatic stress disorder - into her TVD-based stories, PBK demonstrates clearly Fiske's argument (1989a) that the world of the audience is one where the products of the culture industries are re-signified by ordinary people to make them culturally meaningful for the audience. The central question is no longer: what does TV do to audiences, but what audiences do with TV. It is their autonomous agency that is revealed above all in fan creativity.

Live Tweeting

It's a Friday morning. The first thing I avoid at all costs on a Friday morning is going on *Twitter*, mainly because a new episode of *The Vampire Diaries* (TVD) has aired less than 4 hours ago and there will undoubtedly be spoilers online. Spoilers from an episode which I haven't watched yet.

USA time for the show is on a Thursday night at 8pm. That's 3am on a Friday morning in Durban. I get to campus at 7am. That's 4 hours after the episode has aired. You would think that since I'm on the site 4 hours later, there wouldn't be much talk about the episode I have yet to watch, right?

Wrong.

There will still be people in the US talking about what they saw, since its 12am, US time. There will be people who will be watching the recorded episode after it has been aired. There will be people who have downloaded the episode online and are tweeting about it while they are watching. Basically, I will see tweets about the episode which I haven't watched yet, all

over my Timeline. It is quite unavoidable – which is highly inconvenient because *Twitter* is the first site I have to go on in the morning after I check my email (I think I might be addicted).

Live-tweeting can be explained in the simplest terms as commentary. These people tweet what they see as well as their own opinions about what they're watching in real time. For a lot of fans who are not American and cannot watch the show at that moment, 'Live-tweeting' can be both an advantage as well as a disadvantage, depending on the person. It takes a lot of practice to avoid reading certain tweets on a timeline, especially when you accidentally read a spoiler.

What are spoilers, you may be asking? And why, dear reader would you be questioning my inherent fear of reading them? Perhaps I can explain.

Spoilers are vital bits of information that give away plot or character details. Many people like reading spoilers. For me, spoilers are not something I particularly enjoy. I like to watch an episode and be completely surprised by any of the plot twists which the writers have formulated into the story. I like not knowing which character has died or what happens in a particular scene. For me, the suspense is what I look forward to.

Due to a lot of the teaser episode summaries and promo videos which give away exciting clips of what's going to happen in a new episode, many people who haven't had a chance to watch the episode yet, enjoy reading spoilers because they're quite anxious to know what happens. I, on the other hand, have to watch the episode as soon as possible. If that's not happening - I avoid the spoilers. So I avoid actually studying and reading my timeline on *Twitter*. (It can be hard).

A friend online who goes by the name of DDQ, shares a different approach:

"*I don't mind live tweeting. It's up to everyone to either tweet or hide. But I do appreciate being told in advance if someone's live tweeting. [In terms of spoilers] I just don't read them – On Twitter in general, I guess I just skip the tweets… [If I live tweet] I warn ahead of time so people have a chance to mute me or stay off the Time line (TL). I don't think I give away too much info, but at the heat of the moment, I might forget….*" [In terms of liking spoilers]

"I did. These days I tend to only get disappointed, so I stay away from them or chances are, I won't watch the episodes. (This is only regarding TVD and TO)[28]."

With the show being plot driven with many twists and drama, *Twitter* becomes a source of information and speculation for fans to generate a buzz before the episode is aired.

Personally, I tried to not pay attention to these spoilers as I would decide to watch the episode online when it was available, a few hours after it was aired in the U.S. To me, the spoilers would spoil (!) my own experience of watching the episode and knowing what had happened before I could see it for myself. There are people online who enjoy reading the spoilers because they may not be able to watch the episode anytime soon due to the unavailability of the episode in their country or if they do not have sufficiently powerful internet connection on a PC to watch. A lot of South African TVD fans who watched the show on the DSTV channel Vuzu, would not know a lot of the spoilers if they did not keep up, since the U.S was ahead by a number of episodes and DSTV bought the rights for the show and aired the episodes later.

Figure 52: *Twitter* profile of one of the leading *The Vampire Diaries* actors

Ian Somerhalder, an actor from *The Vampire Diaries*, chose to Live tweet as well during the airing of the 11th episode of the show's 4th Season (notice the enormous amount of 'followers' he has on *Twitter*). Many fans across the world found this exciting since Somerhalder plays one of the leading roles in the show and his commentary would be widely appreciated and

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[28]TVD – The Vampire Diaries. TO – The Originals - The official spin off show of TVD, which was announced near the end of the fourth season of TVD in May 2013 and will start in October 2013, along with the fifth season of TVD.

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quite exciting for those who were going to watch the show live as well as read his commentary. Somerhalder is not the first actor of the show to do this. Katerina Graham, another actress from the show also decided to do a Live Tweeting of an episode before Somerhalder:

Figure 53: *Twitter p*rofile of another *The Vampire Diaries* actress

Despite this large fan interest in the show's actors, it is widely known that *The Vampire Diaries* show hasn't been gaining the viewership numbers that they need to compete with other newer and more popular shows in the U.S.A, and many fans see this idea of Live Tweeting by actors from the show as a way to encourage American viewers to watch the show live rather than recording the show on decoder, thus improving the audience statistics.

Since it is occurring in real time, I found that *The Vampire Diaries* viewing experience is somewhat heightened as every week a new synopsis is released for the upcoming episode as well as stills and interviews with the actors that ultimately creates a generated conversation amongst fans online as to what will happen next. Fans analyse what has already happened as well as speculate about what is to come, based on what they see and hear from the 'spoilers' that are released. This can be seen online by fans and role-players alike as they discuss their opinions about the show as it happens.

Fans of *The Vampire Diaries* are amongst the most active audiences I have ever seen online. Every aspect of the show is scrutinised in minute detail. Fans often discuss scenes and dialogue and plot twists in relation to characters as well as the direction the show takes after they watch the episode. I myself often do this when I see people tweeting aspects of the

show. Many fans that are open minded and have read the books and watch the show tend to discuss the positives and negatives that they witness, whilst there are many fans that also tweet their opinions to the producers and writers of the show who have *Twitter* accounts. Some fans who may have watched the latest episode and didn't like a certain scene between two characters, or didn't see something that they expected to see, will often tell the producers this by tweeting them, whilst there are a few who will actually send insults and hate to the creators of the show, simply because they did not like something that had happened. These people usually get feedback from the producers and also other fans that read their comments. Other readers will ignore them, block them or comment and start arguments online. A lot of people who see hate directed to the producers and writers often feel that it is far too much and that the people who send hate do not appreciate the show and that it has only been made into a show thanks to the writers and executive producers.

Other fans tweet the producers and actors when they have enjoyed certain scenes and performances, while a growing group of people who watch TVD feel that the show is not well rounded enough and that there are many flaws present that require preening and fixing, as the seasons and story lines progress. These people often point out the flaws to their friends and other fans and can often be humorous and sarcastic about aspects of the show. These fans have watched and scrutinised the show so much that they have often tweeted mistakes picked up in dialogues and sent this information to the writers, who thus read and reply, saying that they didn't pick up on it at first and will make sure that it doesn't happen in future on the show.

The Vampire Diaries fandom is a very diverse and opinionated one, due to the amount of characters present on the show and the internal conflicts each character faces; every fan has an opinion of who, what, why, when and where about the show. Every fan has likes and dislikes. Every fan reacts differently to criticism. And this all takes place on *Twitter*, freely and openly, where haters will often clash heads, people who like the same kinds of things will flock together, and many people will just watch and comment.

Twitter has as we have seen unprecedentedly enabled fans to give instant feedback on media shows to the TV companies, to the extent that we must now re-conceptualize a TV show as being not only a one-way act of communication between the television corporation and its audience, but instead as a two-way communication 'loop' between producers and the

audience, where that which lies between producer and consumer – the TV text – is in an important sense written by both producers and the audience. This is not only because various audiences *interpret* TV shows in a bewildering variety of ways - depending on a host of factors, such as class, gender, racial or national location, and religious, ideological and cultural specificities (Morley, 1980; Ang, 1985) - but because the very (semiotic) content of the TV text is itself written as a result of *a negotiation* between producers and audiences, with each responding to the interests of the other.

After all, television (and especially commercial television, although public television is not immune) relies upon audience numbers which it can sell to advertisers, and is thus dependent upon audience satisfaction. The rather bleakly pessimistic view of the mass media as an omnipotent machine imposing ideological meanings upon the passive masses fails to take into account not only the autonomous cultural (and ideological) world of the audience, which interprets and (ab-) uses the media in its own (different cultural and ideological) interests, but also how the media typically works *hegemonically*, which is to say by entering into a dialogue with and incorporating (some of) the values and interests of its audiences. This is also to say that audiences have a certain amount of *power*, which the totalitarian media model entirely ignores, because TV corporations rely upon audiences *choosing* to watch their programmes rather than a great many other ones (or audiences even migrating to other media platforms, such as the cinema or the Internet).

This audience power has been immeasurably increased with the Internet and social networking sites such as *Twitter*, because, as has been pointed out innumerable times, the Web enables ordinary people to become interactive media producers. Thanks to the Internet, the TVD audience can now respond to a TV show in the public sphere open potentially to any watcher (or of course producer) of the TV programme – and do so immediately. The contemporary mediasphere therefore contains *both* the TV show *and* the audience commentary (and of course the many fan virtual communities), which enables TV producers to take into account audience interests at a level unimaginable before the Internet, to the extent, as we have argued, of the TV text being traced through with meanings that certainly do not only derive from the commercial producers, but speak rather of an interactive dialogue between producer and audience.

The Vampire Diaries Role Playing Community – The Re-Fashioning of Identities Online

This return to the theme of role-playing will examine the far more complicated dramatic interacting role playing between role players. Our identity in real life is heavily dependent on physical attributes and displayed personality traits when individuals interact on a regular basis. It is an aspect which we are not able to hide or change as it is presented and exposed for people to see. Nevertheless, multiple aspects of one's identity can be displayed online, depending on what aspect users are willing to show of themselves. Cyberspace offers a niche for each of these specific facets of selfhood (Suler 2002). The Internet facilitates the output and input of emotional messages, "thus developing and reinforcing important social ties between users, forming a system of relationships similar to ties of family and friendship, all taking place without participants being physically present" (Sade-Beck 2004: 3). The Internet may be said to help in preserving personal and intimate ties in cases where face-to-face contact is impossible due to physical distance between users, or because users for various reasons are more-or-less house-bound.

Online interaction through the Internet exists mostly as a written medium, operating within a communications framework that takes place either in 'real time' or as delayed interaction; in either form, however, the Internet *transforms the act of writing into 'speech.'* (Sade-Beck 2004: 3). While the net does have distinct properties as a medium, the creation of fictitious personas and the playing out of different roles in diverse contexts are not limited to online communication, nor do they characterize all of the interactions which occur on the Internet.

During the early part of my research, I found a large group of online role players to whom I could not necessarily speak to on ordinary terms. Role players are in a community of their own and this secret society was something I couldn't enter as a normal *Twitter* user or fan unless I also chose to role play one of the characters of the TVD universe. I wanted to see exactly what role players got up to with each other in their own little clubs on *Twitter*. For all I thought, they used role play as an excuse to have cybersex with one another and really didn't want much from the experience other than to hook up with really good looking characters which they had massive crushes on.

My decision to role play was made upon seeing other users role playing on my Timeline, and noticing how they recreated storylines and explored parts of their character that were not given exposure on the TV show. As a fan, I felt I would be able to role play on a relatively ordinary level, but the concept seemed fun and I chose to start off slowly, just to see what role play on *Twitter* entailed, and whether I would be good at it. Role players that I have spoken to over this period subsequently revealed other motivations for why they began to role play.

VampFairy23: *"Role-players choose to role-play either characters or the idea of the series because they love it. It is also a good way to escape from your normal identity. It's a way to have fun."*

DDQ: *"I met a guy who role played on my personal account, and he "lured" me into the world of role playing… ☺ I didn't want to start a role play account at first, but after we were Role playing in DM's[29] I thought it best cause we started blending TVD role play with real life … So I created an account with an Original Character (OC[30]) to his TVD character."*

PBK: *"A lot of my friend's role play. I wanted to try it out and had had interesting conversations with people about various psychological aspects of RP – the very thin line between IC and OOC[31], obsession, attraction, etc. Thought I'd give it a go and got addicted quite quickly."*

In terms of *The Vampire Diaries*, it was important to find out what role players and fans alike found captivating about the series:

DDQ: *"First off, it was the supernatural aspect mixed with the human. Vampires falling in love with a human. It's a tried and tested concept and it works. Second, I am a sucker for romantic teen dramas, can't help it. They work on me every time, whether it's TVD, One Tree Hill or Dawson's Creek. I love unrequited love, like the one we see in Damon and Elena. (And now, sort of, Klaus and Caroline.) It's, to me, what keeps the show going."*

There were certain role players who I followed for a very long time, often reading their content and questioning their portrayal of the character. Once I chose to role play, I had to

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[29] A DM is a Direct Message, or an Inbox message, to put into simpler terms.
[30] An OC – Original Character is a character that a person creates themselves and has them immersed into a specific fandom.
[31] IC – In Character. OOC – Out of Character.

make the decision of choosing a character. For months, I would read other role players content and see what they did, writing scenes and conversations my character would have and then posting these stories online. I would try to start conversations with other role players and have role playing which was temporary and didn't last very long, as I tested my skills at writing and portraying the character as accurately as I imagined to be, in order to see the response I got from others and whether they liked role playing with me (they replied to my tweets, so that was a good start). The process got easier and easier as I felt more comfortable with expressing my thoughts more freely online – through the voice of my character. One of the most important things I felt was that I portrayed my character as accurately as possible, seeing as a lot of the role-players who portrayed the same character as mine tended to represent Bonnie as overtly sexual or outspoken.

On the other hand, there is a community of users who choose to create new content based on existing information from the TVD fandom. Role players are able to bring the characters to life just as much as they are brought to life by the TV show. Role players have the abilities to portray a character is whatever light they choose and can really push a character to their limits, having aspects about them that are rarely explored to suddenly come to the forefront in different scenarios that wouldn't otherwise be tried out on the show. Role players derive some sense of gratification during the process, feeling much closer to the character thereafter. Jenkins explains that role-playing and fan fiction writing "are valuable because they allow kids to understand the books from the inside out; such activities involve a negotiation between self-expressions and shared cultural materials, between introspection and collaborative fantasy building" (2006: 215).

In terms of the quantity of role players from the TVD fandom who are on *Twitter*, there is no certain amount that can be specified as there isn't a way to count the many accounts. However, it is estimated that there are around 9000 TVD role playing accounts (in 2013).There is a certain level of creativity that is required for literary role playing that takes place on *Twitter*. The quality of these role play accounts varies from very good to poorly executed role play, depending on language, style, originality and delivery of content on the site. These accounts range from consistent usage on a daily basis to rarely being used.

Time zones

Time zones played an important role in my observations, as well as in my leisure time when interacting on the site with other users. At first, I would only go on to the account for a few minutes every day, just to check up what was happening at the time. Then it turned to an hour. Then a couple of hours. I started to really pay attention. I would notice certain people tweeting at around a certain time of the day, while others would only appear later on at night due to their respective time zones.

I then started staying up late to read and role play with other users until I saw a pattern amongst role players, making sense of their time zones and paying careful attention to conversations which I saw on my Time Line that were OOC.[32] Certain people gave away their locations freely, whilst others rarely shared any personal or private information concerning the people behind the accounts. This aspect of the person behind the account, took a very long time for me to figure out. Chatting to a role player and getting to know one personally takes a lot of time and investment.

I had been role playing for over a year and I only knew one person very well with whom I chatted every day, while I never really shared personal information about myself with anybody else apart from this one person. This attribute however depends on the role player. I am a very friendly person, but online, I tend to stay strictly In Character. The most important aspect to take away from the users and their time zones is that *Twitter* is a domain that is constantly awake. It's like the saying that goes for the city of New York - it never sleeps. Whether you're up at 2am or 8pm, the site is always buzzing with role players tweeting something or the other.

Choosing a character

People choose certain characters for a variety of reasons. I had discovered that a lot of females were role playing behind male accounts, something that was a little surprising at first, but completely made sense when we realize that the majority of *The Vampire Diaries* fandom consists of females, many of which are teenagers and young adults.

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[32]Out of Character – Refers to content that is written out of the characters context.

Social Network Fandoms & Online Role-Playing: *Harry Potter* and *The Vampire Diaries* Fans on *Twitter*

Many role players often start role playing characters that they personally have a strong interest in, because in order to role play a certain character, one needs to have a deep understanding of him or her - their personality and how they would react with other characters in certain situations. This is a necessary part of role playing because as the writer behind the character's face on *Twitter*, the role-player controls the portrayal of the character to their followers.

Below is a list of the main characters of the TV show, all of whom are role played by fans

Face Claim	Character's Name	Species	Age	Description
	Elena Gilbert	Vampire since 2012 – Turned at the age of 18.	19	Main protagonist – Caring & kind, Elena falls in love with Stefan, & eventually his brother Damon Salvatore, creating a love triangle.
	Stefan Salvatore	Vampire since 1864 - Turned at the age of 17.	162	A good-hearted and affectionate vampire, and the complete opposite of his older brother, Damon Salvatore. Is in love with Elena Gilbert.
	Damon Salvatore	Vampire since 1864 – Turned at the age of 24.	169	The malevolent older vampire brother who, in the beginning, serves as the show's anti-hero; however, he shows a kinder, more caring side as the series progresses.
	Jeremy Gilbert	Human	17	Elena's younger brother, later revealed to be her biological cousin and a member of The Five, a vampire hunter. Dies in season 4 but is resurrected by Bonnie Bennett.
	Bonnie Bennett	Witch since the age of 17. Dies and is currently a ghost.	19	Elena's best friend, who is also a very powerful witch. Moral and loyal to her friends, Bonnie dies after resurrecting Jeremy Gilbert in the season 4 finale.

	Caroline Forbes	Vampire since 2011 – Turned at the age of 17.	19	Elena's other best friend, an insecure, jealous teenager at the start; She turns into a bubblier, mature person after becoming a vampire in the second season.
	Tyler Lockwood	Werewolf since 2011. Becomes a Hybrid since 2012 – Turned at the age of 18.	19	Started off as a Jeremy's rival, Matt's best friend and son of the mayor of Mystic Falls.
	Matt Donovan	Human	19	Elena's childhood friend and ex-boyfriend, who later becomes romantically involved with Caroline.
	Katherine Pierce (Doppelganger)	Vampire since 1500 – Age of turning unknown. Turned Human in 2013 after consuming The Cure.	500+	Elena's doppelganger, also known as KaterinaPetrova, who was originally introduced as the main antagonist.
	Klaus Mikaelson	Original Hybrid - Age of turning unknown.	1000+	One of the first vampires ever created from the Mikaelson family. Was the product of an affair his mother had with a werewolf, making Klaus the first ever Hybrid.
	Elijah Mikaelson	Original Vampire - Age of turning unknown.	1000+	The eldest living brother of the Mikaelson family and one of the first vampires ever created.
	Rebekah Mikaelson	Original Vampire - Age of turning unknown.	1000+	The only daughter of the Mikaelson family and one of the first vampires ever created.

For my own role play account, I chose, as I pointed out earlier, the 19 year old African-American female character, Bonnie Bennett, who is a powerful witch on the TV show. (In the novels, there is a 17 year old girl with psychic abilities who goes by the name of Bonnie McCullough – she is of white Irish decent). As a book and TV show fan of TVD, I like both portrayals of Bonnie. However, I chose to role play the TV Bonnie because I found her character to be underdeveloped and untapped despite how interesting she was. There are

many characters on the show, thus making it a little harder for all facets of each one to be shown. Another reason why I chose Bonnie's character was due to my liking for witches – and Bonnie is the central witch character on the show. She is also a character with a vast amount of potential unrealized on the TV show. There were also certain characteristics about her that I could relate to personally, like her ability to be a good friend and having a strong moral centre, standing up to protect whoever she can. She is also a character I would describe as an underdog. I decided that through role playing Bonnie Bennett, I could explore parts of her character that are not shown on the TV show and express this through role play, showing other role players how much potential could be bought out from her character, if she was given the time to be explored.

Another role player explains her reasoning for selecting the character she role plays from TVD based on her liking of a certain character:

DDQ*: "My then favourite character, Damon Salvatore – vampire – was already taken by my best friend in role play, and I wanted to be able to role play with her, so I chose Klaus, because I liked him too and there was so much to learn about him. And because we didn't know much about him it was easy to role play him AU[33] to start with. And yes, I say 'Then Favourite Character' about Damon – because since role playing Klaus, I've come to love him even more than I love Damon. But that has also to do with the fact that I think Damon's character has been ruined on the show."*

This is a constant theme amongst those that I interviewed – that fictional characters are often role-played because either their media representation is under-nourished, or because the fan disagrees with that media representation of a character. By developing or altering fictional characters, fans give them new lives within the autonomous space of the online fandom, and thus become *co-authors*, not unlike the makers of the TV show who, as we have seen, creatively interpret the novels by altering characters and plots.

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[33]AU – Alternate Universe

Social Network Fandoms & Online Role-Playing: *Harry Potter* and *The Vampire Diaries* Fans on *Twitter*

How to role play fictional characters

There are no specific rules to describe how one portrays one's chosen fictional character. Role-players are left with a variety of options and they can portray any aspect of the characters they fancy. This being said, many role players are quite outspoken about what they see online. If they do not like the way a certain role player behaves on the site, they will comment, criticize, and if they are offended by what they see, will sometimes block or report the person. A role-player therefore picks up through experience what is considered acceptable behaviour. However, people are advised to not role play or share sensitive content with minors or have clear intent to deceive or confuse other users. There are many unwritten rules about role playing that one picks up through trial and error and some of these main aspects will be further explored.

A role play session lasts between half an hour to a couple hours, depending on a role player's availability online. This also depends on how far the role players wish to expand their role play with one another and what stories they wish to elaborate on. Role play can be a simple conversation between characters about a certain issue – which is usually between 30 minutes to an hour, since it is happening in real time and there is a back and forth stream of replies. Or a fully blown story line that unfolds over a long period of time can be role played. Story lines can last months, as role players come online and write replies to one another, even if the person who they are role playing with is not online at the time. The role player simply picks up the story as they come online since their replies can be seen on one another's profiles. Story lines are often thought out and discussed before they are role played, as the role players usually liaise with one another beforehand, conversing in Direct Messages in order to get a clear idea of what they'd like to role play. Role playing with others heavily depends on their presence online – if the person is not online, or if they are busy and take long to respond to a message, this affects how long a role play session can be. Therefore, it is safe to say that a role play session lasts as long as the role player is available online.

'In Character' Role Playing (IC)

'In character' refers to the role-player interacting in a way that their fictional character would usually behave. As a role player, it is quite hard to maintain an 'in character' identity; since the original character is obviously not you as an individual, no role-player can ever be

entirely authentic. You can only draw aspects from the character and add your own twist on it. There is, however, an emphasis on role-players to stay in character in order to make them far more interesting than others. Many role-players express their projection of the character online through the use of a "solo". A solo is a term used to describe a monologue of sorts written from the character's perspective about anything that the role player wishes to write about, which can, for example, have nothing to do with the TV series, such as an imagined event completely different to the series.

'Out of Character' Role Playing (OOC)

Many accounts make a clear distinction when they're tweeting IC or OOC ('Out of Character') by indicating through certain symbols and the general tone of the tweet. When a person tweets about their real life (RL) and what they are doing, whether it is providing an opinion, or talking about what film they have watched or any other topics that do not concern their online character, they are speaking out of character. In the figure below, we can see how a role player announces he is no longer writing/speaking in character by the use of '#OOOC'.
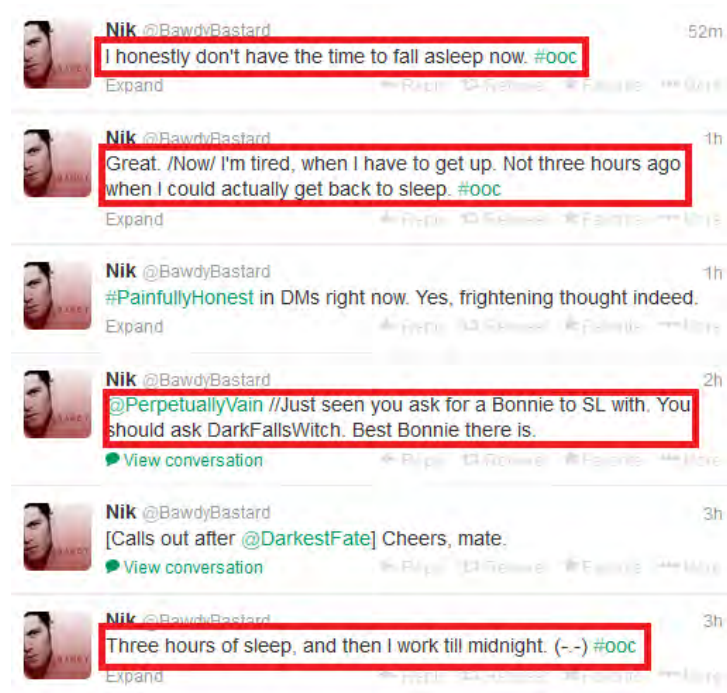

Figure 54: A role player's tweets referring to being out of character

DDQ: *"I either write #OOC before or after a tweet or use // to indicate that I'm saying something outside of the SL[34]. This is mostly to show the person that I'm not talking in character because I might have to leave the SL or I have a question about where the SL is going etc."*

PBK: *"I use '//' if absolutely necessary, whether on the timeline or in DMs. But only when necessary. Mostly, I figure if I have something OOC to say, my personal account is the place to do it – not my role playing account.*

Below is an example of PBK on her role playing account on *Twitter*. When role playing, she speaks as the voice of her character Damon. Having just explained how role players make an out of character distinction when speaking about their real lives, the following example of being OOC is quite curious. PBK makes the out of character distinction (//), but isn't talking to another user. She instead talks to her character in her own voice. Essentially, she is talking to herself, but the conversation flows with individual tweets as though she is talking to her character, as though he is real and present on the site. What this interestingly draws our attention to is Turkle's (1995) identification of how the Internet makes possible the pperformance of multiple identities online. Here a fan actually makes visible both her off-line identity and her separate on-line identity (which do not appear to be getting on that well).

> *//Damon, this is your PM[35].*
>
> *Fuck off, bitch.*
>
> *//I will turn you into a rabbit and feed you to your brother if you don't come to bed right now.*
>
> *FINE. Evil bitch PM says it's bedtime, it's bedtime. #offline*

Many role-players of course draw inspiration from TVD itself, recreating scenes from a TV show with other role-playing characters on *Twitter*. There are however also other sources a role player is able to get inspiration from:

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[34] SL – Story line.
[35] PM stands for Private Messenger and refers to the human behind the character.
   Social Network Fandoms & Online Role-Playing: *Harry Potter* and *The Vampire Diaries* Fans on *Twitter*

DDQ: *"I draw inspiration from the TV show I RP from, TVD. But also from fan fiction and a lot of it is my personal opinion about what I think that person would think or feel from what I've seen or heard on said show."*

PBK: *"Honestly… [I draw inspiration] mostly from my own fan fiction. Isn't that terrible… Oh well."*

A role player may change the sexual orientation of his or her character. One may change the way one's character looks through using a different face claim (FC)[36] of any person of one's choosing. The majority of role players use the actor or actress' face that portrays their character on the show as their avatar.

You may choose to portray your character as an antagonist or a hero, and since it is a supernatural series, vampire characters have the ability to choose whether they want their character to be utterly vampiric or with 'their humanity switch turned on' – a phrase used to describe a vampire who chooses to feel emotions like fear, loss, love and sadness. Vampires within the series are also very old, so role players can choose to role play their characters when they were human before they became vampires, or any certain time period that they fancy, up until the present and even the future. Many of the characters on the show have been shown in flashbacks to the late 1800s, 1920s and so on. A certain group of characters are around 1000 years old, thus offering the role player the chance to explore any particular time frame that they wish.

For many, one of the most important aspects of role playing certain characters is to utilise their personality traits as much as one can, trying to explore the characters and get a feel of what they are really like, in order to make accurate predictions of how they may react in different situations. This is referred to as Staying In Character.

DDQ: *"I try to stay as much in character as I can. My role playing varies from [the character of] Klaus in certain ways and I've chosen to see him as someone who is capable of love and emotions, and made him more likeable than what he is on screen, I guess. I have decided to see past his exterior and look to see –why– he's acting the way he does [on the show and to] give him depth.*

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[36] A face claim refers to the physical description of a character. They can look like anyone, whether an actor or an animated character.

As a TVD RPer, I found that staying as accurate as possible to my character got praise from other well-known and more popular role players as well as though you remain dedicated to their characters. There are different kinds of RPers. RPers who are faithful to their characters 100 percent. RPers who adopt the main aspects of the characters but put their own unique twist to them, so as to make them more dimensional, especially since the show does a bad job of giving a well-rounded picture to each character. Many characters are simply used for certain purposes and are then not seen until much later on the show when they are needed again."

This aspect of characters that are not well rounded on the show, as DDQ mentions, is something that I found with my own character, Bonnie Bennett. Since there is very little of her character that has been developed, as a fan and role player of the character, I can start to re-create aspects of her and give her more dimension and personality.

I found that role play accounts which was more character convincing and who role played often, generated more followers. However, an observation which I made from an early stage in this project made me realise that the more followers one has does not necessarily equate to good role playing. A lot of accounts actually do not RP very much. They tend to talk a lot about their personal lives, discuss characters and opinions about the show, share pictures and celeb gossip about the cast, and generally complain about people they don't like.

Solos

A solo is a piece of writing from the character's perspective and is a good way for role players to show their ability and creativity without really interacting with anybody. Many new role play accounts post a solo in order to share their stories and display their role play talent in order to get followers. Other role players usually follow a person based on this. A solo could be a diary entry, or even a monologue. What is most important to understand about a solo is that it is done by one person. It may contain dialogue or it could merely be the characters' thoughts, describing their emotions or a specific scenario.

Here is an excerpt from a solo:

Someone was behind me. I should have anticipated it. I'd felt that strange shiver which shot up my spine and coiled in my neck but before I even had a chance to turn around and look, he'd gripped me. "What the hell are you doing out here?" The glare from the headlights

shone across Damon's face, his jaw, sharp and stern as he questioned me with piercing eyes. I squirmed out of Damon's grip, gingerly rubbing my shoulder as I scowled up at him, the spell to obliterate his brain cells being called off in a split of a second. "I should be asking you that question" I snapped back accusingly. His forehead creased into a slight frown, his eyes flickering to the dead body behind me. The dead body I'd found at the side of the road when I was driving back home. "We have to call the police" I reasoned. "No." In a swift motion, Damon's hand reached for my arm and pulled. He frog marched me to my car and turned around, his eyes focusing on me intently for a moment. "Bonnie, it isn't safe. I want you to go straight home."

Storylines

Storylines, (or SL's for short) are quite popular when it comes to planned role playing. Role players create stories for their characters and often interact with other role players, thus including their characters into the story. The important thing to understand is that role players create their own story lines, whether continuing aspects from the show which were not explained in detail, or simply expanding on what has been shown, incorporating their own twists and turns. Many story lines deviate from the books and the TV show, since role players have the liberty to imagine different scenarios with a variety of characters and they can formulate plots to accommodate any kind of action they wish. This is often referred to as an 'alternate universe' (AU), where one pictures what certain characters would be like outside of their regular scenarios. If you love a particular character but didn't enjoy a certain scene that was witnessed on the TV show, or if you thought of an idea that hasn't happened on the show to your character, RP is the place for you to go to make your ideas take form and be acted out. Role players have the power to re-create a story and to improve it; whether by creating romances, or changing plots to have characters explored in different ways, role playing contributes to newer content derived from an original story.

DDQ: *"I follow them [other role players] based on their SLs and their RP, depending on if I enjoy reading it or not. I don't like too much OOC stuff or too much RL drama - I tend to unfollow them. I like following couples, not necessarily romantic couples, sometimes siblings*

or friends if I like their interaction with each other. I've tried following RP groups[37], but since most of them are run by very young people, they tend to fall apart quite quickly. I try to make sure I don't follow or let anyone follow me who is under the age of 18, preferably under 21, since I think, as an adult RPer I have a certain responsibility to younger people... but it's hard since so many lie about their ages."

PBK: *"I follow about 100 role players from my Damon account, which is my main one. I'm followed by about 400 and I don't mind RPing with people I don't follow, as long as I enjoy them. I also have a lot of RPers who follow my personal and I semi-RP with them at times from there. Which is bizarre. And fun. On my personal, a lot of RPs ask for advice about their own writing, particularly their solos, and particularly the slash RPs. I get a bit of that on my Damon and Alaric accounts as well and via Damon's ask box on Tumblr."*

People follow role players for different reasons.

DDQ: *"I mostly get entertainment from those I follow, and on rare occasions I get inspired. I want to laugh and have fun when I'm on Twitter so yeah, fun people are essential."*

PBK: *"I get entertainment and inspiration from other role players. And frankly I do enjoy being asked for input and feedback, it's a nice confidence boost. Sometimes it's just for the laugh. Crack shipping[38] amuses me to no end. I am friends with a Castiel/Alaric couple and am endlessly amused by the Damon/Stiles couple on the TL."*

When role playing on a *Twitter* account, one needs to role play with another person, making it logical to follow other role players in order to read, share and exchange content. Depending on what an individual's preferences are, one can follow role players from the one or many fandoms to get an idea of how text-based role play is conducted on the site as well as through reading the numerous ideas and creative ways in which role play is explored. Even though a person may role play the face of a certain character, it is the individual behind the face that makes the character come to life in a virtual community, and being friendly, sociable and open to role playing with others can make the experience quite enjoyable and compelling.

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[37] In a TV series, there is one of each character. On Twitter, there are about 100+ of each character being RPed. As a role player, you have the luxury of role playing with many accounts that portray the same character and you can pick and choose who you like to interact with. An RP group, also referred to as an RP family, selects one of each character to have members role play amongst each other.

[38] Crack shipping is the pairing of two unlikely characters which can be from different fandoms.

Role players have shared their thoughts about what made other role players more entertaining (or annoying) on the site:

DDQ: *"Self-sacrifice and just wanting to have fun in a drama free environment [made role players interesting]. It's almost like being a stand-up comedian sometimes. Too many RPers seem to think that plain rudeness is necessary, and those are swiftly unfollowed [by me]. Of course, the content is of importance, but most of all it's about having fun, and having fun with others. Taking the leap and trying something new."*

PBK: *"STAYING IC is the big one for making a roleplayer compelling, and respecting that I am IC as well. Damon is snarky. Catch him in a mood and he will be rude. Getting upset with me over it is daft. If you can't roll with the punches you shouldn't be RPing a feisty character. You also have to have a real take on the character, your own take, unless you are RPing canon[39] scenes (which I find boring).*

I love a well-written solo[40].I love people who can flirt hard but don't throw themselves sexually at me (it happens in DMs sometimes. I warn once, and then unfollow). I find explicit TL sex a bit odd. I don't hate it if it's well-written but I would never do it myself. I believe that for the majority of RPs, whether they admit it or not, RPing sex is the goal, and it's not, for me – quite the opposite, I will not do it. I'll kiss someone on the TL but that's all. I am aware that some RPs are very young and I think we should all be a little more conscious of it (I'm 35, myself). But being a flirty Damon (and FFS, in the real world flirting doesn't mean sex!!! Why does it here?) who will not have sex is difficult, which is why I asked my friend to start an Alaric account – he is my often-missed boyfriend who likes watching me flirt but would cut off my balls if I took it any further. We imply that there is an awful lot of sex going on while we're actually in Direct Messages complaining about RL. Damonic is my main RP account obviously… but even poor ghost Alaric gets propositioned for sex. He chuckles and says he wishes he had a physical body… and then goes off for heavenly orgies. He has also developed a healthy fear of the Salvatore BH, another role player, who has a mild fixation on him.

I loathe shitty grammar, text language (how r u), etc. I like humor, intelligence, a well-honed phrase. Less 'cerulean hues' and more 'blue eyes'. Economy of language. Someone who will

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[39] Canon refers to staying true to the story.
[40] A solo is a written passage for an individual voice.

take Damon on in a battle of wits and really push it hard, and hold their own – I love the shit out of that. I intensely dislike people complaining that no one will RP with them, saying they hate it on Twitter, they're bored, etc. If you don't want to be there, don't be there. If you do, stay IC, jump in with someone. God-modding[41]sucks too. If you want to write both sides of an RP, write fanfiction. Don't RP."

Drama amongst role players

Drama in role playing, in short, does not refer to fictitious action or performance, but controversy or fighting that happens online between role players when they either clash heads or opinions about certain topics. Drama can be anything from bad mouthing another role player for flirting with a character that is dating somebody else, to disagreements and differences of opinion between role player's views of their or other characters, to full scale bullying. Fighting online is widespread and when individuals post messages that are tactlessly written, strongly opinionated fans and role players can get into arguments about anything from which fan ship is better, to which character on TVD is less than desirable.

DDQ*: "I see it [Drama] and I really can't stand it. I try to keep it out, but when it comes to harassing others, I have a tendency not to be able to shut up and I get bashed a lot for it, but rather me than them.*

There are so many teenagers around, especially The Vampire Diaries fans, and to know that most of them come online to get away from bullies in their everyday life, and to get on Twitter and find themselves cyber- bullied, this time by people who don't even know them or their person, must be absolutely horrifying. They can't get away anywhere. I just can't stop myself from trying to defend those being bullied, even though I know in most cases it doesn't matter because whoever does the online bullying or harassing or starts the drama on Twitter, they are too far removed from reality, meaning, they forget that there are real people behind each account. They don't care. They don't see what they're doing to the person behind the account, and they just move on to their next target. A lot of them actually say it proudly, that they harass other users because they are 'bored'. It pisses me off."

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[41]God-modding is a term used to describe the actions of a person who controls and over powers any role play situation, making decisions for others or evading any role play threats that their characters may face. Such people tend to control every action, even one that isn't their own, by speaking for the other, and try to come out on top of every situation, making it hard for anybody to counteract their actions.

This aspect of virtual communities is quite an important one, although quite negative. This drama which takes place is a complete contradiction of what fandom stands for, which is bringing together a group of people with a similar shared interest to celebrate it. The individuals behind *Twitter* accounts who do cause drama are actually a very small percentage and should they take their drama to a level of bullying, can actually get their accounts blocked and suspended for such content by people who view them. While drama can be easily avoided in role play by simply role playing and avoiding controversy with many accounts that like to raise arguments and cause trouble, proper role play accounts do not concern themselves with these accounts – Because as PBK had previously mentioned, real fans are active and they create instead of fight.

Hierarchy

There is definitely a hierarchy that is present amongst role players. While many accounts on *Twitter* look like role playing accounts, upon studying their timelines, one will find a lot of talk about the show or commenting and chatting about everyday aspects of the show with other users and hardly any role play. The accounts that do role play however, can be split into 2 categories –the experienced role players and the beginners.

Beginners vary from one another depending on their approach to role playing. Many beginners give very little description in their RP and are vague, have errors and mistakes, and are trying to gain a feel of their characters as well as a firmer grasp and confidence in whichever character they are portraying. Beginners usually don't read situations well between other role players and butt in or try too hard to interact with others by seeking attention. Every role player starts off as a beginner, with very little interaction and only a few followers. In order to get the ball rolling, one has to think creatively and pay attention to other role players. *How* and *what* others RP plays an important role in one's own online interaction. In order to be recognised as a good role player, one has to show the ability to portray the character as IC (In Character)as possible, and by role playing as much as possible. If one is not able to find somebody to role play with, there are other ways of showing your RP skills to people. Solos and written pieces often display one's talent and express how well one knows one's character. Other RPers will read this and take interest. Adding some of your own unique twists to your character will make things interesting and will differentiate your character from the many other users who portray them online. Other role players tend to have

an impact on a role player, due to one's observations and interactions with them. Other role players can really play an important role in how one role plays and how one chooses to interact with others on *Twitter*, depending on what they choose to share:

DDQ: *"If it's in reference to those I RP with personally, I'd say they make me grow in my role, they help my character develop. They make me want to take that extra step into creating something new and fun. I can be quite boxed in in my characters, so other great RPers do help me try harder at wanting more for my character and my character's development."*

PBK: *"I don't RP to gain followers (nor do I ask for them), I don't change my behaviour to suit others (obviously RP is very give-and-take, but no matter how many Katherines and Elenas hit on me I am never going to be interested), but I learn from and draw from other RPers."*

Role player Profiles

Bonnie Bennett

<u>Role played by:</u> Zakia

<u>Username:</u> @DarkFallsWitch

<u>Character Description:</u> Heroine. Moral, extremely loyal to her friends, believes it is her duty to help and protect those who are close to her, no matter the cost.

<u>Species:</u> Witch

Figure 55: The researcher's role playing profile on *Twitter*

This account of mine is quite straightforward, having placed all the relevant titles for clarity. Every *Twitter* profile contains space for a biography where the person can describe him or herself, a location reference to specify the whereabouts of the user and an external link which any user may click to be sent to another site that is connected to the user. Since this is a role playing account, I have replaced the biography with something related to my character, a witch. Mystic Falls, Virginia, the fictional town in the TVD stories*, should* be the location of the character (her location has been changed to a figurative location, since she is a witch who gives vampires aneurysms on the show). The link that is provided on the profile, when clicked, is a .gif image.

Damon Salvatore

Role played by: PBK

Username: @Mr_Damonic

Character Description: Anti-Hero. Sarcastic, devious and arrogant, known for his self-destructive behaviour and is very protective over things he cares about, like his brother.

Species: Vampire

Damon Salvatore
@mr_damonic FOLLOWS YOU
YES, I'm a dick. Stop acting like it's news. @HunterSaltzman is my best
friend and @TasteMyBourbon owns my bone. [bi|21+|taken]
Tied to Alaric's bedframe · mr-damonic.tumblr.com

8,307 TWEETS   96 FOLLOWING   502 FOLLOWERS   Following

Figure 56: A role player's profile on *Twitter*

A link to a blog is provided: mr-damonic.tumblr.com

The letters in the brackets explain:

Bi – This is the character's sexual orientation on the site. Damon Salvatore is portrayed as a heterosexual vampireon the TV show; however the role player has chosen to portray him as bisexual in this instance.

21+ - Role play and content suitable for users over 21.This can also refer to the role player wanting to role player with users who are over the age of 21 and are not minors.

Taken – This refers to the character being off the market in terms of dating.

'Tied to Alaric's Bed frame' is the character's location.

Klaus Mikaelson

Role played by: DDQ

Username: @BawdyBastard

Character Description: Antagonist. Sadistic, short tempered and manipulative, Klaus is very protective of his family even though he shares a strained relationship with his siblings.

Species: Hybrid

Figure 57: Another role players profile on *Twitter*

A link to a blog is provided: theoriginalhybrid.tumblr.com

The letters in the {} brackets are quite important here - {RP MC21+ AU}

RP – Role play

MC – Mature Content

21+ - Role play and content suitable for users over 21.Can also refer to the role player wanting to role player with users who are over the age of 21 and are not minors.

AU – Alternate Universe. A fictional space different the fictional world of the novels/TV show.

No location has been specified.

Identity

"On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog."

Figure 58: Online playing with identity[42]

Many studies have argued that one of the defining characteristics of the post-modern is the notion that individual identities are multiple and temporary and that, furthermore, rather than having subjectivities simply imposed by social institutions, individuals actively construct their identities, more often than not through the intentional (and sometimes 'aberrant') usage of commodities and media texts (Fiske 1989). Furthermore, Erving Goffman has alerted us to the ways in which identity is inherently dramaturgical: individuals actively perform various identity-*roles* in different social contexts (1956).Jenkins (2006) argues that ordinary people are playing a much greater role in the making of contemporary culture; my research also examined whether this particular manifestation of online fandom also reveals the manner in which ordinary people are playing a greater role in the active fashioning of individual identities.

For many role players, me included, keeping personal information off the role playing account is quite important.

DDQ*: "I've learned pretty quickly not to give too much of my personal identity away on my RP accounts, but when I get to know people I will let them have a peek into my personal life, some more than others. I don't like mixing Real Life with RP anyway. Why do the people I RP against need to know if I'm a woman or man, if I'm single or married, if I've got children or not. YES, I do believe age matters. If I RP mature contents I would feel sick knowing I'd done so with someone younger than 21. Other than thatit shouldn't matter much what my private life looks like.*

There are also people who will take any chance they get to make your online life hell if you give out too much information about yourself, so for my own wellbeing, I now refrain from giving too much away about myself."

PBK*: "I'm very cautious [About giving away details of my personal identity]. Almost no one knows PBKs real name (maybe 8 people) and even fewer know that PBK is Damonic's PM (maybe 5?). Partly because I have a few friends who are truly awful role players and expect their RP friends to play with them. I won't RP with anyone I don't enjoy. And also, I want to be able to delete Damonic. He takes up a lot of my time and I should be writing. So, yeah. A double layer of security.*

The reason I am cautious about PBKs identity is two-fold – first, I am working on building a writing career of my own and don't know if a history of fan fiction is something I would want to open with, and second, my job is demanding, and fairly public, and I would not be hard to find online. I want the identities separate. Writing a lot of gay porn isn't something I would put in an academic CV."

Here online identities appear as more liberated than off-line identities: writing gay porn is acceptable online but not offline in the real world dominated by oppressive ideologies. Internet fandom allows for the *voluntary making* of identities that are more 'authentic'.

A Wedding in Cyberspace

Many role players seek out (role-playing) characters that they would like to date online or get Shipping may play a significant role in choosing which character a role player wants to see their own character with. For example, I role play Bonnie. On the show, Bonnie has had a relationship with a character named Jeremy.

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Figure 59: Bonnie and Jeremy in a scene from *The Vampire Diaries*

Bonnie's character gets on quite well with many of the characters, both the good ones, along with the evil ones – she's a witch, and many of the villainous characters want her for her power, so even though these interactions and relationships are antagonistic, they're quite entertaining on the show. In role play, I choose to express her ability to interact with many of the characters. I, however, am not interested in Bonnie dating a Jeremy account.

Bonnie is very powerful and beautiful, yet she has not had a decent love interest on the show or any kind of personal interaction, apart from being used for her magic. In my opinion, Bonnie ought to be courted by a more powerful male character and on *Twitter*, I personally ship Bonnie with a lot of the other male characters, like Klaus or Damon (even though I'm pretty sure it won't happen – which is why fan fiction and vids are the best place for a person with doomed ships).

Figure 60: Actual stills from the TV show of Bonnie with Damon, and Bonnie with Klaus – in both instances, she is being asked to use her magic. Despite the chemistry between the characters, no romantic relationships have ever been explored.

In role play, this can be seen quite clearly because I tend to have my Bonnie account interact with many characters, including a few Damon's and a particular Klaus, who happens to take a liking to my Bonnie. Characters often reveal that they are 'Taken' as with Mr Damonic's profile, which indicates that he is dating another character in role play. Many role players (mostly younger females) are surprised when they find out that a lot of the users behind male characters are actually female (this makes sense since the majority of the TVD fandom is made up of females). However there are quite a few males behind male character accounts.

Role players who wish to turn towards a more romantic approach end up dating each other – this does not extend to the people behind the accounts, but rather the characters dating in a fictional universe, or in this case, the space of *Twitter*. Many characters which RP with one another often date each other and if they both wish, even get married and perform weddings. Below is an example of an RP wedding that is being planned on the image sharing site, *Pinterest*.

What are interesting to note is the utilisation of the site and the incorporation of imagery into the role play to make it seem much more realistic, as compared to the usual literary style which has been discussed in this chapter. Unlike other RPGs found for example in videogames, where users are given a picture of the world they inhabit, *Twitter* allows for role players to create their own worlds and their own scenarios.
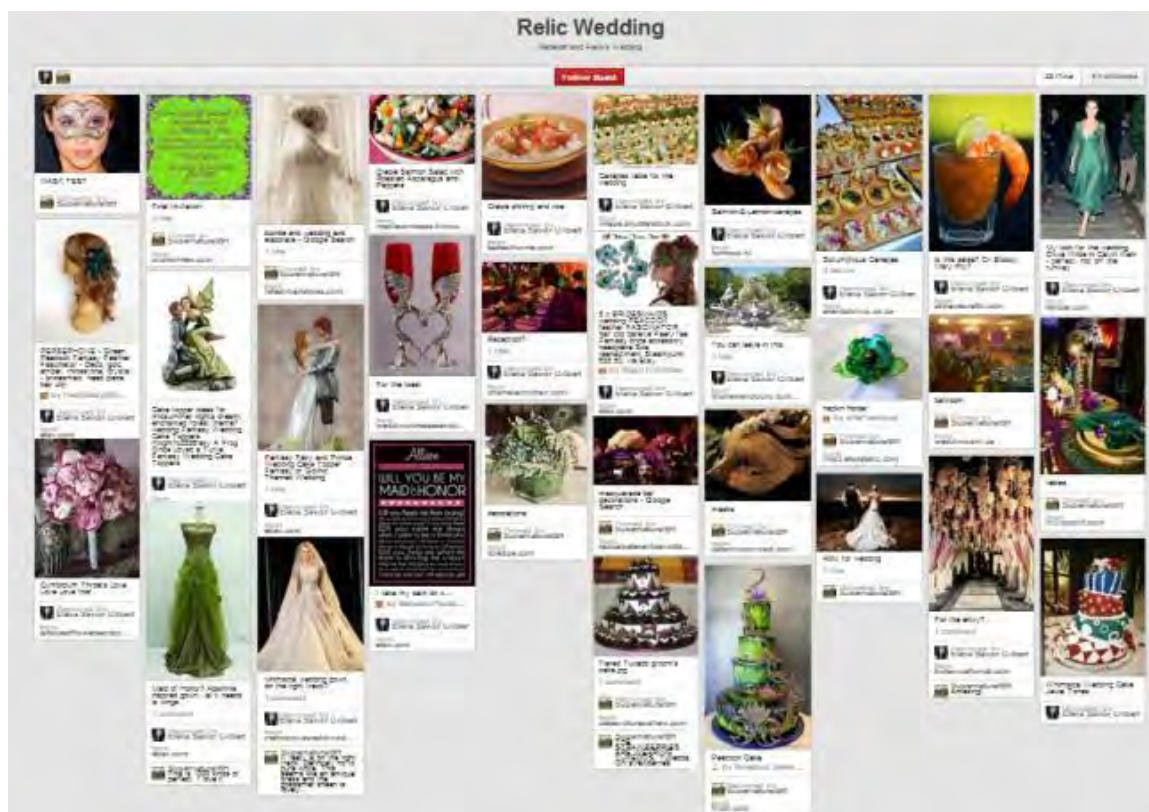
Figure 61: Planning a cyber-wedding

The role player who RPs the character of Rebekah Mikaelson had sent out invitations to her wedding through multiple tweets, inviting her followers and explaining the time and the dress code – It was a masquerade wedding, therefore attendants were to change their avatars to a picture of their character wearing a mask.

The wedding (actually?) took place on the *Twitter* site and with the use of the hash tag #RelicWedding, followers and friends were able to keep tabs on the progress of the wedding which had a priest (the role players asked a friend to role play as the priest), and both the bride and groom said their vows. Through the use of pictures which were attached to tweets, the role players were able to provide imagery on what they wanted to display to their followers. The extent of this romantic online interaction is purely fictional; however, the detail and the amount of time spent in creating such an event which happens online thereafter is given a similar amount of attention in comparison to a real wedding (except this is much more cheaper and less stressful, I imagine). This was a wedding made, not in heaven, but on the Internet, within the densely fictional space of role playing fandom, where what we remember as reality might very well be bad fiction compared to the alluring and liberating reality of the Web.

<center>**Conclusion**</center>

Online Fandom

These contemporary fandoms, operating in 'real time' for the members of their communities, would not be possible practically speaking without the online social media user-generated-content platforms of Web 2.0, especially *Twitter*. *Twitter* enables transnational fan communities to construct a digital meeting-hall and there to assemble together, and to communicate with each other in 'real time' 24 hours per day, seven days per week, regardless of their physical geographical locations in the world. Americans, Swedes, South Africans, Indians and Australians suddenly find themselves neighbours on the Internet, able to share their fan passions with others from every corner of the globe. One only has to contrast this to a pre-Internet period where isolated fans of say a TV series (spread out from New Zealand to Hong Kong to New York) would only be able to communicate with each other through the vagaries of the postal service, to realize the radical transformations to fandom that the World Wide Web has made possible. This remarkable ease of global communication has even in recent years been made even more convenient with the emergence of smart cell phone and tablet delivery platforms, whose effortless mobility now enables serious fans to be connected to their online fandoms 24 hours per day.

Fan creativity: participatory culture

My research has shone a light on the wide range of creative activities fans involved in online – fan fiction, fan art, fan videos, role playing, and the continual act of sustaining a fan community on Twitter by incessant 'fan talk'. This creativity *transforms* (usually commercially driven) media texts through fan imaginative improvisations that speak strongly of the cultural and identity interests of the fans themselves, making these texts fit, as Fiske argues, into a properly popular culture dominated by the fans rather than some vaguely defined elite interest. To take this fan creativity seriously is not only to realize this has nothing to do with an imagined 'passive audience' dominated by the ideological and commercial interests of capitalism, but it is also to draw attention to what Jenkins has so helpfully described as an emergent 'participatory culture'. Fan creativity is so insistent and so pervasive that media texts now extend way beyond the borders of the authors and production

companies that first made them. These 'active audiences' now spin seemingly endless webs of stories, movies, drawings, photographs, dramatic role playing to manufacture what Fiske calls a 'shadow cultural economy' that demands that we radically revise our contemporary perceptions of media texts. Thus *Harry Potter* must now be understood as including the novels by J.K. Rowling and the Hollywood films based on her books, but alongside this 'official culture' must also be included the tens of thousands of fan stories (dispersed across a huge range of genres), the tens of thousands of fan-made *Harry Potter* videos, the fan drawings, the bands who play music inspired by the novels, the dramatizing role players who improvise scenes between characters not found in the novels or films, and so on. These fans become, as we have seen, *co-authors* of the *Harry Potter* phenomenon, both 'deferring to' the original texts and 'differing from' them, as fan texts beget other fan texts in dizzying performances of a prodigious intertextuality in which fans *make* these texts their own. If this all is to demonstrate one's love for a particular TV show, film, or novel, then it is also not a 'passive' type of adulation that simply declares one's admiration for, say, *Harry Potter*. Rather the fans' adulation reveals itself as a sort of demand to *actively to be a part of the fictional universe itself,* as if the admired (set of) texts provide a structured framework within which fans improvise meanings and values and attitudes which begin to speak, not only of the original texts, but of the values and meanings and pleasures of the fans themselves.

It is a perfect example of how texts cannot be read or analysed in isolation, but must instead be dragged out into the open of social and cultural *context*, because it is here that texts actually live – in the manipulating hands of and within the textures of ordinary lived experience, of a people's culture. It is this quotidian and indefatigable energy of the contemporary fan that puts into serious question those bleakly pessimistic accounts of the media as an omnipotent and terrifying 'Big Brother' imposing its elite meanings without resistance upon a hapless mass, thus ensuring that the System shall reign through eternity. It is not of course that the System is not there, but that ordinary people also have the abilities and desires to leave their mark upon the fabric of culture, to speak a language that is not always that of the ruling classes. Moreover - and Web 2.0 software and technology plays an important role in this – fans manufacture through this incessant creative activity *autonomous* spaces whose meanings and values and practices are largely of the fan's own making.

For Marx, capitalism ushers in the reign of the commodity, where the 'use-value' of a product is now replaced by its 'exchange-value', which is to say its commercial value (two chairs are 'equal' to (the cost of) one pair of shoes). But if these media texts are centrally made to make a profit for usually giant transnational media corporations, what fans do, through their intense affective attachments to texts, is reclaim their 'use-value'. The value of *Harry Potter* may lie in the millions of dollars it will bring in to the publishing houses and film production companies, but for fans the value of *Harry Potter* lies in its usefulness to them – to the myriad of pleasures it gives them, to the imaginary world it offers as the basis for a million creative improvisations, to the context it creates for a voluntary and deeply-felt contemporary sociality that gathers on sites like *Twitter*. Fans therefore disturb the limited subject-position of the 'consumer' offered by capitalism, their very creative activism opening the space to accept the 'prosumer' – the citizen who not only consumes culture, but engages in its very production, cooking up original symbolic texts from the ingredients offered by the culture industries. If cooks transform potatoes, rice, chicken, peas into meals for the family, then fans similarly *transform* the raw materials of commercial culture into texts that have meaning for them, that are no longer the products of the culture industries, but have become *meaningful* for the everyday world of the fan. We could also say: the media texts have been *translated* or *re-signified* into the language of the fan.

Fandom and the making of Identity

We have become accustomed to look beyond determinist theories of identity which speak solely of Ideological State Apparatuses which have the uncontested power to produce conformist identities in the interests of the powerful. We speak now instead of identities being negotiated, of spaces opening up in modernity for the self-making of non-ascribed identities, of identities self-fashioned from the bits and pieces of discourses and media texts with which we are surrounded. And what are fans but people who find they can speak about themselves most successfully, can freely identify themselves, choose who they want to be, through the symbolic objects of their fandom.

The Internet, with its capacity for virtual sociality, radically enhances this *playing* with identity, because the Internet is amongst other things a de-centralized and liberated space

awash with a multitude of differing voices with no policemen and school principals and parents telling you how to behave. Helped by the fact that one is not physically present on the Internet but instead disembodied, fans (and of course others) can imagine themselves in ways unapproved by their dominant offline world, and because these are chosen and not imposed, they take on a richness and emotional value that speaks of the very passions of the passionate fan. Thus Hermione from *Harry Potter*, and then remarkably the actual actress who played her in the films, becomes the very model for a contemporary femininity for a great many young women. Thus in role play fans inhabit the fictional identities of witches and vampires to actually live out identities which they are clearly more at home with than those offline identities imposed 'from above'.

Many commentators have spoken unhappily of the postmodern tendency for identities to lack substance or depth, to instead become subject to the fickle logic of fashion – lightly worn, easily changed, never taken seriously. But is there not more to this than this denunciation? What post modernity enables – and nothing makes this more possible than the Internet – is an awareness of the cultural *constructedness* of identity, that identities do not just grow as our bodies do, gradually stabilizing into Who We Are, but are instead fabricated. We are reminded here of the theoretical consequences of Saussure's semiotics, that meanings that we have of things and ourselves are not simply part of the natural order but are instead manufactured by cultural systems of meaning. Meaning suddenly looks far less rigidly itself, no longer deeply rooted in the world, but instead is understood as a shifting, malleable entity open to the fluctuating contingencies of history and thus continually being changed by cultural contestations. The cost of de-essentializing meaning or identity, we might say, is a certain loss of doughty substantiality, which nevertheless enables both meaning and identity to be envisioned as fundamentally mutable, which is also to say, open to the transformative acts of human agency.

For Jenkins as we have seen fandom articulates a profound social shift where ordinary people are no longer content simply to be passively entertained by the spectacular products of the 'old media', and are instead demanding a right actively to participate in the *making* of culture. Jenkins' 'participatory culture' can also interestingly be seen as a space where ordinary people are demanding the right actively to participate in the *makingof their identities*. Fans *choose* their identities, set them to work against the grain of their offline

selves, and throw them into extravagantly imaginative worlds of vampires and magical wizards that transcend the oppressive common-sense realism of hegemonic power, and speak instead of inventive alternate possibilities for how to live. In the virtual space of *Twitter*, the fundamental virtuality of all identity is liberatingly revealed, and enjoyed by fans.

Deconstructing reality/fiction

It is relevant to draw attention here to something that is central to fandoms based on fictional texts, from *Star Trek* to *The Vampire Diaries*, and yet is largely academically ignored, and that is the curious deconstruction of the reality/fiction opposition by fandoms. Perhaps this unsettling of the previously rigid divisions between these two ontological categories has something to do with the emergence of postmodernism which, as Jameson (1991) so powerfully argued, is characterised by the disintegration of the boundary between the economic (traditionally the site of the 'material' or, for our purposes, 'reality'), and the cultural (the space of the imagination, of creativity, of the fictional). It is not only that capitalism colonises the terrain of culture in its relentless search for profitability, but also that culture is no longer contained, but instead spills out over all aspects of the social formation, so that what we buy is not a material motor vehicle, but cultural meanings of status and sexiness. Commodities like motor-cars speak to us (I signify 'coolness') and, by purchasing them I enable them to speak about me to others (I am cool), so that the world of objects turns out to be encrusted with a semiotic density: we communicate not only with language, but also through meaningful objects (and of course, there is no such thing as a meaningless object, nakedly, physically itself). The scandal of the postmodern is that it reveals that *everything is culture*, that even something as indomitably material as the economy is not only structured by discourse (the discourse say of welfare state capitalism), but that it also sells cultural meanings, rather than material things. And to say 'everything is culture' is also to say, since it is what we invent and project into the world, that *culture is fictional*. We call a strange creature before us a hippopotamus, and talk about 'black' and 'white' people. These are all fictions which we generate to signify reality, and as a result we live within fictional systems called 'language' and 'culture' and 'reality'.

This deconstruction is continually lived by fans – it is the very essence of their fandom. *Star Trek* fans have for decades got dressed up in *Star Trek* costumes to attend monthly local branch meetings where, for example, plans are made to attend the next *Star Trek* convention

where the actor who played the captain of the Starship *Enterprise* will be a keynote speaker on the subject of the TV show's philosophy about life. Reality and fiction are so intertwined that it is impossible to separate them into distinct ontological categories.

We may say this: with fandom, the fictional becomes real, and reality becomes fictional. *Star Trek* is lived as real, with the result that the reality of the fan is largely made up of fictional experiences. With regard to the *Harry Potter* and *The Vampire Diaries* fandoms on *Twitter*, role playing takes on a special significance, because fans take on in reality the identity of fictional characters, and even re-design them to make them more expressive of the fans' specific interests. When I role play a witch from *The Vampire Diaries* I inhabit a fictional character, and at a certain point my identity is itself modified by this fictionalizing, so that fiction becomes reality. At a certain point, the very *fictionality* of identity-making walks onto centre-stage, because if *self-fashioning* is what people typically do, then fan identities and role-playing, re-invented as they are from fictional characters, make us aware of how identities are *creative inventions*. This only becomes visible when people are no longer mesmerized into passivity by vast dominating institutions and structures, to the point where all meanings have been dangerously naturalized. The 'fictional' world constructed and imposed by elites is lived as 'reality' itself. But when people, such as these online fans, slip effortlessly between 'reality' and 'fiction', and, most importantly, fabricate and re-fabricate reality and identities through fictional textual worlds, then the irreducible *fictionality of all reality* - its fabricated, invented, human-made projection of fantasies, its protean ability to be constantly re-made rather than only suffered -swims into glaring view, reminding us - radically - that reality is there to be re-made, as are our very subjectivities.

Fandom and globalization

Contemporary online fan studies cannot avoid the realities of globalization. After all, globalization is dependent upon the same digital networks that makes *Twitter* possible, and if *Twitter* is a characteristically global company, used by people from around the world, then the novels, films and TV shows that draw fan communities are also typically global media texts exhibited around the world and owned by global companies such as Comcast, Walt Disney, Time Warner and News Corporation. From the view-point 'from below' of the fans rather than of the corporations 'from above', *Twitter*, as we have seen, immeasurably

enhances fans' enjoyment of their fan communities by enabling fans from all over the world to congregate online, allowing previously isolated fans to achieve a sense of fan belonging. If disasters like the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami are 'global events', since they are experienced via the media throughout the world, then a great deal of mass media texts (TV shows, films, books) are also similarly mediated global events, in that audiences in many countries watch the same texts, and thus the conversation about them assumes – on sites like *Twitter* – global proportions, as we have seen in this thesis. The publication of a new *Harry Potter* novel was timed to be released simultaneously across the world (including South Africa), with midnight *Harry Potter* parties being held in bookshops from San Diego to Tokyo. These are self-consciously global events. The consequence of this is that globalized online fandom contributes to the erosion of nationalism (including the near monopoly nations and their states had to define local identities) by making it possible for fans to construct identities which have little to do with their geographical specificities. These post-national, deterritorialized identities – a sense of belonging with people of your own choosing who share a common deeply-felt interest – are increasingly common, and fandoms, a great many with millions of members, are in the vanguard of these developments. These are authentic global communities voluntarily and therefore freely assembled by their members, and of course one cannot say that of the communities into which most of us were born.

Limitations

This study is not without its limitations, a consequence of the limited size of a Master's thesis. The research could be made stronger, and perhaps more capable of speaking generally of online fandoms, through the extension of its focus to other fandoms. In addition, the different types of fan creativity – fiction, videos, art, role playing – deserve more detailed attention in the form of close analytic readings that engage with their textual specificities such as themes and aesthetic styles. In addition, considering the large pools of possible fans, a quantitative survey could have provided an interesting overview of fan demographics and pertinent fan profiles.

Directions for Future Research

This project represents only a beginning in understanding what is happening within and between fan communities in terms of fan identity and fan creativity. Future studies could focus on additional sites of fan activity. *Twitter* represents a very popular site of fan activity due to the presence of verified people directly involved in the creation of texts that fans love, and the convenient software architecture, and it would be valuable to explore activity in different locales for use in comparison. Given that online fandom is part of contemporary globalization, it would be interesting to research how fans from a great many different places on earth manage to bring those differences to the global table. We assume that globalization does not eradicate difference, but re-shapes it, and how it does so can generate extensive research.

Appendix

Harry Potter Timeline

Year	Books: Published dates	Films: Launch dates and Other relevant dates
1997	*Harry Potter and the Philosophers Stone*: 30 June 1997	
1998	*Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*: 02 July 1998	
1999	*Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*: 08 July 1999	
2000	*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*: 08 July 2000	
2001		*Harry Potter and the Philosophers Stone*: 14 November 2001
2002		*Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*: 16 November 2002 Death of Richard Harris: 25 October 2002. Production delays. Michael Gambon is cast as Albus Dumbledore.
2003	*Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*: 21 June 2003	
2004		*Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*: 31 May 2004
2005	*Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince*: 16 July 2005	*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*: 18 November 2005
2006		
2007	*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*: 21 July 2007	*Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*: 12 July 2007
2008		

2009		*Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince*: 15 July 2009
2010		Launch of Harry Potter World in Orlando, Florida: 18 June 2010 *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*: Part 1: 19 November 2010
2011		*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*: Part2: 15 July 2011 JK Rowling's Birthday: 31 July 2011 Pottermore Registration: 31 July 2011 Launch of *Pottermore*: October 2011
2012		Launch of The Warner Bros Harry Potter Film Studio in London: 31 March 2012
2013		J.K. Rowling releases her new book *The Cuckoo's Calling* under the pseudonym, Robert Galbrieth: April 2013 Announcement of the Harry Potter spinoff film, *Fantastic Beasts And Where To Find Them*: 12 September 2013

The Vampire Diaries Timeline

Year	Published date of Books	Television Series and Other Relevant Dates
1991 - 1992	*The Awakening* By L.J Smith *The Struggle* By L.J Smith *The Fury* By L.J Smith *Dark Reunion* By L.J Smith	
1993 - 2008	Hiatus	
2009	L.J Smith returns after a hiatus to write the next 3 books of the series due to its popularity and announcement of The Vampire Diaries TV series. *The Return: Nightfall* By L.J Smith: 10 February 2009	Pilot episode of *The Vampire Diaries*: Season 1 – 10 September 2009
2010	*The Return: Shadow Souls* By L.J Smith: 16 March 2010	*The Vampire Diaries* Season 1 ends – 13 May 2010 *The Vampire Diaries* Season 2 starts – 9 September 2010
2011	*The Return: Midnight* By L.J Smith: 15 March 2011 L.J Smith is dismissed from writing hereafter – It was specified that she signed a "Work for Hire" contract when she wrote the original *Vampire Diaries* novel trilogy, meaning that Alloy Entertainment, the publishers, own the rights to the books.[43] It was said that the reason behind her dismissal was due to the direction her story was taking. A Ghostwriter is allocated to write the books hereafter. *The Hunters: Phantom* – Written by Ghostwriter: 25 October 2011	*The Vampire Diaries* Season 2 ends – 12 May 2011 *The Vampire Diaries* Season 3 starts – 15 September 2011

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[43]http://anditsdraining.tumblr.com/post/3137484606/l-j-smith-creator-of-the-vampire-diaries-books-fired

Social Network Fandoms & Online Role-Playing: *Harry Potter* and *The Vampire Diaries* Fans on *Twitter*

2012	*The Hunters: Moonsong* – Written by Ghostwriter: 13 March 2012 *The Hunters: Destiny Rising* – Written by Ghostwriter : 23 October 2012	*The Vampire Diaries* Season 3 ends – 10 May 2012 *The Vampire Diaries* Season 4 starts – 11 October 2012
2013	*The Salvation: Unseen* Written by Aubrey Clark: 2 May 2013	Announcement of *The Originals*, a Vampire Diaries spinoff: 26 April 2013 *The Vampire Diaries* Season 4 ends – 13 May 2013 *The Vampire Diaries* Season 5 starts – 3 October 2013 *The Originals* Season 1 starts – 3 October 2013
2014	L.J Smith comes back with a bang by publishing her new novel *The Vampire Diaries: Evensong* which picks up directly from where she left off in the series, except her novel is published through Kindle Worlds on Amazon, as Fan fiction - 31 January 2014	

Further Interview Results from: DDQ

❖ In terms of watching the Vampire Diaries, which do you prefer: Watching the episode live, or watching the episode after it has been screened?

I love watching the episodes live, but seeing as they're aired at a time when I should be tucked up in bed, it's hard to watch them all live. I usually stay up if I've heard something really good is going to happen. Otherwise I tend to wake up early in the mornings, DL the epi and watch while eating brekkie.

❖ What determines whether you would watch an episode live of not?

I guess I answered that question already – if rumours say something good will happen, or that I know my favourite characters will play a bigger part of that night's epi, I will probably make sure to watch live. BUT, with certain shows, that are overall good, like when TVD first started out, I will watch the episodes live every week no matter what time it's aired. Unfortunately, TVD has lowered its standards of late.

❖ What are your thoughts on people who live tweet TVD episodes? Have you ever live tweeted? If so, how much do information do you tend to give away?

I don't mind live tweeting. It's up to everyone to either tweet or hide. But I do appreciate being told in advance if someone's live tweeting, and I warn ahead of time that I will be live tweeting so people have a chance to mute me or stay off TL.

I don't –think – I give away too much info, but at the heat of the moment, I might forget….

❖ Do you like reading spoilers in particular?

I did. These days I tend to only get disappointed, so I stay away from them or chances are, I won't watch the episodes. (This is only regarding TVD and TO)

❖ How do you avoid reading spoilers?

I just don't read them haha. – On Twitter in general, I guess I just skip the tweets…

❖ What do you think about 'Shipping' in general?

I think shipping is good. Shows the creators of a show that you enjoy what they've made and what they're doing. But I don't necessarily think that shipping is of importance to a show's longevity. I watch a lot of shows where I don't ship at all, and for the most part, I tend to enjoy those shows a lot more than the shows where I ship someone or other.

- ❖ Have you ever come across any hard core shippers? If so, what were they like? What do you think of them?

Yes I have. Especially through my vidding. They don't care for the actual video, only –what – you vid and with what specifics. Very one track minded. I find them hard to speak to and/or interact with overall. They don't like anyone else's opinion if it varies the slightest from theirs and they tend to get quite harsh towards the show's creators and fans of other ships if things don't go their way.

I've actually left 2 twitter accts and one YT acct because of incessant shippers who will do anything to start ship wars etc. This was before the block button was properly invented though Hah.

- ❖ When do you think Shipping starts to get out of hand?

Have you ever seen or read about an experiment a high school teacher tried in the 70's called 'the wave'? He tried to show his students how Hitler could make a whole nation kill off almost an entire race based on the theory of a higher race… some shippers remind me of that book that I read about it.

You are not allowed your own thoughts, wishes or wants. You are not allowed to think differently or in any way differ from what 'the shippers' say is truth and right. If you do, you are an outcast, and you will get frozen out of that particular group, which most probably includes your best friends or those you usually hang with – this time on Twitter and YouTube. I've seen it all too many times and it is really despicable.

And these aren't just teenagers. There are adults who seem to forget about impressionable youngsters looking up to them and their views, who are afraid to speak their mind when they know they will be pushed out of the clique if they dare voice a different opinion than the 'popular shippers'.

- ❖ Have you experienced any hate or seen any hate on Twitter about shipping before?

Yes, I have. Many times. And it usually goes as far as name calling and complete bashing of the character of the person behind the Twitter account.

- ❖ What is your general opinion about antagonistic fannish behaviour? Is it something you see in many fandoms?

I've seen it in the One Tree Hill fandom and The Vampire Diaries. In other fandoms, I've only seen support for each other's ships and likes.

- ❖ What kind of ships do you like? (Canon, crack ships, slash ships etc.)

I tend to like crack ship or crossover ships.

Social Network Fandoms & Online Role-Playing: *Harry Potter* and *The Vampire Diaries* Fans on *Twitter*

❖ Anything you would like to add? There are no rules in terms of your experiences and I would gladly incorporate anything you wish to say, whether related to RP, fandom or anything in general, really.

I don't mind character bashing in general. They are there to hate and love, it's what they're made for. Just never make it personal. That's when shipping goes too far.

I do character bashing all the time, and I let my friends bash as much as they want. I might ask why if I don't get why they're hating on a character, but I will always try to leave it at that, it's never necessary to start an argument over the love and/or hate of a character. I've been told by several people that they don't mind having a different opinion from mine because I always let them have their opinion and we can discuss our love/hate without it turning ugly. But that's what we have shows for as well. To love and hate. To discuss. To meet new people. To find friends.

I have friends in many different ships and fandoms. I will never stop talking to someone because of their preference. BUT, I've had those I thought were my friends unfollow/unsub/stop talking to me/hate on me because I don't think the way they do, or because I don't like what they like. I'd say it's immaturity, and since maturity doesn't seem to come with age and experience, I guess that's correct.

Role play

❖ Describe the character you role play in a few words:

Klaus Mikaelson. An immortal hybrid, part vampire and part werewolf. One of the strongest creatures alive. Without remorse and quite unlikable. By most people.

❖ What made you select the character that you role play?

My then favourite character, Damon Salvatore – vampire – was taken by my best friend in RP, and I wanted to be able to RP against her, so I chose Klaus. Because I liked him too and there was so much to learn about him. And because we didn't know much about him it was easy to play him AU to start with.

And yes, I say 'then favourite character' about Damon –since RPing Klaus, I've come to love him even more than I love Damon. But that has also to do with the fact that I think Damon's character has been ruined on the show.

❖ How do you choose to role play your character?

I try to stay as in character as I can. I vary from him in certain ways and I've chosen to see him as someone who is capable of love and emotions, made him more likeable than what he is on screen, I guess. I have decided to see past his exterior and look to see –why – he's acting the way he does instead. Give him depth.

❖ <u>Have you experienced any hate from other users for your portrayal of a character before?</u>

Yes, quite a few times. But nothing that's stuck out really. Just the normal; how can you RP someone like him… but this is from those who play equally heinous characters, they've just done what I have done with my character; seen past the exterior and found their humanity hidden underneath.

❖ <u>Have you received any hate in particular?</u>

Only from one person, but seeing as that person is so narrow minded it wasn't even worth my time to pay attention. I just unfollowed after laughing for a bit.

❖ <u>In terms of time zones and interacting with other users, do you have any experiences where you found yourself altering your normal routine to be online?</u>

Yes, I'm from Sweden and I RPd with someone from the USA and I completely turned my normal routines around to be able to stay online with that person last summer. –Never again.

❖ <u>What are your thoughts about online drama between role players on the site? Is this something you see a lot? If so, why do you think that is?</u>

I see it and I really can't stand it. I try to keep out, but when it comes to harassing others, I have a tendency not to be able to shut up and I get bashed a lot for it, but rather me than them.

There are so many teenagers around, especially The Vampire Diaries and to know that most of them come online to get away from bullies in their everyday life, and to get on Twitter and find themselves bullied again, this time by people who doesn't even know them or their person must be absolutely horrifying. They can't get away anywhere. I just can't stop myself from trying to stop it even though I know in most cases it doesn't matter because whoever does the online bullying or harassing or drama on Twitter, are too far removed from reality, meaning, they forget there are real people behind each account so they don't care. They don't see what they're doing to the person behind the account, they can just move on to their next target. A lot of them actually say it proudly, that they harass other users because they are 'bored'. It pisses me off.

Vidding

- ❖ <u>What usually inspires you to vid?</u>

Usually if I listen to a great song, with great lyrics, I can see the video form in my head from clips from a show.

- ❖ <u>Is there a particular style or narrative that you usually use in your videos?</u>

I usually go for a story-like video. Most of the time it doesn't go exactly by the lyrics, but the lyrics will add to the story. Example… I will use a love song to describe the love between siblings. Or a song where someone is unlucky in love, but in the video I will make them kill the person they love or kill the person standing in the way for their happiness (we are dealing with vampires after all Heh)

- ❖ <u>What determines a great fan video, for you? (Whether your own, or others)</u>

The feeling behind it. It doesn't have to have amazing effects or be 'professionally' made. But it has to speak to me emotionally more than anything.

- ❖ <u>As a vidder, what would you like to say about the activity of fan videoing itself, or the creation process?</u>

Fan vidding means freedom. It means that my crack ships can happen, they can come to life. Just like with fan writing or role playing. AU is such an important word in fan vidding. Especially when things don't go your way on the show. You can open up your editing program and make your shipping dream happen. If you then are able to upload your creation online and make others happy with your AU videos, all the better. Then they can enjoy their crack ships/crossovers as well.

- ❖ <u>How long does it usually take you to create a vid?</u>

If you have your clips sorted (which I don't) it could take less than a day, but it depends what sort of video you're aiming for. I made a video once in 6 hours, where I used clips from 2 different shows and it was 2,5 minutes long, which is a quite long video for me… and that included the render process, because I knew exactly what I wanted and I knew all the characters scenes by heart so I could easily find the clips. While, another time, I made a video of 1,5 minutes and it took me 3 days to finish because I didn't know the character as well and I had to use YouTube to find the clips/episodes I needed.

Then you have videos full of effects which can take daaaaays to finish and edit, where you use several different fandoms, called multifandom videos. Those are usually action based videos and they also usually take a lot longer to render because of all of the added effects.

* Other?

I love vidding, it's the perfect hobby for me who is a single mum who can't get out as much as others. I've found some really amazing friends online who does the same, but the best part is that my best friend at home, who lives next door to me, who is also a single mum, is also a vidder. So we hang out together with our hobby, that some of our other friends have no interest in, but they've been part of our vidding one way or another, either watching or being part of the videos by choosing songs or us making videos for them by using clips or photos for birthdays and stuff, so our vidding is appreciated.

There is so much hard work behind vidding. That's why it's so sad when shippers ruin your creation by adding their hate for your chosen characters you've vidded about. But as with everything else, you need to separate the crazies from the normals and realize that shipping is nothing but character based, but for some vidders it's very down putting, after the hours spent putting a video together.

Further Interview Results from: PBK

* (Apart from Twitter) Which other sites do you interact with in terms of online fandoms? (Facebook? Tumblr? Livejournal? Other?)

I have a few tumblrs – one for Dalaric, one for everything else, one for reposting Damonic's solos and the remarkable number of questions he gets. I am also an admin on tumblr for a Harry Potter RPG – first war era.

I use livejournal for fanfiction, community stuff (challenges etc), fanart occasionally. I am running a fic-a-thon which is Alaric-based over there right now.

I have accounts on archiveofourown.org and fanfiction.net for my fanfiction.

* Why do you prefer these sites?

I love AO3 because anything goes, because they have governance (a board of directors, on which financial members get to vote), vision and mission, and a real sense of community. It is still smaller than FFN but it is proportionally slashier and to be honest, I think the overall quality of writing is better (maybe because you have to wait so long to get an account).

I use LJ because of the communities. Good places to advertise your writing and meet new people.

And tumblr, my god. Pretty pretty gifs. The work people put into them is unreal. I often reblog gifsets with a mini-fic of some sort below them.

I don't link fannish stuff on facebook. I don't want to have to explain it to my RL friends.

❖ <u>Why you do like the activity of online fandoms?</u>

A lot of people who call themselves fans are very passive. Even in online fandom, the people who watch a show each week and then tweet abuse at the creators (the behavior towards Julie Plec disgusts me in particular) and start ship wars… really, they are the passive fans. My friends are active fans. They run websites and write fanfiction and make videos and roleplay.If someone ships Delena and an episode is full of Stelena scenes, these people shrug, and go make a gifset or write a story, or roleplayDelena on twitter. They don't fight, they create.

I also think that fans get to tell stories the writers can't. They get 22 weeks a season, 40 mins a week to tell a particular aspect of a story…

As an example, in July, I published a monster-sized fic – 66,000 words – detailing Isobel's life from the time she was a child visiting Mystic Falls to the moment she died in the cemetery (and an evil epilogue on the Other Side). It was called "[Head is a jungle, heart is an empty room](#)." I drew a lot from the fandom's knowledge, talking out serious plot holes and stuff and despite the fact that Isobel is an obsession that very few people share with me everyone was supportive, and ultimately interested.

It got me started thinking though about how the creators of a TV show really do gloss over so much, don't think twice about retconning something or using minor characters to patch holes in their plots, and participatory fans really get our hands dirty, really get in deep and lovingly repair it all. It's play – no different in meaning to the games we favored as children, making plastic dolls fall in love and create them worlds where terrible things happen but someone keeps them safe.

Plus, not enough slash on TV. Plenty on my hard drive. [wink]

I also like the chance to make a statement. I wrote a chapter of my long, ongoing story *[The next hundred years or so](#)* called *[Compelling arguments for equality](#)*. Basically, Damon and Alaric (who have at this point been together 9 years; Alaric has been a vampire for 8) go on a months-long road trip to compel select politicians to change their stance on marriage equality, turning the tide nationally. Afterwards, they get informally married (because legal or not, Damon has no social security number). Doing this without breaking character was bloody hard, which made it a good writing exercise, but also, a way to make a lot of my arguments without actually having to spell them out. Amusingly, it was [featured](#) on an equality and diversity blog the week it came out.

I also wrote an interesting arc where Alaric had post-traumatic stress disorder. A way of combining a bit of my professional knowledge and hopefully teaching someone something about living with a person who is experiencing mental illness.

<u>What do you post/tweet about?</u>

I thought my tweet cloud might amuse you.

Honestly Alaric is my most tweeted word. But I tweet about writing – both my original writing and fanfiction–about Alaric, his handsome beau Damon (or, depending on my mood, his husband).

I watch a few other shows as well (Supernatural, Revolution, Suits, Grey's Anatomy) and tweet about them too – mostly frantically slash shipping all over the fandoms and back. I often find myself asking… "Who would Alaric Saltzman do?"

I rarely tweet about politics or anything else real life. My job is about misery. I need my down time to be about fantasy. Although having said that, I have made a small number of friends who know me well though we met through fandom, and play big sister to a couple of girls who really do need someone to be a reliable adult in their lives.

❖ <u>How do you show your fandom to other users?</u>

In my profile including my icon. I indicate I'm a slash writer generally and Dalaric specifically, have a link to a tumblr post which enable people to find me wherever.

❖ <u>Does your display of fandom determine who follows you or what you talk about?</u>

Yes. I am often followed by people who haven't really twigged to what I'm saying and they are people whole will follow anyone with anything TVD related in their profile. I am followed by a lot of RPs as well and haven't been able to work out how many of them are there because they read my writing, how many just follow everyone TVD-related, and how many actually just like talking to me. A mix, I guess. I don't follow a lot of RPs from PBK but I talk to a lot of them. I also have a fair few friends who are slashers from other fandoms and though they pity my lonely existence in a fandom this het, we enjoy each other's filthy minds. (They are encouraging me to write Sterek for Teen Wolf… but then I'll never get out of fandom, ever. The reviews would hook me in forever.)

Social Network Fandoms & Online Role-Playing: *Harry Potter* and *The Vampire Diaries* Fans on *Twitter*

Glossary

AU: Alternate Universe

Canon: Refers to the official storyline.

Crack: Refers to crack shipping - The pairing of two unlikely characters which can be from different fandoms.

Fan artist: A person who creates artwork from works of fiction.

Fan fiction: A written piece of fiction based from a pre-existing piece of work.

Face Claim: The physical appearance of a character, whether a real person or animated.

Fic writers: Writers who write fan fiction.

God-modding: A term used to describe the actions of a person who controls and over powers any role play situation, making decisions for others or evading any role play threats that their characters may face.

Het: Slang term for heterosexual. Refers to romantic fiction written about heterosexual characters.

Manips: Short for photo manipulation. Refers to an enhanced picture using Photoshop or image editing software.

Modding: The act of changing or adding features to create something different.

Muggle: A person who possesses no magic skill or ability.

OOC: Out of Character - Content that is written out of the characters context.

Retconning: A situation where a new storyline explains or changes a previous event, making it more interesting or significant is referred to as retconning.

RP: Role-play

Ship: Short for romantic relationship.

Shipping: Derived from the word 'relationship.' Refers to two characters linked in a romantic pairing.

Slash: Genre of fan fiction involving homoerotic pairings of either 2 male or 2 female characters.

Slashy: A term used to mean homoerotic.

Slashers: Writers of slash fiction.

Solo: A written passage for an individual voice.

Spam: Bulk messaging – usually used to describe junk mail and advertising in emails.

TVD: The Vampire Diaries

TO: The Originals - The official spin off show of TVD, which was announced near the end of the fourth season of TVD in May 2013 and will start in October 2013.

Vids: Short for Video.

Vidders: People who create fan videos.

Vidding: The act of creating fan videos.

Vlogs: Video blogs.

Zines: Short for Fan Zine. A low budget or amateur publication dedication to fan appreciation.

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