

Re(a)d Wedding: A Comparative Discourse Analysis of Fan Responses to *Game of Thrones*

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INTRODUCTION

A **transmedia system** is a media-hopping network of intertextualities that extends the narrative “storyworld” of an original production (Kinder, 1991; Jenkins, 2006). As such, fans of transmedia storyworlds employ unique tactics for negotiating a complex information space.

This **ongoing pilot project** seeks to define the “**transmedia fan**” by identifying the negotiation tactics (de Certeau, 1984) employed by fans through their engagement with transmedia storyworlds.

BACKGROUND

HBO’s *Game of Thrones* and the book series it adapts, *A Song of Ice and Fire*, together represent the source texts at the heart of a transmedia system (Bourdaa, 2014). The *Game of Thrones* (GOT) transmedia system (or storyworld) includes:

- **Television (HBO) series** (>60 episodes)
- Five video games
- A graphic novel adaptation
- Multiple companion books
- The **novels**
- Tabletop games
- Mobile apps
- Merchandise
- Fan productions (e.g., podcasts, fanfiction, wikis, videos, music)



Fig. 3. ‘Keep Calm’ Meme Generator Result (source: <https://www.tumblr.com/tagged/can't-keep-calm>)

Two distinct fandoms co-exist in relation to the GOT storyworld:

- Fans of the television series
- Fans of the novels

“**The Rains of Castamere**” (2013; Season 3, Ep. 9) adapts the “Red Wedding” portrayed in the novel *A Storm of Swords* (2000).



Fig. 1. Logo for the popular Telltale Games Series. (source: <https://telltale.com>)



Fig. 2. *A Song of Ice and Fire* box set by George R.R. Martin. Actor Sean Bean, from HBO’s *Game of Thrones*, featured on exterior. (source: www.georgerrmartin.com)

METHODS

The pilot project undertook analysis of online comments on review website *The AV Club* (www.avclub.com). Comments about “The Rains of Castamere” on *The AV Club* are separated into two threads:

- **Newbies** (GOT fans unfamiliar with the novels and averse to spoilers)
- **Experts** (GOT fans that have read the novels)

The first 200 comments from each thread were selected as sample for qualitative analysis:



Fig. 4. Corpus composition and pilot sample sizes.

Using a Grounded Theory approach for **qualitative coding** (Charmaz, 2006), comments in the two pilot samples were coded for themes using NVivo 11. Preliminary results identify **four different types of negotiation tactics**.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Codes fell into **four types** that describe how fans made sense of narrative information (i.e., tactics).

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

Table 1. Examples of negotiation tactics identified in sample data.

Analysis of codes revealed that initial reactions were grounded in emotion. Reasoned, relational and comic tactics were often driven in dialogue by sentiment, revealing a progression between tactics (Fig. 5).

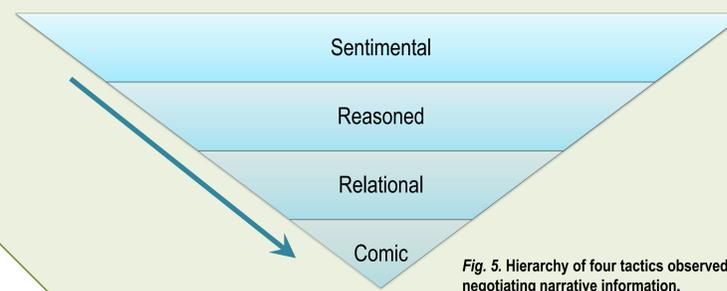


Fig. 5. Hierarchy of four tactics observed for negotiating narrative information.

DISCUSSION

The comparison of results between the two samples revealed key observations on fans’ engagement with a transmedia storyworld:

- **Para-Active Engagement:** The compulsion to fill gaps in narrative understanding by seeking platforms with paratextual content (e.g., *The AV Club*) represents a level of engagement with a narrative that is characteristic of transmedia fans (Evans, 2016).
- **Fan Identity:** Shocking narrative turns (e.g., violent/graphic depictions) challenge beliefs and shape identity through each fan’s para-active engagement.
- **The Politics of “Spoilers”:** the transmedia fan community develops conventions around sharing and withholding paratextual information.

Fans’ negotiation tactics can be understood as **information behavior**. When transmedia fans encounter new narrative information, they make sense of it within the broader context (i.e., para-active engagement) by employing the observed tactics. Ongoing engagement leads to the perpetual discovery of information that shapes the fan’s narrative understanding (Fig. 6).

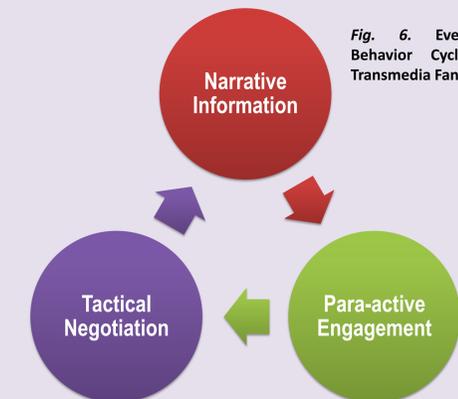


Fig. 6. Everyday Information Behavior Cycle Model of the Transmedia Fan

CONCLUSION

Findings on the “negotiation tactics” of transmedia fans provide insights into how people access and make sense of narrative information that is presented in different media and formats. These insights represent valuable contributions to the study of information behavior and technology use.

Future research should further investigate the existing corpus as well as alternate sites for transmedia fandom (i.e., other narratives), and test preliminary findings. Avenues for future research include:

- Application of computational methods for **sentiment analysis** of corpus (e.g., using R)
- **Qualitative coding** of larger samples and additional corpora
- **Exploratory interviews** with fans

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