

# Re(a)d Wedding: A Case Study Exploring Everyday Information Behaviors of the Transmedia Fan

Eric Forcier

Faculty of Health, Arts and Design, Swinburne University of Technology, Australia. eforcier@swin.edu.au

## ABSTRACT

As practitioners of new forms of consumption and production, fans represent an important area for research. Specifically, fans of “transmedia systems” – media-hopping networks of intertextualities that extend the narrative world of an original production – employ unique tactics for negotiating a complex information space. The study of such tactics provides valuable insights on the everyday information behaviors of modern post-digital readers and media consumers that could benefit literacy and community engagement. Despite this, fans have received little attention in the information behavior literature. Therefore, this paper seeks to contribute new empirical understandings of the transmedia fan to the information behavior domain. The author undertook a pilot case study of the *Game of Thrones* transmedia fandom. Using a grounded theory approach, the qualitative coding of 400 online user comments revealed four types of tactics employed by fans to negotiate the transmedia system: sentimental, reasoned, relational and comic. A discussion of these tactics and the ways in which fans use them results in a preliminary definition and information behavior cycle model for the *transmedia fan*. The study’s findings offer key observations about the everyday information behavior of fans and about reading and media consumption practices in general.

## KEYWORDS

information behavior, transmedia, game of thrones, fans, everyday life

## INTRODUCTION

The study of fans is a field that increasingly influences the everyday information behaviors of contemporary post-digital society. As Price & Robinson (2016) have noted, fans are practitioners of new forms of consumption and production arising from internet technologies and, in particular, social media. Moreover, as fandom – “regular, emotionally involved consumption of a given popular narrative or text” (Sandvoss, 2007, p. 22) – moves away from the subcultural fringes and is observed in the everyday practices of mainstream culture (Booth, 2015), the unique behaviors it represents are normalized. As such, contemporary fans represent

an emergent model for the consumer as someone that unself-consciously moves information among hypermediated, mediated and unmediated modes of experience through their emotional narrative engagement. Understanding the ways in which this activity takes place is of utmost importance to LIS scholars, educators and practitioners; not only does the study of fans reveal trends in cultural consumption relevant to fostering literacy and engagement in communities, but it demonstrates new strategies for negotiating ever-expanding networks of information across the physical and digital realms.

HBO’s *Game of Thrones* is a fantasy television series currently spanning six seasons and 60 episodes, with an average global viewership (from its most recent season) of 25.1 million viewers per episode (Shepherd, 2016). It has prompted the production of five video games, a graphic novel adaptation, several companion books, two rap albums, a 28-city orchestral tour, a wide variety of tabletop games, toys, merchandise, musical tributes and mobile apps, and countless podcasts, fanfics and other fan-based creations. The series itself is an adaptation of a book series with a pre-existing fandom (Martin, 1996). The series, the novels it adapts and the variety of productions it has generated are all part of the same *storyworld*: a transmedia system that contains a complex network of texts, paratexts and intertexts that fans enthusiastically negotiate through their engagement.

The purpose of the current pilot case study is to examine the information behavior of *Game of Thrones* fans through the lens of everyday practice, as defined by Michel de Certeau (1984) and elaborated by Paulette Rothbauer (2004; 2010). Through the application of constructivist grounded theory (i.e., Charmaz, 2006), a qualitative coding of online user comments identifies specific behaviors and discursive tactics of fans. A discussion of results explores the role of information and digital technology in media fandom and proposes a preliminary definition and model for the *transmedia fan*.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *The Study of Fans in LIS*

In their survey of scholarship on the information behavior of fans, Robinson & Price (2016) observe that there currently exists little interaction between library and information studies (LIS) and fan studies as distinct fields of research. They note that most scholarship emerging from LIS ignores the unique social context of fans, while fan studies (generally considered a sub-domain of cultural studies) rarely and inadequately address information issues. As such, Robinson &

Price's study stands out in its approach to integrating the literatures of these two disparate fields.

When compared to different, broader and nonetheless related categories of information user, such as amateurs, readers and everyday consumers, fans have been largely overlooked in LIS. Hart et al. (1999) suggest the reason for this historical gap in LIS literature is that fans are dismissed as "at best deviant or at worst dangerous" (p. 82). This position reflects popular negative characterizations of "fannish" behavior as obsessive and/or hysterical, deviant and even pathological (Jenson, 1992). Early fan studies scholars refuted these stereotypes by providing evidence of fan communities that developed unique practices as a means of resisting the impositions of dominant social structures (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998; Gray, et al., 2007). Despite almost 30 years of fan studies research and a massive shift in the technological landscape that has pushed fandom into a mainstream position, negative stereotypes of the "hyperfan" persist (Booth, 2017). For this reason, perhaps, fans have only been studied in limited and indirect ways in LIS literature.

Indeed, fans under the guise of amateur producers, or "producers" (Price & Robinson, 2016), have been more frequently covered in the LIS literature. The creation of fanfiction, unauthorized texts that expand upon an existing authorized narrative, have earned the most attention in this regard (e.g., Gursoy, 2015; Peckosie & Hill, 2015). Other forms of fan production have also been explored in recent studies; for example, Rasmussen-Pennington (2016) examines the information behavior and production practices of music fans, while Nyman (2010) studies practices emerging from the role-playing game (RPG) community.

Fans have also been studied in their context as readers. Kofmel (1997) and Serantes (2014) examine the diverse reading experiences of science fiction and comics readers, while Rothbauer explores reading as everyday life practice in the context of lesbian, bisexual and queer and rural youth (e.g., 2004; 2011). All three address readers in their role as "fans" through their emotional narrative engagement. The act of *reading* – broadly defined by Dresang & Koh (2009) to include practices surrounding digital and mobile media – is particularly relevant to the documentation of "invisible" literacies resulting from the "undeniably media-rich and technologically mediated lives" of individuals (Rothbauer, 2011). The affective and interpersonal negotiations inherent in reading are representative of de Certeau's (1984) concept of everyday production ("making do"), while remaining far less visible than the amateur fan productions more commonly studied in fan studies under various terms (e.g., "participatory culture," "producers" etc.). Rothbauer highlights the need for research to critically examine the appeal of a diverse range of "mass media texts" (2004, p. 128), including digital and internet-based texts (e.g., e-zines, web comics, message boards and social media). More recently, Rothbauer has framed reading as a social practice that is situated: "reading must be thought of partly as realizing an intention, partly as an answer to a text read in context." (2016, p. 4)

### **Information Behavior in Fan Studies**

While the models and theories established in LIS are rarely – if ever – invoked by fan studies scholars, concepts representing information behavior are consistently referenced using context-specific terminology. For example, Aardse (2014) examines how fans and players of *The Lost Experience* ARG were encouraged to "seek out information, solve complicated covert riddles and clues, and create a semblance of story through their own media sifting and rearranging" (p. 116). Soto (2015) and Henderson (2015) contribute insights into the role fanfiction plays in the development of traditional and digital literacy among young people. Pugh (2005) reveals various active reading and production practices surrounding fanfiction that are recognizably information behaviors (e.g., beta-reading, resource guide writing and Livejournal rec listing). Van Steenhuyse (2013) expands Pugh's conclusions, noting how Jane Austen fans read stories across media and negotiate – internally and with others – a contextual frame (i.e., their own personal understanding of the storyworld). Ganzon (2013) describes how video game fans used digital tools such as YouTube, DeviantArt, Wikipedia, Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Fanfiction.net and BSN (BioWare's Social Network) to "compile information, compare readings, make suggestions and voice criticism" (pp. 134-135). These examples provide evidence of many information behaviors specific to fans.

### **What is Post-digital?**

Cramer (2015) defines *post-digital* as the "state in which the disruption brought upon by digital information technology has already occurred" (p. 20). Floridi (2015) states that, for many people today, it is "no longer sensible" to distinguish between being online or offline (p. 1). The concepts of "onlife" (as opposed to online) and "infosphere" emerge from this observation, referring to the modern-day pervasiveness and inescapability of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and their potentially radical effects on the human condition (Floridi, 2014). Similarly, Jenkins, Ford & Green (2013) describe a "networked culture" in which the same information sharing activities that took place in a "pre-digital world" now take place at an exponentially greater speed and scope. The concept of "media convergence" (Jenkins, 2006) is likewise associated with the new post-digital paradigm.

The use of the word *post-digital* in the current paper is intended to emphasize a shift in the perception and use of digital media from exclusive to commonplace. Contemporary post-digital society is thus defined as a culture in which digital media have become integral to the practice of everyday life, and yet so commonplace as to be invisible and indistinguishable from non-digital practices.

### **Transmedia Systems and Fans**

The definition of *transmedia* is the source of some debate among researchers (e.g., Stein & Busse, 2012; Harvey, 2015; Kurtz & Bourdaa, 2016). The current study adopts a broad

definition of *transmedia storytelling* as a process whereby elements of a narrative world (i.e., “transtexts”) are dispersed across multiple media channels and result in an immersive and unified entertainment experience (Jenkins, 2006; Stein & Busse, 2012; Kurtz & Bourdaa, 2016). This definition includes official narrative articulations (e.g., core and canonical texts, including adaptations), unofficial narrative articulations (e.g., tie-ins), fan productions and paratextual content (e.g., fanfiction, fan films, reviews, blogs, memes, etc.). Therefore, a transmedia system, or *storyworld*, is co-constructed between industry producers, authors and fans.

### **Post-digital Everyday Life Practice**

Rothbauer (2004) defines everyday life practice as the “informal, routine, mundane activities of daily life.” (p. 14) Tactics are the underlying structures that form these activities; they represent resistances, but they also signify the “hidden production” of users (de Certeau, 1984, xii-xiii; Rothbauer, 2004). According to de Certeau, “tactics” function in counterbalance to “strategies,” which are imposed by institutions and define the boundaries of the system, as a way of “escaping without leaving” and “making do” (Ibid.; Rothbauer, 2010).

In contemporary post-digital society – and particularly within transmedia fandoms – the spaces between “comfortable binaries” (e.g., production/consumption, reading/writing, online/offline) are constantly and often invisibly negotiated (Rothbauer, 2010). These negotiations occur every day: compulsively checking one’s Twitter or Facebook feed, tuning in to a favorite podcast, binging on Netflix, searching a wiki or posting in an online forum. Moreover, these negotiations represent tactics for accessing and managing information within a system imposed by the technologies consumers use and, in the case of media fans, the conventions established by the media industry.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **Spoiler Alert: Red Wedding in Context**

*Game of Thrones* has been selected for study due its definition as a transmedia blockbuster (Bourdaa, 2014). The world of HBO’s *Game of Thrones* is set in the epic fantasy genre. The premise is deceptively simple: Seven kingdoms struggle for control over the Iron Throne. The show aspires to a gritty realism and is intensely violent and sexually graphic. It is adapted from the ongoing book series written by George R.R. Martin, entitled *A Song of Ice and Fire*.

One of the most dramatic and controversial moments in the source material (Martin, 2000; Strang, 2013) was adapted to the screen in the ninth episode of the third season, “The Rains of Castamere” (Benioff & Weiss, 2013). In this episode, Robb Stark, his pregnant wife, Talisa, his mother, Catelyn, and most of his family, retainers and soldiers are murdered in cold blood at the hands of their supposed allies, the Freys and the Boltons. While readers familiar with the novels had long anticipated (and dreaded) the events of the so-called “Red Wedding,” fans who had not read the books were presumably

unprepared for the ultra-violent outcome of that pivotal episode.

### **Design and Methods**

As a pilot study aimed at defining the *transmedia fan* based on observed everyday information behaviors, the current research undertakes a comparative analysis of publicly posted conversations of *Game of Thrones* fans on the review website *The AV Club*. For the first four seasons of the series, staff writers at *The AV Club* ([www.avclub.com](http://www.avclub.com)) published two reviews for each episode: one for viewers familiar with the books (i.e., “experts”, <http://www.avclub.com/tvclub/game-of-thrones-experts-the-rains-of-castamere-for-98086>) and one for viewers unfamiliar with the books and averse to “spoilers” (i.e., “newbies”, <http://www.avclub.com/tvclub/game-of-thrones-newbies-the-rains-of-castamere-for-8087>). Communities of “expert” and “newbie” fans formed on the website and, once published, each review engendered discussions in which community members enthusiastically participated. The two reviews of “The Rains of Castamere,” therefore, document the fans’ initial reactions, impressions and interpretations related to the episode: one comment thread where fans/commenters were aware, in general, what the episode had in store and one thread where the fans – if they had successfully avoided spoilers – would have no warning.

The experts thread includes ~2,200 comments while the newbies thread includes ~3,300 comments. In order to reach a saturation of qualitative codes, 200 comments from each thread (i.e., a total of 400 comments) were coded separately for emergent themes. The analysis adopted a constructivist grounded theory approach, as defined by Charmaz (2006), which permits an inductive and recursive development of ideas and theoretical models through the empirical analysis of textual data. A text file of each comments thread was imported into NVivo 11 for analysis. Threads were coded in chronological order. This purposive sampling approach ensured results captured fans’ initial reactions and were not weighted toward conversations taking place days or weeks after experiencing the episode. Once complete, the qualitative coding for each comments thread was compared. A set of four overarching forms of negotiation or tactics (Table 1), was compiled specific to the negotiation of a transmedia system (i.e., *Game of Thrones*).

These tactics provide insight into the information behaviors of *Game of Thrones* fans and transmedia fans in general. It is possible that further coding of comments would reveal additional themes; however, this sample was sufficient to capture the initial reactions of “newbies” and “experts.” The next section presents results, followed by discussion of findings. In the final section, we propose a preliminary definition and model of the transmedia fan based on findings, as well as address limitations of the study and future research.

## **RESULTS**

Four forms of negotiation tactics demonstrating how fans made sense of the viewing experience were identified in the

Tactics	Examples
Sentimental negotiation <i>i.e., sharing feelings</i>	(Screams) – E1 <i>God, it was awful. Maybe the most viscerally awful violence ever on Game of Thrones.</i> – E35
Reasoned negotiation <i>i.e., use of logic</i>	<i>Guess her character in the books isn't all that important.</i> – E5
Relational negotiation <i>i.e., use knowledge of inter/paratextual information</i>	<i>Yeah, I actually had to look it up on wiki of fire &amp; ice.</i> – E51 <i>Just like the gypsy woman said!</i> – E7
Comic negotiation <i>i.e., use of humor</i>	<i>In this setting, you'd be a fool not to expect something terrible at all the weddings.</i> – N18

**Table 1.** Tactics observed in AV Club comments from Game of Thrones fans

analysis: sentimental, reasoned, relational and comic (Table 1). In addition, the theme of spoilers emerged as particularly significant in the context of information behavior.

Theoretically, tactics are interpreted as a form of resistance against the media industry, executive producers, writers, the author, the website, etc.; however, the examples studied tended to reflect a process of identity formation rather than resistance. The central question underlying comments is how the commenters identify themselves as a *Game of Thrones* fan—or if they (still) identify themselves as such. This process of identification also demonstrates how some commenters perceive themselves in other ways: as newbies or experts, as members of other fandoms, as critics. The episode also forces fans to decide if the violent and unpleasant depictions are justified and to explore how this might impact their continued enjoyment of the storyworld.

As examples are examined in the following sections, a concise definition of each tactic will be provided which conforms to the style set out in de Certeau's (1984) example of *la perruque* ("the wig"): *La perruque* is an everyday practice wherein "the worker's own work is disguised as work for his employer" (pp. 25-26), i.e., using "company time" in the pursuit of personal interests. De Certeau describes this as a minor form of resistance, but it is also the locus for identity formation. Today, fans might snatch a minute or two at work to watch a YouTube video they were told about or check the latest posts on social media. This tactic is a mundane, everyday method of negotiating an information-rich world that incrementally shapes an identity.

Finally, it must be stated that the four tactics are not mutually exclusive. For instance, the example by user E7 in Table 1 may be interpreted as both relational and comic, while user E51's comment may be both relational and reasoned. Since only a sample of comments have been studied, it is possible that other tactics may be identified in future research.

### Sentimental Negotiation

Sharing feelings in the form of an outburst of emotion and/or by commiserating with others about their own affective experience is a negotiation tactic that allows fans to deconstruct their own interpretation of the storyworld. This tactic permits the fan to reevaluate the merits of the storyworld and their enjoyment of it.

Fans had strong affective responses to "The Rains of Castamere." Sharing this emotional response may be cathartic or it may be a way for commenters to confirm that they are not alone in feeling the way they do. Regardless, the first posts on both threads were sentimental:

(Screams) – E1 (Experts)

*F\*\*K THIS SHOW! F\*\*K THIS SHOW IN ITS COLD BLACK ABSCESS OF A HEART! At this point, I'm only waiting for our Dragon Overlords to BURN THE ENTIRE F\*\*KING CONTINENT TO THE GROUND!* – N1 (Newbies)

Responses ranged from grief to rage, from awe to confusion. Additionally, there were comments that addressed how the emotional toll of the episode carried on after its conclusion:

*My wife, who has not read the books looked at me in shocked silence, like she couldn't believe I would read and enjoy something so horrible. So I was like "THAT'S NOT IN THE BOOK, I SWEAR!" and then she started to cry. Thanks a lot HBO. Now I have to deal with a sobbing wife who thinks I'm a monster.* – E22

*My wife's 9 months pregnant and I was going back and forth whether or not to warn her... no tears for her, but she's a bit shell shocked.* – E53

Despite these accounts, very few fans indicated dissatisfaction or an intent to quit the show. A surprising finding was that the experts demonstrated sentimental negotiation as often as newbies, despite having foreknowledge of the Red Wedding. On the other hand, while the experts thread expressed surprise, disgust and bewilderment regarding the depiction of violence committed against Talisa (different from the character of Robb's bride in the books who avoids a similar fate), the newbies participated in a collective revenge fantasy that visited unprintable tortures on Frey and Bolton, the murderers.

### Reasoned Negotiation

Another tactic observed in fans is the logical examination and critique of technical elements in the show and the discussion of potentially significant clues to future events. This tactic fulfills fans' impulse to fill narrative gaps they perceive and to shore up their understanding of the storyworld. It is also closely related to the production practice of fan theories.

Most interestingly, reasoned negotiations were not observed in opposition to emotional responses, but rather as a result of them. For example, the experts' surprise over Talisa's death results in a lengthy exchange comparing the events of the episode to those in the novel; this exchange leads to speculation about what Talisa's death may suggest about Jeyne Westerling – her still-alive novelized analog – in future books. Similarly, shock and disgust at depictions of violence in general in the newbies thread leads to a debate about whether or not it may be "the most violent thing ever shown on television."

### **Relational Negotiation**

In order to make sense of new information, fans will compare it to knowledge they already have that they perceive as related in order to fit it into their contextual frame for the storyworld. This tactic is known as relational negotiation and is observed when fans compare their experience to other similar narrative experiences they have had.

Relational negotiation tended to inform one or more of the other three tactics employed. For instance, fans might compare what they are feeling to a time when they felt the same way:

*How about Rory dumping Dean for Jess in Gilmore Girls? That's high up there for me. – N14*

Or, it might follow from a reasoned response, as in the newbies' debate mentioned above, where *Spartacus*, *Casino*, *Breaking Bad*, *Twin Peaks* and other media productions were compared for their depictions of violence.

It might also be a reference made for comic effect, as when user E7 writes "Just like the gypsy woman said!" referring to a popular *Archer* meme about doomful prediction (Table 1).

### **Comic Negotiation**

Humor is a powerful tool that is used to diffuse tension, share an opinion, highlight an issue and/or express complex emotions. As a tactic for fans, it is also employed to creatively negotiate meaning through the use of pastiche.

*The AV Club* commenters used humor frequently, even and sometimes especially when discussing controversial themes:

*Seeing everyone die was harrowing, but her death was particularly gutting. – E65*

*couldn't stomach it, eh? – S16*

*I've had a bellyful of these puns. – E68*

The use of humor was a convention shared in both threads. This takes a variety of forms including sarcasm, puns and pastiche. In some cases, comedy also served as a form of social commentary, or satire, particularly when addressing objectionable depictions in the narrative. Pastiche was used typically in combination with relational negotiation, relying on a reference to another narrative and applied to the current context, which might result in an interesting insight or cognitive dissonance (if *too* incongruous). In one instance, newbie N34 quotes Stephen's (Samuel L. Jackson's) monologue

from the film *Django Unchained*, adapted so that the monologue is directed at Walder Frey and updated to reference characters in *Game of Thrones*. The passage is unsettling, particularly as it follows from the collective revenge fantasy that took place in the newbies thread (discussed above).

### **Spoilers: Experts vs. Newbies**

A "spoiler" is when narrative information is shared with a person who intends to fully experience the narrative, and when foreknowledge may negatively impact their experience. While the expert and newbie threads are ostensibly separated to prevent non-reader (i.e., newbie) fans from having their experience spoiled by readers of the source material, there are a significant number of fans that post under both. As such, fans that are particularly opposed to spoilers must remain vigilant, even when participating in the newbies thread. For the most part, the so-called experts that comment in the newbies thread are respectful, and spoilers only tend to slip in by accident or when a non-reader fan has explicitly asked for clarification about character or setting. In a discussion on the thread where non-reader fans share how certain elements of the episode were spoiled for them, one expert implies that readers should not be obligated to spare the feelings of non-readers with spoiler warnings. This fan is roundly criticized for sharing their opinion.

What is it about you ASoIaF fans that makes you think everyone on the planet is obliged to read fantasy novels the moment they come out? – N47

*[Username]'s attitude is why I wish they'd rename the "experts" thread to something that doesn't have the same gravitas. – N122*

Fewer commenters attempt to defend the fan:

*I think [username] is talking more about forums OUTSIDE of this one. – S8*

While one commenter debated the issue directly with the fan:

*Although I disagree, I hear you. The problem is that for the first time in history, all of us--most of the seven billion--have access not only to all the literature man has created ever, but to all the worlds' TV and movies, and so gripes about the entertainment being old enough not to need a spoiler warning are meaningless... – N46*

In these examples, the negotiations of fans play out in the ways they respond to the expert fan's opinion. Is it possible for fans to effectively avoid and/or withhold information that might result in spoilers? This is a question that each fan wrestled with through their engagement with the *Game of Thrones* storyworld.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Post-digital Reading**

As everyday practice, the activity investigated in this study falls somewhere between reading (Dresang & Koh, 2009; Rothbauer, 2016) and production (Price & Robinson, 2016;

Jenkins, 2006). Consider the approximate chronology of the experience of the fans in question: they viewed the episode on television or computer screen, in most cases in the Sunday night hour when it first aired. As Van Steenhuyse (2013) has noted, transmedia fans develop their own contextual frame based on their consumption of narrative content. The immersive experience of watching “Rains of Castamere” transformed each fan’s contextual frame for the *Game of Thrones* storyworld, providing new information and knowledge that they were required to make sense of. They then visited the *AV Club* website – for many of them, as existing members of the community, this represented part of their regular media fan experience: an everyday practice dictated by habit or impulse or compulsion rather than an articulated information need. Wilson & Walsh’s (1996) general model of information behavior accounts for “passive attention” and “passive search” as information-seeking behaviour; Laplante & Downie (2011) provide an example of the application and adaptation of this model in their study of music information-seeking in everyday life. The process of seeking paratextual content in the form of a review or of community interaction is similar to the music information-seeking experience, which results in hedonic outcomes (experience of pleasure and engagement). “Hedonic outcomes” are described as a type of information use (Laplante & Downie, 2011). By clicking to one review page or the other, each fan allowed a particular label to be assigned to them, defining them within the fandom as newbie or expert. They may or may not have read the review published by the staff writer, but they certainly scrolled to the bottom of the page, read the comments posted and then added their own. In many cases, posting resulted in exchanges, a dialogue with other fans. This dialogue – the focus of the current project – is but one site where each fan’s negotiation of *Game of Thrones* played out. The sensemaking process would have continued for all of them, as they each took something away from their interactions that would shape the storyworld in their own minds. According to Hills (2002), this aspect of negotiating a transmedia system is hyperdiagetic; it is a gap-filling process, where fans are invited to speculate and assign their own affective meanings. This quality may also be applied to post-digital reading practices, as described by Rothbauer (2016): an answer to a text read in context.

### **Engagement**

The behavior that prompts this study is the fundamentally interactive act of posting (i.e., writing) about *Game of Thrones*. The underlying information behaviors of *Game of Thrones* fans – the characteristic ways in which they post – are what this study ultimately articulates. Besides implications regarding identity formation (discussed below), the four tactics revealed in the analysis are all about *making sense of* new narrative information. Each tactic describes how fans undertake this task, and as such demonstrates information behaviors specific to the negotiation of a transmedia system.

The more slippery – and altogether relevant – question is why they do it. In information behavior (IB) research, practices are often determined based on motivations and needs. Engagement as a theoretical concept has been addressed less commonly in IB studies and usually as a desirable outcome of a user experience. Laplante & Downie (2011) define *engagement* as a quality characterized by challenge, esthetic and sensory appeal, feedback, awareness, motivation, interest, and affect. Engagement is discussed as an *effect* of activity, rather than an *impetus* to act. This may be an aspect of IB that has been previously overlooked, since immersive engagement in the storyworld is what motivates these *Game of Thrones* fans to extend their experience into an interactive forum online. As Rothbauer (2016) notes of reading, this aspect of fan information behavior can be understood as realizing an intention. This finding suggests that further investigation into engagement as a corollary to motivation and information need is required.

By contrast, engagement is a central theme in fan studies literature, and as such its theoretical exploration in that domain represents a valuable resource for IB research. Evans (2016) defines engagement in the context of fans and audiences as a type of behavior. Her analysis finds three main types of engagement discussed by transmedia producers and audiences, which are immersive, interactive and para-active. While all three influence the information behavior of fans, para-active engagement is the most relevant to the current study: it represents the activities that happen *around* the narrative source text. It also represents a form of information seeking, where the fan seeks to fill perceived narrative gaps in the storyworld. Evans includes reading of paratexts, such as wikis and comments threads (i.e., lurking), as a type of para-active engagement. Each of the four tactics explored in the analysis provide evidence of para-active engagement. Other researchers, by comparison, define engagement in terms of production (Stein & Busse, 2012; Jenkins, 2006; Booth, 2015). Citing an influential blog post by a fan, Stein & Busse (2012) and Booth (2015) study fan engagement in terms of affirmational fandom (i.e., sanctioned fan production, e.g., memes, fanfiction, etc. that promotes the authorized source material) and transformational fandom (i.e., non-sanctioned production that seek to fix perceived issues in the source material). Booth (2015) provides a nuanced interpretation that suggests the information behaviors of fans tend to hover somewhere between “affirmational” and “transformational” engagement. The examples discussed in results demonstrate the complex relationship *Game of Thrones* fans have with the show and novels.

The use of digital media to share information and publish fan productions is the most visible outcome of fan engagement (e.g., *SuperWhoLock* Tumblr, as described by Booth, 2015, p. 25). However, a less visible, more mundane form of fan engagement becomes evident in the post-digital reading practices of *Game of Thrones* fans. Finally, Jenkins, through his evolving definition of the concept of participatory culture,

has repeatedly addressed the role of digital media in empowering and engaging fans, providing new and improved means of sharing, appropriating, remixing, annotating and archiving texts (Jenkins, 2006; Jenkins, 1992/2013). Arguably, the everyday information behaviors of the fans studied in the current research might be described as participatory culture.

### **Identity Formation**

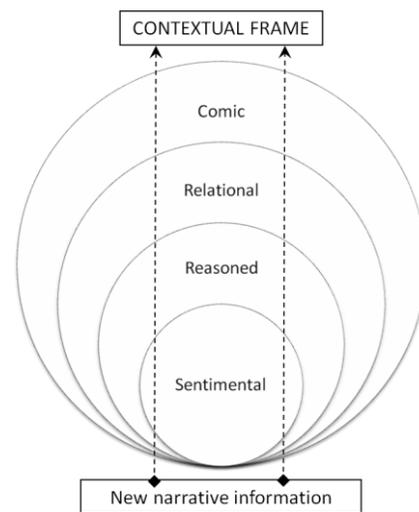
A key finding that emerges from this study is evidence of how transmedia negotiations shape fan identity. This finding is made clear through an examination of three emergent themes in the analysis of comments: (1) the critical evaluation of graphic depictions, (2) the reaction to and treatment of spoilers, and (3) the use of humor and pastiche.

The show has not been without its share of controversy over its hyperviolent depictions (e.g., Ferreday, 2015; Strang, 2013), and it is likely that fans are aware of these broader cultural debates about the representation of sex and violence in media. Comments are dominated by examples of fans wrestling with the graphic representations in the episode. All four tactics observed contribute to this behavior. As a fictional representation, some fans question if the violence in the episode is justified. Some express their ambivalence by comparing the visual depiction with elements from the novel, while others compare it to violent scenes from other films and television shows. The comments studied demonstrate how each fan's experience of the episode shapes their critical response and continued self-identification as a fan. Once more, this is evidence of the hyperdiagetic nature of transmedia information behavior and post-digital reading (Hills, 2002). But it is also evidence of how everyday life practices contribute to identity formation. Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) describe a spectacle/performance paradigm (SPP) in which being a member of an audience is closely associated with the construction of the person. Their characterization of SPP is echoed by authors in fan and information studies, such as Floridi (2015), Rothbauer (2004), Gray, et al. (2007) and Booth (2015), observing how people's everyday activities increasingly cast them in the role of audience member; Abercrombie and Longhurst point out that the qualities of being part of an audience, therefore, "leak out" into the wider realms of everyday life. From our present historical position, this effect can be attributed to the increasing pervasiveness of digital technologies.

As Jenkins (2006) has observed, spoilers play an important role in the construction of fandom. In transmedia fan communities, where distributed transtexts and paratexts compete for a fan's attention, spoilers may be even more relevant to community and individual identity formation. The analysis of comments confirms this observation, demonstrating how the treatment of spoilers takes place in a fan community. This observation is consistent with the SPP paradigm (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998). Spoilers are representative of information avoidance as opposed to information seeking. Avoiding information in the form of spoilers has been explored in IB literature (e.g., Harviainen and Savolainen, 2014). However, as indicated previously, few IB studies have examined

the information behavior of fans specifically. Future research would be needed to more fully explore information avoidance in the context of fans and everyday life practice.

The examples of comic negotiation described above provide evidence of fan pastiche and satirical humor. Fan pastiche is defined as the mimicry or "deliberate imitation of an act or text" (Booth, 2015, p. 2). Booth (2015) characterizes it in opposition to parody, the appropriation and aping of activity with commercial intent. On the surface, then, pastiche represents affirmational fandom. A surprising finding of this study, however, was how fans employed pastiche and the humorous treatment of narrative content in a wide variety of transformative (i.e., critical) and intertextual ways. Just as spoilers influence the formation of communities and individuals, the comedic conventions observed in fan interactions reflect the construction of fan identity.



**Figure 1.** *Everyday Tactics for negotiating narrative information*

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The above findings support a preliminary definition of the transmedia fan as a post-digital reader that negotiates transmedia systems through sentimental, reasoned, relational and comic tactics. The identity of the transmedia fan is constructed through their everyday negotiation of the transmedia system (i.e., storyworld). A post-digital reader engages with a narrative through a hyperdiagetic sensemaking process. Transmedia fans are further distinguished by para-active engagement in the storyworld, i.e., information-seeking behavior.

Rather than distinct operations, tactics are used in combination. In addition, a causal relationship is observed in the ways tactics are employed. Sentimental negotiation is observed as a fan's initial gut reaction, while reasoned negotiation applies logical evaluation that qualifies and sometimes revises emotionally-driven judgment. Relational and comic tactics for making sense of new narrative information are also employed cumulatively, building upon the fan's ongoing emotional and para-active engagement. This process of negotiation allows for the transmedia fan to fit new narrative information into their contextual frame of the storyworld. Figure 1 provides a

visual representation of how tactics occur causally and in combination.

An emergent everyday information behavior cycle model of the transmedia fan demonstrates how tactics are used to negotiate narrative information through para-active engagement, and thus shape the fan's contextual frame of the story-world (Figure 2). As the transmedia fan is continually exposed to new narrative information, either through active or passive everyday information seeking, this study theorizes that a continual process of negotiation takes place. Future research could determine if this model is equally applicable in alternative cases of transmedia fandoms, as well as in the broader conception of the post-digital reader and everyday consumer.



**Figure 2.** Everyday information behavior cycle model of the transmedia fan

As a pilot case study, this research is limited in its scope. Since research is ongoing, findings are considered preliminary. The analysis of a larger sample of comments from the respective datasets may reveal additional themes related to fans' everyday information behavior. Future case studies, as well as qualitative and quantitative research on fan populations, could shed light on the nature of transmedia fandom and the information behavior of transmedia fans. This study has sought to address a gap in LIS research on fans as information users. In doing so, it has also provided a roadmap for bridging everyday information behavior and fan studies scholarship.

Definitions, models and findings on the transmedia fan and on post-digital reading are significant since new understandings of information practices impact library service delivery and literacy in contemporary post-digital society. The everyday tactics observed and theorized in this paper provide valuable insight into how people manage information in a media-rich and technologically-mediated world. What we have characterized as "post-digital" information behavior is increasingly becoming the "new normal," as Floridi (2015) and others have emphasized and must therefore be included in the ongoing study of everyday life.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Lisa Given for her feedback and encouragement in undertaking this project. Institutional support for the study has been provided by Charles Sturt University and Swinburne University of Technology.

## REFERENCES

- Aardse, K. (2014). Alternate reality games, narrative disbursement and canon: The lost experience. In K.M. Barton & J. M. Lampley (Eds.), *Fan CULTure: Essays of participatory fandom in the 21st century* (pp. 106-118). Jefferson: McFarland.
- Abercrombie, N., & Longhurst, B. (1998). *Audiences: A sociological theory of performance and imagination*. London: Sage.
- Benioff, D. & Weiss, D. B. (Writers), & Nutter, D. (Director). (2013). *The Rains of Castamere*. In D. Benioff & D. B. Weiss (Producers), *Game of Thrones*. HBO.
- Booth, P. (2015). *Playing fans: Negotiating fandom and media in the digital age*. Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press.
- Booth, P. (2017). Fandom in the classroom. *Uncanny: A magazine of science fiction and fantasy*. Retrieved April 16, 2017 from <http://uncannymagazine.com/article/fandom-in-the-classroom/>.
- Bourdaa, M. (2014). This is not marketing. This is HBO: Branding HBO with transmedia storytelling. *Networking Knowledge*, 7(1), 18-25. Retrieved April 16, 2017 from <http://www.ojs.meccsa.org.uk/index.php/netknow/article/view/328>.
- de Certeau, M. (1984). *The practice of everyday life*. Trans. Steven Randall. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Cramer, F. (2015). What is 'post-digital'? In D. M. Berry & M. Dieter (Eds.), *Postdigital aesthetics: Art, computation and design* (pp. 12-26). London: Palgrave.
- Dresang, E.T., & Koh, K. (2009). Radical change theory, Youth information behavior, and school libraries. *Library Trends*, 58(1), 26-50.
- Evans, E. (2016). Negotiating "engagement" within transmedia culture. Paper presented at the Summer School in Cultural Studies, University of Jyväskylä, Finland. Retrieved December 30, 2016 from [http://www.academia.edu/26560923/Negotiating\\_Engagement\\_within\\_Transmedia\\_Culture](http://www.academia.edu/26560923/Negotiating_Engagement_within_Transmedia_Culture)
- Ferreday, D. (2015). Game of Thrones, Rape culture and feminist fandom. *Australian Feminist Studies* 30: 21-36. Retrieved April 16, 2017 from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2014.998453>
- Floridi, L. (2014). *The fourth revolution: How the infosphere is reshaping human reality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Floridi, L. Ed. (2015). *The onlife manifesto: Being human in a hyperconnected era*. New York: Springer.
- Ganzon, S. C. (2014). Control, destroy, merge, refuse, retake: Players, the author function, and the mass effect ending controversy. In T. Ravy & E. Forcier (Eds.), *Words, worlds and narratives: Transmedia and immersion* (pp. 126-146). Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press.
- Gray, J., Sandvoss, C., & Harrington, C. L. (2007). Introduction: Why study fans? In J. Gray, C. Sandvoss, and C. L. Harrington (Eds.), *Fandom: Identities and communities in a mediated world* (pp. 1-16). New York: New York University Press.

- Gursoy, A. (2015). Evaluating fan fiction metadata for preservation use. *Proceedings of the 78th ASIS&T Annual Meeting: Information science with impact: Research in and for the community*. St Louis, MO. Retrieved April 16, 2017 from <https://www.asist.org/files/meetings/am15/proceedings/submissions/posters/247poster.pdf>.
- Hart, C., Schoolbred, M., Butcher, D., & Kane, D. (1999). The bibliographic structure of fan information. *Collection Building*, 18(2), 81-89.
- Harvey, C. (2015). *Fantastic transmedia: Narrative, play and memory across science fiction and fantasy storyworlds*. London: Palgrave.
- Harviainen, J. T., & Savolainen, R. (2014). Information as capability for action and capital in synthetic worlds. *Proceeds of ISIC: Part 1*. Retrieved April 16, 2017 from <http://www.informationr.net/ir/19-4/isic/isic12.html#.WPP8F9IrJaQ>.
- Henderson, S. (2015). *The Hunger Games fanfiction as a community of practice: forming identities in online communities* (Thesis). University of British Columbia, Canada, 2015. Retrieved April 16, 2017 from <https://circle.ubc.ca/handle/2429/54488>.
- Hills, M. (2002). *Fan cultures*. London: Routledge.
- Jenkins, H. (1992/2013). *Textual poachers: Television fans and participatory culture*. Updated Twentieth Anniversary Edition. New York: Routledge.
- Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York: New York University Press.
- Jenkins, H., Ford, S., & Green, J. (2013). *Spreadable media: Creating value and meaning in a networked culture*. New York: New York University Press.
- Jenson, J. (1992). Fandom as pathology: The consequences of characterisation. In Lewis, L. (Ed.), *The adoring audience: Fan culture and popular media* (pp. 9-29). London: Routledge.
- Kofmel, K. (1997). Solitary act and social interaction: Adults reading science fiction and fantasy. *Canadian Association of Information Studies (CAIS/ACSI)*. Retrieved April 16, 2017 from <http://www.cais-acsi.ca/ojs/index.php/cais/article/view/178/353>.
- Kurtz, B. W. D. L., & Bourdaa, M. (2016). The world is changing... and transtexts are rising. In B. W. D. L. Kurtz & M. Bourdaa (Eds.), *The rise of transtexts: Challenges and opportunities*. New York: Routledge.
- Laplante, A., & Downie, J. S. (2011). The utilitarian and hedonic outcomes of music information-seeking in everyday life. *Library & Information Science Research*, 33, 202-210.
- Martin, G. R. R. (1996). *A Game of Thrones*. New York: Voyager Books.
- Nyman, N. (2010). *Information behaviour in World of Warcraft* (Thesis). Umeå University, Sweden. Retrieved April 16, 2017 from <http://umu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:394752/FULLTEXT01.pdf>.
- Peckosie J., & Hill H. (2015). Beyond traditional publishing models: An examination of the relationships between authors, readers, and publishers. *Journal of Documentation*, 71(3), pp. 609-626.
- Price, L., & Robinson, L. (2016). "Being in a Knowledge Space": Information behaviour of cult media fan communities. *Journal of Information Science*. Retrieved April 16, 2017 from <https://doi.org/10.1177/0165551516658821>.
- Pugh S. (2005). The democratic genre: Fan fiction in a literary context. Bridgend: Seren.
- Rasmussen Pennington, D. (2016). "The most passionate cover I've seen": Emotional information in fan-created U2 music videos. *Journal of Documentation*, 72(3), pp. 569-590.
- Rothbauer, P. (2004). *Finding and creating possibility: Reading in the lives of lesbian, bisexual and queer young women* (Doc. dissertation). Western University, Canada. Retrieved April 16, 2017 from [https://works.bepress.com/paulette\\_rothbauer/17/](https://works.bepress.com/paulette_rothbauer/17/).
- Rothbauer, P. (2010). Beyond a signpost for resistance: The promise of Michel de Certeau's practices of everyday life for LIS scholarship. In G. J. Leckie, L. M. Given, and J. E. Buschman (Eds.), *Critical theory for library and information science: Exploring the social from across the disciplines* (pp. 53-62). Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, LLC.
- Rothbauer, P. (2011). Rural teens on the role of reading in their lives. *The Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults*, 1(2). Retrieved April 16, 2017 from <http://www.yalsa.ala.org/jrlya/2011/02/rural-teens-on-the-role-of-reading-in-their-lives/>.
- Sandvoss, C. (2007). The death of the reader? Literary theory and the study of texts in popular culture. In J. Gray, C. Sandvoss, and C. L. Harrington (Eds.), *Fandom: Identities and communities in a mediated world* (pp. 19-32). New York: New York University Press.
- Serantes, L. C. (2014). Young adults reflect on the experience of reading comics in contemporary society: Overcoming the commonplace and recognizing complexity (Doctoral dissertation). Western University, Canada. Retrieved April 16, 2017 from <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3442&context=etd>.
- Shepherd, J. (2016). Game of Thrones season 6 ratings: Show brought in 25.1 million viewers on average per episode. July 19, 2016. *The Independent*. Retrieved April 16, 2017 from <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/news/game-of-thrones-season-6-ratings-show-brought-in-251-million-viewers-on-average-per-episode-a7144261.html>.
- Rothbauer, P., Skerdingstad, K. I., McKechnie, L. & K. Oterholm, Eds. (2016). *Plotting the reading experience: Theory/practice/politics*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
- Soto, C. B. (2015). *The role of online reading and writing in the literacy practices of first-year writing students* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Massachusetts-Amherst, USA. Retrieved April 16, 2017 from [http://scholarworks.umass.edu/dissertations\\_2/326/](http://scholarworks.umass.edu/dissertations_2/326/).
- Stein, L. E., & Busse, K. (2012). Introduction: The literary, television and digital adventures of the beloved detective. In L. E. Stein & K. Busse (Eds.), *Sherlock and transmedia fandom: Essays on the BBC series*. Jefferson: McFarland.
- Strang, F. (2013). SPOILER ALERT: Too gory even for Game of Thrones? *Daily Mail Online*. Retrieved April 16, 2017 from <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-2335087/Game-Thrones-left-fans-left-sickened-bloodshed-touted-gruesome-scenes-TV-history.html>.
- Van Steenhuyse, V. (2014). Oh, the angst! Emotional immersion in Jane Austen fan fiction. In T. Ravy & E. Forcier (Eds.), *Words, worlds and narratives: Transmedia and immersion* (pp. 103-125). Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press.
- Wilson, T. D., & Walsh, C. (1996). *Information behaviour: An inter-disciplinary perspective*. London: British Library Research & Innovation Centre. Retrieved April 16, 2017 from <http://informationr.net/tdw/publ/infbehav/>.