

**Everyday Onlife Practice
and Information Behaviour:
A Study of Media Fans in a Postdigital Age**

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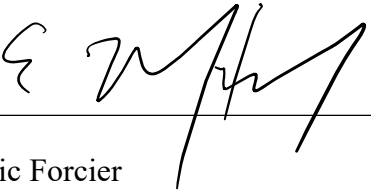
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Declaration

I hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis is original research work and has not been submitted to any other university or institution for a higher degree. Also, I declare that the thesis contains no material previously written or published by another person. Proper citations were made in the text for the materials which were referred from other studies.



Eric Forcier

13 April 2022

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Abstract

As individuals, how we access, use, share, interact with, and engage with information in our everyday lives is always in a process of evolution. Referred to collectively as information behaviours, these activities are influenced by social and cultural norms and the emergence of new technologies. The current project explores how information and communication technologies (ICTs) in everyday life influence the information behaviour of media fans. By studying self-identified fans of media storyworlds (e.g., *Star Wars*, *Game of Thrones*, *Supernatural*, *Mass Effect*, etc), this research seeks to understand the “onlife fan”. Adopting a social constructionist paradigm, this project undertakes a Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) study of media fans. The methods consist of in-depth interviews with 17 participants and content analysis of two online *Game of Thrones* fan communities. This research contributes new theoretical and interdisciplinary understandings of media fandom that establish a bridge between the existing fields of information science and fan studies and builds upon the emerging interdisciplinary subfield of FanLIS. Results demonstrate that media fans are involved in a process of sustained engagement; over time and through media consumption and social participation, they encounter and make sense of information as part of the everyday experience of fandom. They also indicate that fans share and create new information para-actively and, at the same time, construct and perform identities. These behavioural patterns, or *tactics*, are fundamental to fan practices. The research incorporates these concepts into a model for the information behaviour of onlife fans. More broadly, this study presents an emergent theory for *everyday onlife practice*, based on the examples of fans, that incorporates the mediated experience of ICTs in modern daily life. These findings are significant for the development of future research in information science, fan studies, and FanLIS that seeks to understand the critical ways in which practice and identification take shape in a postdigital age.

Acknowledgments

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Any academic project represents a journey of sorts, and this one (as manifested by this document) proved no exception. It began in the fall of 2012, when I met with a group of likeminded researchers at a conference on transmedia and immersion (the product of that encounter can be seen in the volume *Words, Worlds and Narratives*, which I co-edited with Tawnya Ravy). I credit this meeting for planting the seed of what would eventually lead to the undertaking of this study. Therefore, thanks to Christina, Maria, Shawn, Veerle, Tawnya, and the rest of the Salzburg crew for sparking my interest in fan research and getting me to think about points of connection with information science principles.

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1. Research Overview

1.1. Living Onlife

The digital-online world is spilling over into the analogue-offline world and merging with it. This recent phenomenon is variously known as ‘Ubiquitous Computing’, ‘Ambient Intelligence’, ‘The Internet of Things’, or Web-augmented things’. I prefer to refer to it as the onlife experience. It is, or will soon be, the next stage in the development of the information age. We are increasingly living onlife.

(Floridi, 2014, p. 43)

As individuals, our information behaviours—how we access, use, share, interact and engage with information in our everyday lives (Case & Given, 2016; Rothbauer, 2010; Savolainen, 2007)—are always in a process of evolution. These activities are, by necessity, influenced by social and cultural norms and the emergence of new technologies. In the wake of the so-called “digital revolution” (Negroponte, 1996) and rise of the “information society” (Floridi, 2002), we find ourselves in a period where this evolution has continually accelerated, manifesting and mutating into new forms too swiftly to catalogue. In *Convergence Culture*, Henry Jenkins (2006a) refers to this period of accelerated evolution as media convergence. This phenomenon is equally central to Luciano Floridi’s (2014) concepts of the “infosphere” and “onlife experience” (p. 43), which describe how our relationship with information is presently transformed by the many competing, intersecting, merging, and intertwining media through which we filter our lives. “There is no longer any medium in the literal sense: it is now intangible, diffuse and diffracted in the real, and it can no longer even be said that the latter is distorted by it...” (Baudrillard, 1983, p. 54) Baudrillard’s words resonate today in a way that they did not when he wrote them. He argued that television dissolved into life, and life into television, in the ways that human experience was filtered, simulated, and re-lived. Today, it is not just television that melts into reality and generates the infinitely abstracted “hyperreal”

(Baudrillard, 1984, p. 2), but all of mass media: layer upon layer of information, delivered on screens that surround us and through network devices that rest in the palms of our hands. The layers of mediation we engage with and the technologies through which we engage are commonplace now, “spectralised” (Baudrillard, 1983, p. 55), and mostly invisible in the sense that we do not think about them unless they fail. These layers are information channels that weave the fabric of our everyday lives. They shape the ways that we watch films, television programs, and streaming video for news and entertainment; the ways that we read for work, for pleasure, or simply to stay informed; the many ways we play, shop, communicate with friends and family, and participate in our communities. These layers of mediation operate at the “nexus of work, leisure, and family life” (Ocepek, 2018, p. 399). The proliferation of information and communication technologies (ICTs) further dissolves distinctions between reality and simulation. ICT is an umbrella term used by Floridi (2011) in his philosophy of information (cf. Floridi, 2010, pp. 6-8; 2014). It is used, globally, to refer to all networked hardware, such as cell phones, tablets, and computers; the software that enables users to access, manipulate, and transmit information using such devices; and the interconnection of telecommunications networks that, not incidentally, make up the global system we know as the internet and that make digital connectivity an integral part of modern living. The impact of ICTs, and specifically digital media, are foundational to both Jenkins’ and Floridi’s complementary perspectives on 21st century life.

The potential implications of Floridi’s observation about onlife experience, with which I introduce the current study, are staggering. The experience of living onlife is one where the boundaries between online and offline have become fuzzy and movement between the two spheres occurs seamlessly. The boundaries that were still quite distinct 20 years ago are now blurred to a point where the distinction is hardly discernible. We find evidence of this in people’s mundane leisure activities, as we will see in the virtual communities of play with which this study’s interview participants engage (discussed in Chapter 4); or, when members of a fan community communicate their live television viewing experiences through a combination of quotes and textual and visual memes on Twitter (discussed in Chapter 5). These examples demonstrate how people are almost always connected to the network through ICTs—through their phones, their computers, their devices, their media. Network connection is an anticipated

part of daily life. That is what it means to be part of the “infosphere” (Floridi, 2014). It is what it means to participate meaningfully in the information society, in this modern information-rich era where connection is so normal, so matter of fact, and so ordinary that the words online and offline are rendered meaningless. Instead, we are *always onlife* (Burnett & Burnett, 2020), navigating channels and flows of information that traverse layers of digital and analogue mediation. If we are living onlife, or soon will be as Floridi predicts, we are not merely *facing* a fundamental transformation in how we make sense of our worlds but have *already been transformed* in ways that we do not yet fully grasp. Floridi’s observation is a clarion call for research into this transformation and its impacts. Figure 1.1.1 illustrates how engagement with media in everyday life occurs onlife, that is in the mediated online/offline, digital/analogue environments that make up the infosphere.

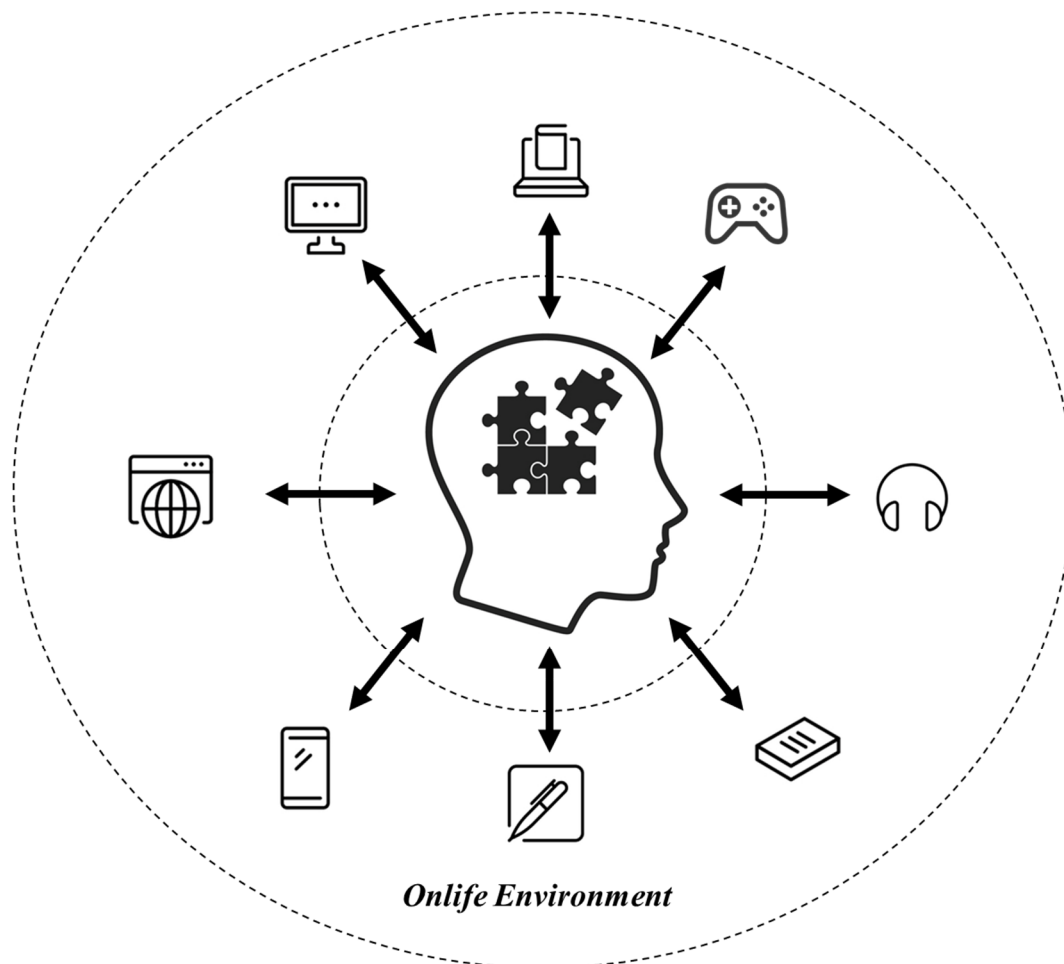


Figure 1.1.1. Living onlife: Engagement with media in everyday life.

Onlife is a profoundly relevant concept in the study of information behaviour at our present moment. However, the impact of onlife experience remains highly theoretical. While much has been written on the digital reading experience (e.g., Dresang and Koh, 2009; Skjerdingsstad & Rothbauer, 2016), human-computer interaction (e.g., Agarwal, 2015; Bilal & Nahl, 2007; Lee, Ocepek & Makri, 2022), and critical media studies (e.g., Booth, 2015; Evans, 2019; Hellekson & Busse, 2006; Jenkins, 2006a; Kurtz & Bourdaa, 2016) there remains a gap in research about onlife. Only recently have researchers studying information behaviours begun to explore the value of onlife from Floridi's philosophy of information (Bawden & Robinson, 2017; Burnett & Burnett, 2020). Grounded data about onlife experience, focused on a particular population, is needed to produce a meaningful result and generate theory that future researchers can build upon. The current project achieves this by exploring the role that onlife experience plays in the information behaviours of media fans.

1.2. Everyday Life Practice of Media Fans

*Fan slang draws a sharp contrast between the “mundane”—the realm of everyday experience and/or those who dwell exclusively within that space— and fandom, an alternative sphere of cultural experience that restores the excitement and freedom that must be repressed to function in ordinary life. One fan writes, “Not only does ‘mundane’ mean ‘everyday life,’ it is also a term used to describe narrowminded, pettiness, judgmental, conformity, and a shallow and silly nature. It is used by people who feel very alienated from society.” **To enter fandom is to “escape” from the “mundane” into the marvelous.***

(Jenkins, 2006b, p. 42, emphasis in original)

Media fans represent a particularly interesting intersection of information, communication, production, and consumption practices. As a subject population, they are a veritable confluence of factors—a perfect storm—that generates the rapid evolution of information behaviours. To understand fans in a broader context, as information users and consumers, it is valuable to consider how their behaviours and practices can be understood as everyday life practice.

Everyday life practice is a framework developed by de Certeau's (1984) sociological investigations into human "ways of operating" (p. xix). 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. Tactics represent resistances to sources of power in society, but they also signify the "hidden productions" of users (de Certeau, 1984, pp. xii-xiii). "Hidden productions", "tactics", "ways of operating": these terms, which help frame this study's central research problem, all signify different aspects of the same thing. They are the everyday practices of individuals: talking, reading, texting, Googling, writing, shopping, playing, watching, listening to music and audio podcasts, role-playing, browsing, and posting to social media sites. They also, ultimately, represent the everyday information behaviours of individuals (Ocepek, 2018).

The proliferation of both transmedia texts (such as *Star Wars*, the *Marvel Cinematic Universe*, and *Game of Thrones*) and media fandoms represent a messy implosion of what Rothbauer (2010, p. 61) calls "comfortable binaries". The spaces in between production and consumption, reading and writing, online and offline are negotiated constantly and often invisibly by consumers, particularly media fans. These negotiations occur every day in contemporary life (e.g., compulsively checking one's Twitter or Facebook feed, tuning in to a favourite podcast, binging on a new Netflix series, searching a wiki, or posting in an online forum). Indeed, these are common examples described and demonstrated by participants in this study. Moreover, these behaviours represent tactics for accessing and managing information within a system imposed by the ICTs consumers use and, in the case of media fans, the conventions established by the media industry.

Jenkins (2006b) argues that to enter "fandom" (the world of the media fan) is to escape from the mundane into the marvellous. However, the hidden productions of fans observed in the current study suggest that fandom is far more complex and fundamentally transformative than that. Indeed, the fans discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 demonstrate that rather than escaping "ordinary life", they are *reinventing* it. Truly engaging with fandom means making a routine of the marvellous. It is "a transformation of the mundane, workaday world into a land of imaginative delight." (Fine, 1983, p. xiii). For fans in this study, the marvellous is a part of their everyday lives, and their everyday lives are far from mundane.

1.3. Media fans as consumers and information users

*Venimus,
venimus
hoc cupidi,
multo magis ire cupimus.
(We came!
We came here desiring,
much more do we desire to go.)*

(Wall inscription, Herculaneum, House of the Telephus Relief AGP-
EDR153487)

Media consumption has always, to an extent, spilled outside the moment an audience encounters a text and into everyday life (Hills, 2009). Take, for instance, the inhabitants of ancient Pompeii. Nineteenth century excavations of the city unearthed evidence of a widespread participatory practice: graffiti (Benefiel, 2013; Lafrance, 2016; cf. ancientgraffiti.org). Of the over 13,000 wall-inscriptions recovered to date, many illustrate alphabet jumbles, riddles, and word games that readers would have encountered and enjoyed every day (Benefiel, 2013). For a city with an estimated 10,000 inhabitants, that represents a significant volume of media content. That content is mostly divorced from its original context today, but for those 10,000 ancient Pompeians each graffito represented a meaningful message, or *semantic information* (Floridi, 2010, p. 34). From this perspective, we can see how a plaster wall and a sharp stone or charcoal stick might have been the Twitter of the ancient age. Imagine what ancient Pompeian readers took away from the graffitied riddles upon the city's walls. Were they fans of specific types of inscriptions, while disdaining others? What meanings and interpretations did they assign to inscriptions? Did they contribute to the creation and dissemination of new inscriptions? Were they referential or paratextual in some way, building upon knowledge of some other aspect of Roman life? What role did this content play in the everyday life of these Pompeian fans? It is a defining characteristic of fans that they form attachments through their consumption of media content (Duffett, 2013, p. 123; Sandvoss, 2005, p. 8; Williams, 2015). Part of what makes them fans is how they extend their engagement with media content by sharing and generating new

content. Borrowing from de Certeau's (1984) theory of everyday life practice, Jenkins (2003) describes this participatory activity as textual poaching, where fans are depicted as "information hunters and gatherers" (para. 4; cf. Jenkins, 1992/2013). The fanfiction readings and writings and the costume/cosplay experiments of interview participants described in Chapter 4 represent hobbyist "maker" practices that involve information creation as much as hunting, gathering, and poaching information (Huvila, et al., 2020, p. 1; cf. Gorichanaz, 2019; Huvila, 2022). As such, media fandom is a fertile site for understanding information behaviour, because of fans' heightened engagement with information-rich media content.

In the infosphere, our stones and charcoal sticks have glowing screens. Our tools afford ways to engage with and generate information in far more sophisticated ways, and yet the action of consuming and producing content is still fundamentally the same. Increased access and integration of digital media into the fabric of daily life has led to an *evolution* in practices, rather than the introduction of wholly new ways of doing. Ancient romans wrote on physical walls in much the same way social media users write on Facebook walls (Lafrance, 2016), and for much the same purpose: to communicate, to share information, to *connect*. The *Game of Thrones* fans described in Chapter 5, for example, use websites like the *AV Club* (avclub.com) and Twitter as ways to connect with each other discursively over their shared entertainment. The difference is not in the purpose, but in the effectiveness of the practice. The affordances of digital media increase our ability to share and circulate content, making it more *spreadable*. Spreadability refers to the potential to share information and the technical resources that make it easier to circulate some types of content over others (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013, p. 4). This has widespread implications, as Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2013) make clear. In addition to reshaping economic structures that control who can access information, reconfiguring legal structures, social relations, and cultural and political participation, spreadability lies at the core of onlife experience for fans. It is the spreadability of content that permits the development of tactics for making a routine of the marvellous in fans' everyday lives.

1.4. Media fans

Media fans are just people. Like anyone else, they can be rational, biased, stubborn, critical, tired, liberal or open-minded. One of the

central differences between fans and other people, however, is that they have experienced a meaningfully different feeling to others and cannot always rationally explain why.

(Duffett, 2013, p. 124)

Any study of the media fan should begin with a basic understanding of what being a media fan entails. Coppa's (2006) historical account provides a comprehensive overview of how media fandom has distinguished itself from other communities of consumers, leisure-seekers, enthusiasts, and amateurs. Price (2017; Price & Robinson, 2016) also traces a brief history of media fandom from the nineteenth century to the twenty-first century, emphasising that the increasing presence of ICTs in daily life has led to an existential debate about fandom in a culture that allows fans to be "more visible and interconnected than ever" (Price & Robinson, 2016, p. 651). Who are media fans?

1. **Fans are readers.** In her exploration of the reading experiences of comic book readers, Serantes (2014) notes that the focus of her study ultimately narrows to "a very particular reader: the fan" (p. 8). Rothbauer's (2004) study on reading in the everyday life of queer youth provides evidence that reading fanfiction and engaging in other fan-based literary activities play significant roles in identity formation and the development of social connections. 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). Coppa (2006) also emphasises the role of reading in the consumption and production practices that define the media fan. While fan studies researchers often explore narrative productions that are not limited to the written word (e.g., television, film, video games, online/digital participatory practices that involve social content platforms, like *Archive of Our Own*), the source of the fan's attention is often still referred to as a "text" (e.g., Jenkins, 1991/2013; Price & Robinson, 2021; Sandvoss, 2017). The reading practices of fans, whether in the traditional sense of a print text or in the multiple digital literacies perceived by information researchers that include mass media texts (e.g., Dresang & Koh, 2009),

are fundamentally intertextual because they “are read in the context of other texts” (Sandvoss, 2017, p. 34; cf. Kristeva, 1980).

2. **Fans are *viewers*.** Fan studies literature is primarily focused on a definition of the fan as audience (e.g., Lewis, 1992). Abercrombie and Longhurst’s (1998) landmark text examines how fandom has redefined how researchers understand audiences, proposing new frameworks for the study of media consumers. Their research focuses on visual media, in particular (i.e., television and film), including their spectacle/performance paradigm which places the production in relation to a larger “mediascape” (p. 36). Their paradigm emphasises the impact of a media production on the everyday life and identity formation of the viewer (pp. 36-37). The abundance of film and television-based fandoms is reflected in the abundance of scholarship on fans as viewers (e.g., Booth, 2015; Evans, 2019; Hills, 2002; Jenkins, 2006a; Kinder, 1991; Lewis, 1992).
3. **Fans are *players*.** What distinguishes fans from the traditional perspective of the mainstream media consumer is a higher level of engagement and participation with the source text (Evans, 2019; Sandvoss, 2005). Booth (2015) makes this the overarching premise of his book, *Playing Fans*. “Every day,” Booth (2015) writes, “we play with our media; every day we are fans. We watch, we join groups, and we chat” (p. 1). The social interactivity that is highlighted in this characterisation suggests that fans are more than just passive readers or audience members, even if they are not purposefully creating or producing a *thing*. Their engagement with the narrative world and with a community of like-minded people make fans something more than just viewers (Duffett, 2013, p. 20; Evans, 2019, p. 2). In an information behaviour context (introduced in Section 1.7 and explored in detail in Chapter 2, Section 2.2), it is this quality of the fan that also marks them as an information user, since it is through engagement that information seeking becomes a conscious goal (Laplante & Downie, 2011; Wilson & Walsh, 1996). Fans are also players in a more literal sense. The characterisation of fans as computer, video, and tabletop gamers is equally relevant to a study of transmedia fandom as their characterisation as readers and viewers (e.g., Forcier, 2013; Ganzon, 2013; Klasttrup & Tosca, 2014; Thon,

2014). Rothbauer (2011) indicates that “invisible” literacies resulting from the “undeniably media-rich and technologically mediated lives” of individuals are yet poorly understood (para. 2). She argues that the use of Dresang and Koh’s (2009) broader conception of reading, which includes practices surrounding digital and mobile media, would ensure that such literacies are properly addressed. The concept of onlife introduced in the previous sections is useful in achieving this task, as it provides a vocabulary for re-framing concepts such as reading, viewing, and playing. Dresang and Koh’s (2009) approach to reading under the auspices of radical change theory may be easily re-framed as *onlife reading*, for example, because it seeks to capture the invisible transformations undergone by the user through their interaction with mediating technologies.

4. **Fans are *producers* and *participants*.** An emphasis on fan *production* (rather than consumption) has emerged in the last 20 years of scholarship, as ICTs have provided more opportunities for the participatory and creative activities of fans (Booth, 2015; Bruns, 2008; Jenkins, 2006a; 2006b; Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013; Price, 2017; Price & Robinson, 2016). Such production takes the form of fanfiction (Bacon-Smith, 1992; Pugh, 2005), fan films or “vids” (Gwenllian Jones, 2002; Jenkins, 2006a), music videos (Rasmussen Pennington, 2016), wikis, blogs (Jenkins, 2006b), memes (Booth, 2015) and arrangements of online information repositories (Gursoy, 2015; Hart et al., 1999; Price & Robinson, 2021). Price and Robinson (2016) describe fans that create as “produsers” (cf. Bruns, 2008; Jones, 2011). More broadly, this type of productive activity is studied as participatory culture (Jenkins, 1992/2013; Jenkins, Ito, & boyd, 2016). The study of fans from the perspective of participatory culture alone can be limiting, since it excludes less visible forms of everyday production embedded within reading, viewing, and playing practices (e.g., de Certeau, 1984; Rothbauer, 2004). Nevertheless, fans’ tangible productions, and fans’ practices in generating them, represent important aspects of media fandom.

According to Duffett (2014), the instant a fan connects with a fan object (a text, a film, a character, a story) they enter a “knowing field”: “a terrain of conviction that defines their fannish identity” (p. 125). This concept of the “knowing field” links fan identity (being) and fan action

(doing). Duffett (2014) also frames the question of how we define a fan in the contexts of identification and practice. Instead of isolating an objective category, he argues, we must consider self-identifying as a fan as central to the process of fandom (p. 25). Identification represents particular ways of *being*. A second measure of personal fandom is a matter of practice, which manifests as a “frequent and regular process of reading and watching” (Duffett, 2014, p. 25). Practice, therefore, represents particular ways of *doing*. Understanding the **ways of being and doing** of individuals is necessary when studying information behaviours and practices. For example, social positioning as it has been framed in information behaviour studies, examines identity construction through discursive practices (Given, 2002; McKenzie, 2004; 2010; McKenzie & Carey, 2013). Fans’ different social positions offer examples of ways of being (i.e., how media fans identify themselves), and of doing (i.e., the behaviours and practices related to their fan identities). Media fans can assert any or all of these different identities (reader, viewer, player, producer, and participant) at the same time by engaging with fandom in the spaces mediated by ICTs. The purpose of this research and of the results presented in Chapters 4 and 5 is to explore the lived examples of *being* and *doing* as experienced by the participants, through the lenses of onlife and the everyday. This exploration contributes an empirical understanding of the information behaviours of contemporary media fans.

1.5. Media Fandom and Storyworlds

Yet because fandom is continuously created, it is continuously changing, and any discussion of it is always already obsolete. Thus, rather than trying to create a homogeneous reading or attempting to essentialize fandom and the artworks that spring out of it, we hope to mirror the discussions and vitality of differences that characterize fandom.

(Busse & Hellekson, 2006, p. 9)

What makes a fandom? In *Playing Fans*, Booth (2015) contends that we can never know the relationship between fan, producer, and media if we look for it, but we can identify moments when it has happened (p. 5). He refers to this as the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle applied to fan studies and calls for researchers to study particular sites of interaction and “draw inferences

about moments of connection” (p. 25). In this way, we might approach a comprehensive understanding of fans and fandom. In 2012, *SuperWhoLock* emerged as a transmedia fandom that collectively shaped a mash-up of the television series *Supernatural*, *Dr. Who* and *Sherlock* through a basic identification of common elements shared across all three narratives (Booth, 2015, pp. 26-30; Perez, 2013). While the work of *SuperWhoLock* fans took shape in a number of ways, community activity was dominated by a unique digital form known as GIF fics (a type of fan production): “short narratives constructed from animated GIFs that tell a story utilizing characters from all three series (sometimes more).” (Booth, 2015, p. 26) GIF fics weave intertextual micro-narratives through the selection of visual content from authorised texts that are recognisable to fans. These curated moments “reflect affective engagement with the media” (Booth, 2015, p. 33) and represent imagined interactions between the series characters. GIF fics are named for the digital format in which they appear (i.e., Graphics Interchange Format) and shared exclusively online by fans, usually tagged on Tumblr or in similar online fan communities. Booth explores several examples of GIF fics as “one of the few native digital fan practices” (p. 41) to demonstrate how the relationships between fans and the texts they consume are becoming increasingly more complex. He refers to the *SuperWhoLock* phenomenon and other similar fan communities as “trans-fandom”: a “hypermediated fan audience” that allows for connections between media texts to be built upon, expanded, and interwoven in a way that would not have been possible without digital technologies (p. 65). Booth (2015) observes, “Fans have an overabundance of texts upon which to build a fandom now that there are multiple cult texts and the ability to store, rewatch, and edit them digitally.” (p. 65)

I define fandom as *intertextual and paratextual engagement with a fan object that remains deeply personal while also being constructed socially through collective participation*. This use of fandom refers to both the communities of avid followers of media texts and to an individual’s devotion to such texts as fan objects. Such an understanding of fandom inevitably links text (i.e., narrative media productions) with the social contexts of fans; it relies on Kristeva’s (1980) and Genette’s (1979; 1982/1997; 1987/1997) concepts of intertextuality, transtextuality, and paratexts. It also relies on a definition of engagement as a process for the “privileged experiences” that fans encounter or “seek out in their daily lives” (Evans, 2019, p. 4).

These various theoretical concepts and perspectives that inform our understanding of fandom are explored in greater detail in Chapter 2, Section 2.5.

Fan objects is a phrase that is commonly used in fan studies scholarship to refer to the thing at the centre of a fandom, such as a character, a text, a story, or a world. Ryan (2014; 2015) offers the concept of the *storyworld*: the semantic organisation of many texts into a universe and the construction of such a universe in the mind of a reader (viewer, player, participant, and fan) through narrative experience (Ryan, 2014, p. 32). The narrative experience is the site of a fan (and a fandom's) engagement with a fan object, whether that object is a specific text or property within the storyworld (e.g., a character, a relationship, a plot point), the representation of any of these things (e.g., t-shirts, collectibles, merchandise), or the storyworld itself.

1.6. Information Behaviour (IB)

In common with fan studies, library and information science has a keen interest in the utility of their research outside the field, and in understanding to what extent it produces an impact outside its own disciplinary boundaries. For example, while library and information science (LIS) has a rich history of user studies, its impact outside of the field is less clear, despite multidisciplinary studies being shown to have more impact (Ellegaard & Wallin, 2015). Thus, it would seem that this is the perfect opportunity to bring members of these two disciplines – fan studies and LIS – together, in order to move the concept of ‘interdisciplinarity’ away from just a subject of conversation, towards something real and tangible.

(The CityLIS FanLIS Project, <https://blogs.city.ac.uk/fanlis/>)

GIF fics are but one example of a fan practice. Other examples, as discussed in Chapter 4, Section 4.2, include the production of fan works as ways of doing, such as: fanfiction, fanart, fanvids, games, costumes, and more complex ways of making. Examples also include the ways that fans play with texts through the sharing of content and cosplay, role-playing, and collecting. What do we make of these fan practices?

From an information behaviour (IB) perspective, we might consider the creative extensions that fans undertake in either appropriating or imitating the texts that move them as compulsive gap-filling characteristics of immersion (Long, 2007). Brenda Dervin's concept of sensemaking, for instance, explores the notion of gap-filling as a practice for addressing and managing uncertainty (Case & Given, 2016, p. 88). However, the hypermediated fan, rather than addressing a feeling of uncertainty or anxiety, might seek out new sources to sate an inarticulate need in the form of GIF fics (or even choose to create their own, as one interview participant describes in Chapter 4) in an effort to address their own affective response—their Barthesian *jouissance*—to the characters and stories of the source text(s) (Barthes, 1975). This would appear to represent uncharted territory in the IB field. What can researchers learn from the study of fans and fan communities? And what insights might the application of IB approaches offer in the definition of fandom?

The practices and specific behaviours that represent how people need, seek, and use information in their everyday lives is the domain of IB research (Rothbauer, 2010; Savolainen, 2007), emerging from the information science (IS) discipline. Historically, IB research has been applied to the study of two categories: information systems (or channels) and people (or users) (Choo, 1998, as cited in Case & Given, 2016, p. 45). Media fans represent information users that have only rarely been investigated in the past, typically in the context of either bibliographic modelling and information retrieval (Bullard, 2014; Gursoy, 2015; Hart, et al., 1999; Rasmussen Pennington, 2016), serious leisure (Hartel, 2003; Lee & Pace, 2009), or reader advisory as a function of public service (Kofmel, 1997; Rothbauer, 2004). More recently, media fans have become the site of renewed scholarly interest in IB and IS (e.g., Hill & Pecoskie, 2017; Magree, et al., 2014) and under the community-based moniker, #FanLIS (Price, 2017; Price & Robinson, 2021). The FanLIS community, which studies the intersection of IS and fan studies, points to a warming attitude toward casual leisure and entertainment, important contexts of everyday life (Ocepek, 2018), as sources and sites of information and information behaviours. IS and IB perspectives are explored in greater detail in Chapter 2, Section 2.2, and FanLIS as an emerging research community and body of scholarship is also discussed in Section 2.4.

Critical to the current project is an inclusive definition of information. Historically, information has been used to denote various overlapping concepts, such as facts, data, message,

document, pattern, channel, and context. As Case and Given (2016) have done in their survey of IB literature, unless otherwise indicated, the current project defines information as “any difference that makes a difference to a conscious, human mind” (p. 56; Bateson, 1972, p. 460). For media fans, information is thus understood as any encountered media content that is meaningful in the mind of the individual, and therefore *semantic*: data + meaning (Floridi, 2010, p. 20; p. 34)¹.

It is essential to note the ways in which the mind of a person transforms *content*, a term commonly used by media scholars, into *information*, as it is understood by information researchers. A challenge faced by FanLIS so early in its development as a research community, as well as IB and IS researchers in general, is ensuring that scholarship adheres to a common shared language and discourse, so that results from research can be extended and built upon over time. This provides a foundation for investigations around the ways that people use and create information. The following are my qualifications of Bateson’s (1972) and Floridi’s (2010) definitions:

1. (*Semantic*) *information* is meaningful data.
2. *Content* is semantic information as perceived by the person that *creates* it, since it has been invested with meaning and/or message.
3. *Content* is information as perceived by the person that *interprets* it (i.e., reads it, views it, plays it), since they construct meaning from it (i.e., perceived “difference”, Bateson, 1972, p. 458).
4. *Medium* is the context of content. Medium is understood as a filter for information that a person perceives through their encounter with content. It highlights certain differences and de-emphasises others.

¹ I refer the reader to S   (2019) for in-depth review of Floridi’s definition of *semantic information*. For the purposes of the current project, I subscribe to Fallis’ (2015) definition of information as representational content that does not require truthful data (i.e., may include misinformation, disinformation and, more to the point, fictional information).

1.7. Summary and Research Questions

Gadamer (2004) writes, “The path of all knowledge leads through the question” (p. 357). In order to be a “research question”, a question must be “researchable”, “precise”, and “open” (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013, pp. 11-14). A researchable question can be investigated scientifically and answered empirically. A precise question is narrowly focused in such a way that it should say “a lot about a little” (Silverman, 2001, p. 5). An open question both “opens up” and “unsettles” what we already “know” about a subject (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013, p. 13). These three criteria, in turn, create the potential to generate knowledge that matters and lead to valuable theoretical contributions. The two research questions that guide this study were developed with the criteria of researchability, precision, and openness in mind.

The goal of this study is to understand onlife ways of being and doing through the lens of information behaviour in the context of media fans. By studying the fans and fan communities of media storyworlds, this project addresses the following research questions:

Table 1.7.1. Research Questions

<i>Q1:</i> Ways of <i>being</i> (<i>identity</i>)	Who/what is the <i>onlife fan</i>? In what way(s) do contemporary media fans identify themselves as a) fan, b) consumer, c) information user?
<i>Q2:</i> Ways of <i>doing</i> (<i>action</i>)	What are the information behaviours of <i>onlife fans</i>? In what way(s) do contemporary media fans access, make sense of, engage with, and/or produce information through their engagement with fandom?

Adopting a social constructionist paradigm, this project undertakes a Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) study of media fans in the onlife context. The methods consist of in-depth interviews with 17 self-identified fans and content analysis of two publicly accessible, online *Game of Thrones* fan communities (i.e., *AV Club* and *#FakeWesteros*). The selected methods generated empirical data on the information behaviours of these individuals and communities, demonstrating similarities and differences between each other, and marking transformations over time that can be compared to information practices previously observed in

fandom and other contexts. Thus, the study provides an understanding of what it means to be living onlife in the media fan context; this subject has heretofore remained unexplored in IB, IS, or fan studies literature. It also offers insights on how media convergence is altering the ways in which people make sense of, use, create, and share information. The research contributes findings on the role of ICTs and media convergence in the lives of fans by introducing findings achieved through the application of a different disciplinary and theoretical lens to an emergent interdisciplinary field (i.e., FanLIS). Finally, through the lens of IB, this research generates theory in the form of a model for the information behaviour cycle of the onlife fan.

The scope of this study is limited to the media fan experience in western developed societies, and specifically in North America, Europe, and Australia. Interview results represent the experience of Canadian fans, in particular, but these are transferable across similar fan communities. The case studies examine the discourse of fans represented through online social media as textual data (in English). Both sets of data are primarily situated within the contemporary social context of the western, middle-class experience. The *onlife fan*, as a theoretical construct emerging from this study's data, is thus a product of this particular perspective and context. However, that is not to suggest that onlife experience is exclusive to western or middle-class experiences. Opportunities for future research identified in the final chapter of this thesis suggest avenues for further exploration of onlife in other social, political, and cultural contexts.

In this vein, it is important to note that while the current research does not focus specifically on racial, cultural, or ethnic identity as a core focus for studying fan identity, as some scholars have called for (e.g., Pande, 2018), issues of race, gender, and culture did emerge in participant accounts. For example, this is addressed in the discussion of the toxic fan in Chapter 4, Section 4.3.3, where interview participants' perspectives regarding offensive behaviours in media fandom are considered. This section of the analysis illustrates how racist and misogynist behaviours (e.g., Massanari, 2017; Rosza, 2014), from participants' perspectives, are particularly relevant to how fan identity is constructed onlife. Other sections of Chapters 4 and 5 touch on how participants perform and sometimes challenge heteronormativity and "whiteness" (Stanfill, 2011, p. 22) in media representations through their practices.

These glimpses through the eyes of the participants illuminate blind spots in previous fan studies scholarship (Wanzo, 2015). The individual and idiosyncratic perspectives presented in the analysis often reveal how fandoms, particularly in the merging of digital and analogue environments that make up the infosphere, bridge differences of nation, class, gender, and ethnicity. Specific examples (such as one participant's initial encounters with World Wrestling Entertainment, discussed in Section 4.3.1) represent the transcultural fandom studied by authors like Morimoto and Chin (2013). Similarly, the gendered fan productions of interview participants that re-interpret media narratives through fanfiction and cosplay (discussed in Section 4.2.1) illustrate how the identity of the onlife fan can overcome such distinctions. As such, the specific social contexts of participants are discussed as they relate to participants' experiences of onlife. However, the focus of the current study is on onlife ways of being and doing and information behaviours of onlife fans, rather than social, political, and cultural identities, or as an examination of transcultural fandoms². It is constrained, both by its focus and by the geographical and social contexts of its participants, within parameters that limit a fulsome analysis of these broader concerns in fan studies. Thus, it is the intention of this work that, by constructing a strong theoretical foundation for the onlife fan, future work can build upon the concept to address issues, such as whiteness (Stanfill, 2011; Wanzo, 2015), that represent gaps in media fan research.

In the following chapter, I delve more deeply into the multi-disciplinary literatures upon which this research is founded. Chapter 3 provides a comprehensive report on the study's paradigmatic and methodological approaches, principally through the application of CGT, and research design. Chapter 4 presents the everyday ways of being and doing identified in interviews, with discussion that examines how participants' information behaviours represent the onlife experience of individuals. Chapter 5 examines the process of engagement and the concept of tactics in the context of online fan communities by presenting results of the two case studies. Chapter 6 summarises conclusions from all collected data and offers a synthesis of results that

² For recent research in the IB field related to transcultural fandom, I recommend Kizhakkethil's (2021) study of a fanfiction community as a diaspora. The study examines the content shared and created within this community as "everyday, as social ties, as awareness and as memories" that transform information into shared, meaningful experience (p. 241).

theorises the information behaviours of media fans; this final chapter also includes reflections on the outcomes of the study and areas for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

The study of the onlife experience of media fans is an ambitious project in spanning the distance between information behaviour (IB) and fan studies (FS), each one its own interdisciplinary field of study. In addition to being positioned within information science (IS)³, this research is informed by scholarship from many different areas, including: sociology (de Certeau, 1984; Goffman, 1959), philosophy (Floridi, 2002; 2010; 2011; 2014; 2015), psychology (Sanford & Emmott, 2012), narratology (Genette, 1987/1997; Kristeva, 1980; Ryan & Thon, 2014), and media and communication (Evans, 2012; Jenkins, 2006a). The following chapter provides a review of the relevant literature and flags the various conceptual and theoretical antecedents of the study.

The following section (2.2) introduces IB models and theories and situates the study within IS. The section highlights relevant areas of research, such as information finding and encountering (Agarwal, 2015; Erdelez, 1995; Ross, 1999), monitoring and everyday life information seeking (Savolainen, 1995), ecological modelling (Williamson, 1998), information behaviour patterns and naturalistic information acquisition (Lee, Ocepek & Makri, 2022), everyday information behaviour (Ocepek, 2016), serious leisure (Hartel, 2003; Lee & Trace, 2009), information worlds (Jaeger & Burnett, 2010), social positioning theory (Given, 2002; McKenzie, 2010), communication modelling (Robson & Robinson, 2015), immersive documents (Robinson, 2015a; 2015b), and engagement (Nahl, 2007; Waugh, 2017). Section 2.3 offers background on the scholarly field of FS and situates it in the broader context of audience studies and media and communication. Section 2.4 introduces the recent emergence of the interdisciplinary project known as *#FanLIS*, which seeks to explore “the rich, liminal seams where fan studies, fandom, and LIS intersect, and where opportunities for cross disciplinary learning and knowledge creation may exist” (Price & Robinson, 2022). This section includes a

³ The IS domain is also referred to as library and information science (LIS). For example, the name “FanLIS” refers to the interdisciplinary community that studies IS and FS.

review of the literature emerging from this project, as well as IS and FS literature that shares the same interdisciplinary scope and focus. Section 2.5 offers a thorough discussion of concepts relevant to the FanLIS research domain, including: intertexts (Kristeva, (1980), paratexts (Genette, 1982/1997; 1987/1997), transtexts (Branch, et al., 2017; Kurtz & Bourdaa, 2016), media convergence (Jenkins, 2006a), transmedia storyworlds (Dena, 2009; Klasttrup & Tosca, 2014; Ryan & Thon, 2014), engagement (Evans, 2016; 2019), post-object fandom (Williams, 2015); and contextual framing (Emmott, 1989; Hills, 2002). Sections 2.6 and 2.7 expand on the introduction of everyday life practice (de Certeau, 1984) and onlife (Floridi, 2014) outlined in Chapter 1, as the primary sensitising concepts of the research. These sections provide background and context for understanding everyday life and onlife in relation to IB and FS. The chapter closes with a discussion of the remaining gaps in research highlighted by these sensitising concepts, and the specific areas where the research questions and their focus on the onlife fan experience propose to further deepen our understanding of media fandom and information behaviour.

2.2. Information Behaviour (IB) Studies

As a field spanning roughly 40 years of research, IB offers many different perspectives. This section provides an overview of key theories relevant to the study of media fans for both readers that are familiar with IB and those that are new to the field or to IS as a discipline. The work of Dervin, (1983, 1989, 1992), for example, is valuable for its conceptualisations of uncertainty and knowledge gaps. Belkin, Oddy, and Brooks' (1982a, 1982b) anomalous state of knowledge (ASK) is similarly useful. Both theories might be applied to fans' engagement with and use of information, particularly related to media storyworlds where gaps between each narrative instance (i.e., text and paratext) can incite a fan's desire to seek out more content. This desire is similar to *information need*, in that both concepts act as a spur to increase one's knowledge. Information need is a key concept in IS and IB research, defined as a recognition that one's knowledge is "inadequate to satisfy a goal" (Case & Given, 2016, p. 6). However, the preference or "choice behaviour" that guides people when selecting entertainment content "grows from a situational context [in which] affective and emotional states and reactions play a key role." (Zillman & Bryant, 1985, as cited in Case & Given, 2016, p. 116). While Case and Given (2016) note that curiosity can be an unconscious precursor (p. 6), information need is

typically framed as a conscious question or problem in the mind of the person that feels it (Agarwal, 2015). Therefore, information need and the theories of Dervin (1983; 1989; 1992) and Belkin, Oddy, and Brooks (1982a; 1982b) fall short of explaining the underlying unconscious and affective elements of fan behaviours. The study of information “finding” (Agarwal, 2015) and “encountering” (Erdelez, 1995) offer partial answers to unconscious behaviour in the form of unplanned information acquisition and serendipitous information seeking (Erdelez, 1995, p. 3); here, an information user’s mind is open and receptive to information without having a consciously framed question or need. Savolainen’s (1995) concept of “passive monitoring” (p. 272), while inadequately defined outside of his everyday life information seeking (ELIS) model, similarly provides a basis upon which we might explore how fans acquire information through the narratives they consume. Other relevant theories and concepts such as finding without seeking (Ross, 1999), ecological modelling (Williamson, 1998), information behaviour patterns and naturalistic information acquisition (Lee, Ocepek & Makri, 2022), everyday information behaviour (Ocepek, 2016), serious leisure (Hartel, 2003; Lee & Trace, 2009), information worlds (Jaeger & Burnett, 2010), social positioning theory (Given, 2002; McKenzie, 2010), communication modelling (Robson & Robinson, 2015), immersive documents (Robinson, 2015a; 2015b), and engagement (Nahl, 2007; Waugh, 2017) are explored in the following paragraphs.

2.2.1. Encountering Information

As discussed in Chapter 1 (Section 1.6), the IB of media fans includes a variety of practices related to the identification, access, and use of information. Wilson (1999) provides a simple hierarchy to understand the relationship between information *behaviour* and information *seeking* (Figure 2.1). This model is valuable insofar as it positions IB in context with specific phenomena related to using information (e.g., active seeking, computer-assisted searching, etc.); IB encompasses research on the human activities involved in the specific phenomena related to information use.



Figure 2.2.1. Wilson's (1999) nested model, as reproduced in Agarwal (2015, para. 8)
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In Figure 2.2.1, IB is the general field of investigation that includes the study of seeking and searching. It also includes all related activities that may be described as unconscious or unintentional and that do not involve active seeking (Agarwal, 2015; Wilson, 1999). Information searching, at the lowest level of the model, is a particular type within information seeking research that is concerned with the interactions between information user and technology (Wilson, 1999) (e.g., a library's online public access catalogue, Google Search). Information seeking is typically understood as the "conscious effort to acquire information in response to a need, want or gap in our knowledge" (Agarwal, 2015, para. 9). The classic example of this activity in the IS context is a student that approaches the library reference desk with a question (Taylor, 1968). This definition forms the basis for most theories, models, and frameworks of information seeking (e.g., Dervin, 1983, 1992; Ellis, 1989; Krikelas, 1983; Kuhlthau, 1991; Wilson, 1981; Wilson & Walsh, 1996. See also Case & Given, 2016, pp. 141-175.) Nevertheless, research on information seeking in recent years has turned toward the unconscious processes that lead to the encountering and acquisition (the *finding*) of information, blurring the meaning of the term: Is it still *seeking* if a person is not actively looking for information? Can a person find information when they are not seeking it?

Agarwal (2015) extends Wilson’s (1999) model to account for “serendipity”: incident-based, unexpected discovery of information (para. 24). In his effort to define serendipity through the body of IB scholarship, Agarwal problematises the established relationship between seeking and finding (Figure 2.2.2).

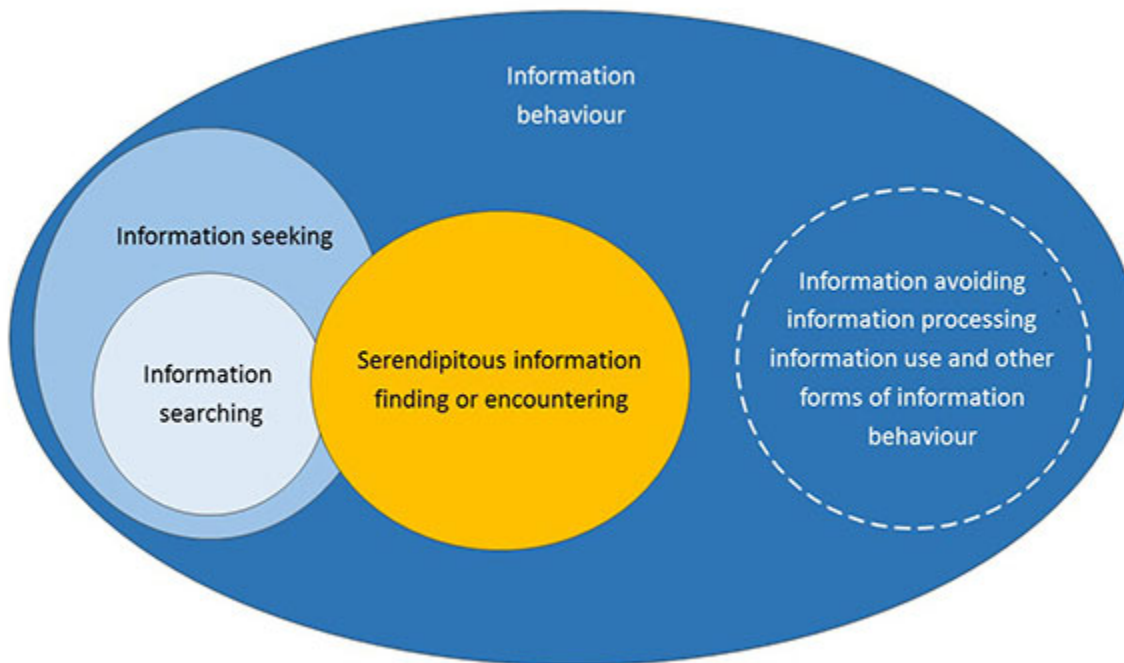


Figure 2.2.2. Agarwal's (2015) model for seeking versus finding: placing serendipity within information behaviour
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“Finding or encountering”, as depicted in Figure 2.2.2, *overlaps* “seeking” and “searching”, suggesting that unconscious/passive and conscious/active processes of information behaviour may occur simultaneously. Indeed, Agarwal’s conclusion, which follows from that of other researchers on serendipity (e.g., Erdelez, 1995; Ross, 1999; Savolainen, 1995; Williamson, 1998), is that serendipitous information “finding” may often take place while a person is actively seeking information to address a completely different perceived need. We can also conclude from Agarwal’s model that finding can occur when an information user is not consciously seeking anything⁴. This indicates that, rather than finding inevitably following seeking, finding

⁴ Consider a common practice of the television viewer: Channel-surfing, or its onlife equivalent, scrolling through the interface of viewing recommendations on a video streaming platform like Netflix, demonstrates how a receptive mind can encounter information (in programs and about programs, e.g., titles, plot descriptions, categories, genres,

can occur with or without seeking. This suggests that the relationship between the two concepts is more complex than the existing literature indicates, and that they can be mutually exclusive.

Savolainen (1995) presents a model for ELIS by exploring the habits and practices involved with “keeping things in order” and “mastery of life” (p. 267; cf. Case & Given, 2016, pp. 155-157). While Savolainen’s (1995) model is concerned primarily with “practical information” acquired through problem-solving behaviours, he also points out that the “habits of information seeking form a part of mastery of life, often rooted in an unconscious level and not wholly subject to reflection.” (p. 265) ELIS addresses the need to legitimise non-work contexts, including media consumed for entertainment, as the sites of information seeking. Rather than acknowledge instances where finding occurs without seeking, as Agarwal (2015) does, Savolainen’s (1995) model offers “passive monitoring” as a form of unconscious or semi-conscious information seeking, which compares the perception of “how things are at the moment” and “how they should be” and indicates that every individual has their own monitoring system that evolves over time (p. 272). The passive monitoring of everyday events for information also describes how readers identify and fill gaps perceived in a given narrative (Emmott, 1997). Savolainen’s monitoring system (p. 272) is analogous to Emmott’s (1989; 1997) contextual frame (discussed further in Section 2.5), wherein the latter is manifested in the microcosm of a narrative storyworld (Ryan & Thon, 2014) while the former applies to real world contexts⁵ (e.g., Stebbins, 2007/2015). Building on the concept of information monitoring as a behaviour related to finding and encountering information, Williamson’s (1998) study of the variables that influenced seniors’ IB offers an ecological model of information use (cf. Case & Given, 2016, pp. 161-162). This model incorporates the many contexts of information in everyday life by placing “other individuals and institutions that vary in psychological and/or physical distance from the person seeking information” (Case & Given, 2016, p. 161). In the periphery beyond individual and institutional information sources are the various “ecological” factors that influence “seeking of, and receptivity to, information” that includes physical environment, socioeconomic circumstances, values, and lifestyles of the information user (Case

performers, etc) without having a consciously framed question or need in mind. The channel-surfer only has a nebulous desire to be diverted and entertained.

⁵ For example, the hobbyist context of serious leisure seekers, as articulated by Stebbins (2007/2015).

& Given, 2016, p. 161). A key finding of Williamson's (1998) study was that respondents regularly acquired information that they were not aware they needed simply by monitoring their world. Monitoring took place through interaction with intimate personal networks (i.e., family and friends), wider personal networks (e.g., clubs, churches, organizations) and mass media (e.g., newspapers, television, radio, magazines). Williamson (1998) argues for a study of information users in relation to the "major systems of information provision in society" (p. 37). The concern with systems that influence information use (i.e., information and communication technologies, or ICTs, as introduced in Chapter 1, Section 1.1) that would suggest Floridi's (2014; 2015) preoccupation with onlife environments and the experience of onlife are particularly valuable for the advancement of IB research.

Alongside information monitoring, multiple authors examine the role of serendipity, or chance, in everyday information seeking behaviour (e.g., Abbas & Agosto, 2013; Erdelez, 1995; Foster & Ford, 2004; Heinström, 2006; McCay-Peet & Toms, 2010; Ross, 1999; Williamson, 1998). Similar to monitoring is the concept of "information encountering" (Erdelez, 1995, p. 3) or "incidental information acquisition" (Williamson, 1998, p. 24), which refers to the accidental discovery of information in cases where people do not know they need the information until they encounter it. Ross (1999) explores this type of information seeking or, rather, "finding without seeking" (p. 783), in her study of 194 readers who read for pleasure. Like Agarwal (2015), Ross' framing of how people find information as an unplanned encounter acknowledges that this practice is not always an outcome of seeking. Her empirical findings on the behaviours of pleasure readers are especially relevant in the media fan context, as readers represent a type of media fan (as discussed in Chapter 1, Section 1.3). Chief among these findings is her conclusion that study participants demonstrated "active engagement" with the construction of meaning in the way they forged connections with narrative elements connected to their own lives and concerns (Ross, 1999, p. 796). Meaning making in the mind of the reader is, again, analogous to the construction of an individual's contextual frame for a narrative that is essential in understanding the diegetic behaviours of media fans (Emmott, 1997; Hills, 2002). As one participant stated, "I read a book...and it will stay with me; I'll be mulling it in my mind as I do the dishes" (Ross, 1999, p. 787).

Ross (1999) concludes that this finding represents a “circular relationship” between reader and text (p. 795). Citing Ricoeur (1974), she indicates that there is a “reciprocity between *text*-interpretation and *self*-interpretation” (p. 795). Ross’ work and that of other IB researchers (e.g., McCay-Peet & Toms, 2010; Pohjanen & Kortelainen, 2015; Rothbauer, 2004; Savolainen, 1995; Williamson, 1998) indicates that the study of IB in media fans should be concerned with *two* levels of sensemaking: the micro-level of the storyworld and the macro-level of everyday life. Furthermore, the contexts of an individual’s everyday life both influences and is influenced by their interpretation of the text or storyworld. As another participant in Ross’ (1999) study put it: “If you read widely and frequently, you can’t help but coming against the problems in literature which you find useful in life and vice versa. I don’t actively go seeking.” (p. 795) The same might be said of watching and playing narrative media. While existing research on how people encounter information articulates the macro-level sensemaking that impacts individuals’ real-world decision-making (e.g., Agarwal, 2015; Erdelez, 1995; Ross, 1999; Savolainen, 1995; Williamson, 1998), few studies have examined the micro-level manifested in fans’ narrative gap-filling (Hills, 2002; e.g., Price, 2017; Stobbs, 2018; Waugh, 2017). The current research addresses this gap.

More recently, Lee, Ocepek, and Makri’s (2022) perspective on “naturalistic information acquisition” takes the discrete activities theorised by IB researchers (searching, seeking, monitoring, and encountering) and considers them as complexly interconnected interactions with information that “follow, feed, and facilitate each other” (p. 595). These interconnections are defined as “information behaviour patterns”, that is, the reliable sample of traits, acts, tendencies, or other observable characteristics of a person, group, or institution (Lee, Ocepek, & Makri, 2022, p. 595). Their analysis includes online experience through the observation of arts-and-crafts hobbyists using “browse-first” digital and physical information environments that included Pinterest (pinterest.com) and brick-and-mortar craft stores. The behaviour patterns they identified included instances where participants encountered information in both digital and physical environments through “no goal browsing” (i.e., browsing the website or store without a set goal or question in mind) and in cases where their goal was only partially or ill-defined (p. 602). In these examples, encountering information elicited a response and new behaviour, for instance, “semi-defined browsing”, “monitoring”, or “searching” for further information, as a

sequence of information acquisition. In the online context, IB patterns can also be understood in terms of information production, information reception, information reactions, and information rewards, as other research has framed the encounters of Twitch users and audiences (Diwanji, et al., 2020). The patterns revealed by Lee, Ocepek, and Makri's (2022) study offer a unique perspective to IB research that privileges the dynamic human experience, and supports previous theory in IB proposed by Dörk, Carpendale and Williamson (2011) on the "information flaneur". Observing that information seeking in the past was characterised in terms of utilitarian goals (e.g., information needs in the form of problems, goals, or tasks, e.g., Belkin, Oddy, & Brooks, 1982a; Kuhlthau, 1991), they propose a new way to think about information seeking as an "inherently complex human experience that includes a wide range of emotions and motivations beyond a particular problem or need" (Dörk, Carpendale, & Williamson, 2011, p. 1216). They use the "flaneur", a 19th century urban figure of the aimless wanderer⁶, as a metaphor for information encounters that casts the relationship between activities and experiences as a continuum between "horizontal exploration" and "vertical immersion" (p. 1221). The flaneur does not have a goal, but rather is immersed in the experience of city life:

Without becoming fully part of it, he passes through squares and crowds making sense of the city. While the cityscape may be teeming with crowds and commerce, the flaneur opens his senses and paints his own picture of the city. (p. 1216)

Dörk, Carpendale and Williamson (2011) draw a parallel between the growing urban spaces of the 19th century and the sprawling information spaces of the semi-real, semi-figural environments of onlife (p. 1217). The flaneur is both spectator and explorer, absorbing information as it is encountered and developing their own contextual frame of the space they experience and explore. The information flaneur shares these characteristics with media fans and their onlife experiences.

⁶ The metaphor for the "flaneur" also appears in de Certeau's (1984) illustration of spatial practices in everyday life with examples of "walking in the city" (pp. 91-110). In both Dörk, Carpendale and Williamson (2011) and de Certeau (1984), the subject constructs the city informationally through their perambulations without having a set goal or purpose.

2.2.2. *Everyday Information Behaviour*

Revisiting Savolainen's (1995) ELIS model as a representation of everyday IB in 20th century non-work contexts that are early digital, is useful as a starting point to situate our understanding of how behaviours have shifted with the emergence of onlife experience. As described in the previous section, monitoring of everyday life through digital and analogue media is routine behaviour when a person does not sense a dissonance (i.e., a conscious information need or "problem") between how things are and how they should be (Savolainen, 1995, p. 272). Seeking "orienting information" is something that occurs through monitoring (p. 272). In his elaboration of the ELIS model, Savolainen (1995) addresses the role of media, broadly defined, in seeking orienting information. We might think of this as a semi-purposeful or semi-passive process, what Lee, Ocepek, and Makri (2022) would refer to as "no goal browsing" or as "ill-defined" (p. 602). First, Savolainen (1995) notes that the analysis of information behaviour involving electronic media and mass media, including radio, television, and newspapers, is deeply embedded within everyday life. Secondly, he describes how the collection of various media to which a person is exposed every day constitutes a "mediascape", that is, a "landscape of voices and pictures" (Savolainen, 1995, p. 274). Both observations correspond to Floridi's (2014) 21st century concept of "infosphere" as the all-encompassing information environment shaped by ICTs. Through interviews with teachers and industrial workers, Savolainen observes four approaches to everyday life problem solving (i.e., "types" of "mastery of life") which map to two axes: 1) optimism vs. pessimism and 2) cognitive vs. affective (Figure 2.3). Participants' choice of media was evaluated as more cognitively oriented based on how deliberately they selected the media they consumed and the "seriousness" of the content (i.e., entertaining vs. educational).

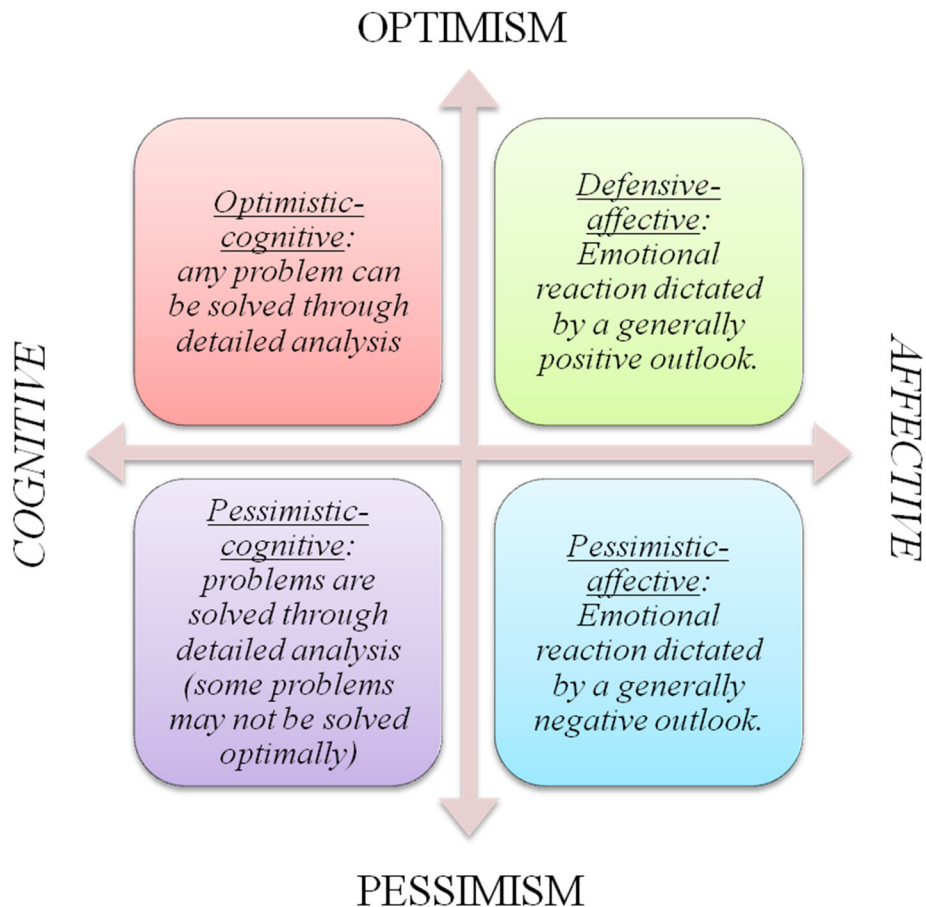


Figure 2.2.3. Savolainen's (1995, p. 265) four types of mastery of life, visualised as a matrix.

Among Savolainen's findings, the teachers tended to be more cognitively oriented in their selection and use of media, whereas the workers were more affectively oriented. One reason for this is that teachers felt "pressing requirements" (p. 279) to accumulate cultural capital and devoted less time to consuming media for leisure, while watching television for entertainment all evening was the norm among workers. This pursuit of media for leisure, Savolainen argues, is affective. While demonstrating the "compartmentalisation" of behaviours of which Lee, Ocepek, and Makri (2021) are cautious (in this case, "problem solving" as a type of information seeking or browsing), Savolainen's (1995) foundational research in the everyday context remains useful in providing a basic conceptual matrix and vocabulary to reflect how people encounter information in non-work contexts. In particular, the cognitive and affective aspects offer a perspective with which to consider the discursive practices of fans in terms of emotion and rationality (as discussed in Chapter 5). Savolainen's (1995) concept of "mediascape" is also

useful for conceptualising the gamut of information environments that mediate 21st century everyday life. It is a term that is also used in audience studies, such as in Abercrombie and Longhurst's (1998) spectacle/performance paradigm (p. 32). However, based on Savolainen's (1995) examples of mass media more than 25 years ago, one cannot presume that the mediascape has not changed significantly, as have the information behaviours involved in its utilisation in everyday life. Section 2.2.3 explores alternate approaches to the study of IB that take the role of ICTs into consideration, while section 2.7 considers how Floridi perceives the transformation of the mediascape through the concepts of the infosphere and onlife experience.

Ocepek (2018) notes that, while IB researchers has long been interested in everyday contexts (e.g., Chatman, 1999; Fisher & Julien, 2009; Pettigrew, 1999; Savolainen, 1995), they have failed to articulate the “rationale for exploring the everyday” and its relationship to information behaviour in other contexts (p. 398). Ocepek proposes a theoretical framework for the study of *everyday information behaviour* that uses Lefebvre's (2014) ideas on everyday life as a totality of the “genuine reality” lived by individuals (p. 137) and the “nexus of work, leisure, and family life” (Ocepek, 2018, p. 399). In other words, the everyday refers to all aspects of life and lived experience (Ocepek, 2018) and more than simply non-work contexts (Savolainen, 1995). Ocepek (2018) argues that the mundane and the quotidian parts of life should be studied alongside more traditional IB domains, such as work and serious leisure (Hartel, 2003). As discussed in Section 2.6, de Certeau's (1984) theory of everyday life practice is complementary to Lefebvre's (2014) earlier works⁷, offering the concept of tactics for understanding what people produce through the experience of the everyday. While Lefebvre (2014) is not primarily interested in information's role in the everyday, de Certeau (1984) demonstrates that he *is*, through his preoccupation with representations as institutional and social productions (Rothbauer, 2010). This makes de Certeau, in particular, a valuable touchstone for researchers interested in everyday IB.

There are other domains of research within IB that can be understood as “varieties” of everyday IB (Ocepek, 2018). Serious leisure, for example, has been used for the study of

⁷ *The Critique of Everyday Life, Volume 1* was first published in 1947. This was followed by *Volume 2 (Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday)* in 1961, and *Volume 3 (From Modernity to Modernism)* in 1981.

hobbyists who “make significant personal effort based on specially acquired knowledge, training, or skill” (Hartel, 2003, p. 230; cf. Stebbins, 2007/2015). Some hobbyist areas that have been the subject of IB research include genealogy (Cortada, 2011), gourmet cooking (Hartel, 2010), rubber-duck collecting (Lee and Trace, 2009), fantasy sports fandom (Otto, Metz, & Ensmenger, 2011), and media fandom (Price, 2017; Price & Robinson, 2021). More recently the study of fun and fun-life contexts, as a part of everyday life, has emerged in IB as a distinct area of interest (e.g., Ocepek, et al., 2018; Ocepek, et al., 2020). This research embraces the pleasures of life (Kari & Hartel, 2007) as the setting for information-rich experiences. It is framed alongside serious leisure studies like Lee and Trace (2009), as well as literature outside that domain that more broadly addresses IB concerns, such as studies that explore the conservation and preservation activities of video game fans (Sköld, 2013; 2018; Swalwell, Stuckey, & Ndaliansi, 2017). Finally, a similar theoretical framework to Ocepek’s (2018) “everyday information behaviour” is Jaeger & Burnett’s (2010) “information worlds”. Information worlds theory is also committed to the study of information as a totality of lived experience, specifically in the ways that the experience of the everyday is socially situated. The theory builds on Habermas’ (1984; 1987) notion of *lifeworld* as the shared and informal realm of all social and personal interaction, and Chatman’s (1991) work on *small worlds* as localised, normative spheres of social life experience. Information worlds proposes that worlds are not all “small”, but that they exist in a wide variety of scales, from small families to global communities (Jaeger & Burnett, 2010). These many “information worlds” interact and influence each other, as when the individual that experiences them moves across perceived boundaries between their worlds. This perspective finds parallels with Floridi’s (2014) concept of the infosphere as an “always *onlife*” environment (Burnett & Burnett, 2020). These different worlds of experience are overlapping social spaces where individuals create communities, develop social norms and values, and generate and interact with information (Jaeger & Burnett, 2010, p. 30). Kizhakketil’s (2020) study on the IB of an online fanfiction community as a diaspora small world is an example of research that uses this theory in the media fan context.

2.2.3. *Other Approaches to the Study of IB and Engagement*

A different approach to the study of IB, through the lens of social constructionism, is social positioning theory (e.g., Given, 2002; McKenzie, 2004; 2010; McKenzie & Carey, 2013). Social positioning is “the use of rhetorical devices by which oneself and other speakers are presented as standing in various kinds of relations” (Van Langenhove & Harré, 1999, p. 362). This theory has been used to study power, trust, and cognitive authority in IB research (Case & Given, 2016; e.g., Genuis, 2013; McKenzie & Carey, 2013). Hollway’s (1982) and Van Langenhove and Harré’s (1999) development of social positioning theory is based on post-structuralist notions of identity construction that suggest a person is “composed of multiple selves through which they define their identities, and as these selves are the product of social interactions with many possible constructions,” they give rise to a multitude of discourses, each one a different way of representing the world (Given, 2002, p. 129). In the context of fan IB, we can consider how the multiplicity of selves that surround “any one object, event, person, etc.” tells a different story about the fan object in question, whether that’s a character, a text, or a storyworld (Burr, 1995, p. 48). Contextual framing (discussed in more detail in Section 2.5) can be viewed as the social construction and social positioning of a fan through their understanding of a storyworld (Emmott, 1989; Ryan, 2014). Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical analysis of interaction in everyday life, which provides a sociological study of the presentation of the self through the performance of different social identities, is also an important touchstone for social positioning. IB literature has employed social positioning theory to understand the different ways that information users position themselves discursively in relation to sources and structures of information, for example undergraduate students in the university context (Given, 2002) and the social constructions of patients and health care professionals in health information seeking (Genuis, 2013; McKenzie, 2004; McKenzie, 2010; McKenzie & Carey, 2013). Social positioning proves equally beneficial in exploring the identity constructions and self-narratives of media fans, particularly in mediated onlife environments. Chapter 4 (Section 4.3) discusses how fan identity was constructed among interview participants from this perspective.

An approach to studying the interaction between technology and everyday IB is to consider it from the perspective of communication. Robson and Robinson (2013; 2015) combine elements from information seeking and communication models to offer a new model for IB that

accounts equally for information seeker, information provider, and medium. Cibangu (2015) similarly argues for an integration between IS and media and communication studies at a broad level. Robson and Robinson's (2015) model accounts for mass media information sources, including print and electronic literature, websites, blogs, television, and radio programs. It also traces the layers of feedback between information actors, including both the information provider (or communicator, e.g., authors, publishers, producers, experts, companies) and the information seeker/receiver (any individual in everyday life). Knight and Littleton (2015) reframe Robson and Robinson's (2015) perspective at the base level of everyday dialogue between people. Their exploration of collaborative IB suggests that the roles of information provider and information seeker are fluid, often shifting between participants in discourse.

This interdisciplinary take on IB is reminiscent of Clark and Brennan's (1991) concept of "mutual knowledge" (p. 127). Writing from the domain of communications theory, Clark and Brennan (1991) explore the concept of "grounding": the cumulative coordination of content and process in establishing "common ground" within discourse (p. 127), which is an activity shaped by media (p. 139). Their perspective is early digital, and therefore the factors they provide as "constraints" on communication imposed by media (e.g., copresence, visibility, audibility, cotemporality, simultaneity) were valid for the media landscape at the time (pp. 139-141). From our contemporary perspective, it is necessary to re-examine the impositions and influences of media on communication and IB, particularly where Clark and Brennan's "constraints" are no longer evident. Grounding and mutual knowledge emerge from the "given-new contract" (Clark & Haviland, 1977, p. 4), an important conceptual development in psycholinguistics and communications theory (Chafe, 1994, p. 169). The spectrum of communication, from mass media broadcasting to two people talking, is relevant to IB because it comprehensively captures the flow of information through its media and users. We routinely encounter information at multiple points along that spectrum, through the experience of the everyday. The increasing pervasiveness of ICTs ensures that communication is understood as central to the study of everyday IB and onlife.

Another approach to examining the influence of ICTs on IB is the study of "immersive documents" (Robinson, 2015a; 2015b), which predicts the emergence of a new medium for information and redefines the traditional IS concept of "document" (e.g., Buckland, 1997; 1998;

Frohmann, 2009). The immersive document is a “new type of document” that arises from the mixture of “pervasive” technologies, multisensory interfaces and “contemporary participatory” transmedia storytelling that permits the reader or user to “perceive unreality as real” (Robinson, 2015b, p. 1734). There are three modern developments that, in conjunction, give rise to the immersive document and, moreover, new information behaviours: 1) pervasive information, 2) multisensory technology, and 3) participatory culture. Robinson’s immersive document parallels the “multimedia document” Manovich (2001/2014) predicted as the “new communication standard” arising from the web (p. 36). In this sense, Robinson’s notion is the next step in an evolution of the document as it is currently understood. It is also analogous to the concept of the “transtext” as a narrative instance within a distributed transmedia system or storyworld (Kurtz & Bourdaa, 2016), which is discussed further in Section 2.5.

Historically, much information was sought and obtained at designated institutional places, such as libraries, bookstores, archives, and government and institutional record centres. This practice has shifted gradually with the innovation of ICTs that increase the diffusion of information, including radio and television (Robinson, 2015b). Until the 1990s, users expected that they had to visit specific sites to gain access to “any significant amount of information” (p. 1735). Today the opposite is true: as information users, we take for granted the sheer volume of dispersed data that are easily accessible to us through a variety of modes and methods, many of which we employ unthinkingly in everyday practice. This phenomenon is what Robinson (2015b) refers to as *pervasive information*. *Multisensory technology* refers to innovations that combine multiple sensory inputs and outputs with network technology (e.g., Bowdler, 2014; Flinders, 2013). Extant examples of such devices are virtual reality rigs, such as the popular Oculus Rift; however, Robinson (2015b) points to the holodeck from the *Star Trek* universe as the science-fictional ideal. She suggests that, as these innovations move closer to the holodeck envisioned in our 20th century dreams, information sharing via these technologies and their networked integration with other media will advance the new form of document. Finally, Robinson (2015b) aligns the concept of participatory culture explicitly with transmedia systems, indicating that the narrative “playing out across a variety of information devices” moves beyond the e-book and follows the reader (or viewer/player/consumer) “into the real world” (p. 1736; cf. Jenkins, 2006a; Salkowitz, 2014). She emphasises the rise of fandom in relation to transmedia as

a source of emerging immersive and participatory activities and behaviours, such as cosplay (e.g., Brehm-Heeger, Conway, & Vale, 2007; Drushel, 2013; Ue & Cranfield, 2014, Zubernis & Larsen, 2014). Taken together, these three developments (i.e., the mixture of pervasive technologies, multisensory interfaces, and contemporary participatory transmedia storytelling) represent the conditions for the emergence of the immersive document, as well as the evolution of “immersive” information behaviours (Robinson, 2015a, p. 114). Thus, the characteristics of information shared in the form of these types of documents are *pervasive*, *participatory*, *multisensory*, and *immersive*.

The concept of narrative gaps as a site for the study of information seeking behaviours was mentioned previously in Section 2.2.1 with reference to Emmott’s (1989; Sanford & Emmott, 2012) contextual frame in psycholinguistics. In the context of media fandom, fans develop their own contextual frame based on their consumption of narrative content (Van Steenhuyse, 2014, pp. 106-107). Emmott’s (1989) concept parallels related concepts in audience studies and FS discussed in Section 2.3, such as hyperdiegesis (Hills, 2002), but it is useful to cite glimpses of contextual framing in IB literature. As an example of contextual framing, Van Steenhuyse (2014) describes how adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice*, the 1813 novel by Jane Austen, influenced the development of an online fanfiction community. Each new instance extending the source narrative presented new information and knowledge that fans were expected to make sense of, and which affected their engagement with the storyworld as fanfiction readers, reviewers, and writers. Wilson and Walsh’s (1996) general model of IB accounts for “passive attention” and “passive search” as information seeking behaviour (Wilson & Walsh, 1996, Section 7.1, para. 6). Laplante and 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 para-active engagement in the form of community interaction is similar to the music information-seeking experience, which results in “hedonic outcomes” (experience of pleasure and engagement), as a type of information use (Laplante and Downie, 2011, p. 204). For Austen fans, the sensemaking process is ongoing and cyclical, as their experience of new instances of the narrative and their community interactions perpetually shape the storyworld in their own minds (Van Steenhuyse, 2014). According to Hills (2002), this aspect of negotiating a transmedia system is “hyperdiegetic”: it is a gap-filling process, where fans are invited to

speculate and assign their own affective meanings (p. 104). This quality may also be applied to the characterisation of postdigital reading practices: an answer to a text read in context (Skjerdingsstad & Rothbauer, 2016, p. 4). A gap in sense-making is the initial problem state for information seeking (Dervin, 1989) as it has been conventionally understood, and its existence normally signals an anomalous state of knowledge (Belkin, Oddly, & Brooks, 1982a) on behalf of the information user. The difference, in the case of Van Steenhuyse's Austen fans, is that gap-filling as a practice is dictated by creative impulse or compulsion rather than an articulated information need. This is consistent with the discussion in 2.2.1 on information encountering, which explored how tacit motivations (similar to the gap-filling impulse observed in fans) have been studied and conceptualised in IB studies (e.g., Dörk, Carpendale, & Williamson, 2011; Erdelez, 1995; Lee, Ocepek, & Makri, 2022; Ross, 1999; Savolainen, 1995; Williamson, 1998).

The study of engagement is also central to any understanding of the information-related behaviours and practices of individuals (and of media fans specifically). Paradoxically, engagement has only rarely been addressed directly in IB studies (e.g., Bilal & Nahl, 2007; Waugh, 2017). Some studies describe engagement as a desirable outcome of the user experience in human-computer interaction (e.g., Arapakis, et al., 2014; Laplante & Downie, 2011). Laplante and Downie (2011) define engagement as a quality characterised by challenge, aesthetic and sensory appeal, feedback, awareness, motivation, interest, and affect. Meanwhile, Arapakis, et al. (2014) indicate that a characteristic of engagement is “the affective dimension of the interaction between the user and the content” (p. 1989). In both cases, engagement is discussed as an outcome of activity, rather than an *impetus* (or precondition) to act. However, immersive and affective engagement with a fan object can be a motivating factor for fans to extend their experience to other texts (e.g., reviews, commentary, fanfiction) and to seek out opportunities for interaction and participation online (Waugh, 2017). As Skjerdingsstad and Rothbauer (2016) note about reading, this aspect of fan IB can be understood as “realizing an intention” (p. 4). Nahl (2007) describes affective engagement as a process that emerges when a person feels that something is wrong and wants to do something about it, or “the operation of intentionality with regard to a technological affordance” (p. 7). More accurately in the context of fans and fan engagement, Nahl's definition could be altered to read when a person feels something is *interesting*. Waugh's (2017) study of teen members of the Nerdfighter online fan community

explores a complex pattern of engagement that is spread across a variety of social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Discord, Tumblr, Twitch, YouTube). Engagement for teen Nerdfighters begins with the source content and ethos promoted by the YouTube videos of The Vlogbrothers and the novels of John Green, and extends through social interaction into virtual spaces, where norms and values are co-constructed by community members and platform users. Waugh's (2017) use of engagement as a holistic concept characterised by patterns of interaction with mediated information and comprised of motivations and outcomes is more akin to the way engagement is defined in FS and media studies (e.g., Evans, 2019), which is explored further in Section 2.5.

Beyond these approaches, IS includes key areas of interest that overlap with FS. The #FanLIS community, which is discussed in Section 2.4, represents this overlap explicitly, but subdomains of IS research have laid a groundwork for the bridge between disciplines. Some of the information researchers that have investigated fans in the context of reader studies, genre studies, and literacy studies were discussed in Chapter 1 (Section 1.4), particularly in the way fans are characterised as readers (Dresang & Koh, 2009; Rothbauer, 2004; Serantes, 2014; Skjerdingsstad & Rothbauer, 2016). Ross (1999), discussed in Section 2.2.1, represents reader studies in IB and IS, demonstrating how reading is viewed as information practice. Dresang and Koh's (2009) radical change theory, discussed in Section 2.2.2, also examines the practices of readers, specifically in the way they are influenced by digital technologies. Kofmel's (1997) study of adult science fiction readers is a further example of how fans have previously been studied in the information context, through the lens of publishing structures, genre, and reader selection. Mackey (2011) compellingly argues for research on readers that focuses on the local contexts of the reader rather than the author to better develop our understanding of literacy and improve outcomes in the education of young readers. Her auto-literacy project traces the intertextual journey of a single child exploring a single theme as an example of "embedded and embodied literacies" and how readers make sense of information (p. 289). The current study adopts a similar approach by focusing on the lived experiences of media fans, as collected through interviews, and in the textual production of fans in online communities.

2.3. Fan Studies (FS)

FS is an interdisciplinary field that sits across and “poaches” from many other domains of research (e.g., media and communication studies, audience studies, literary theory, narratology, sociology, psychology, critical theory), while seeking to distinguish itself from them through a singular body of literature (Jenkins, 1992/2013). The identity of FS as a standalone field is still very much in question, as a roundtable of scholars and students at the 2019 Fan Studies Network Australasia Conference indicates (Chin, Woo, & Scott, 2019). Scholars Bertha Chin, Benjamin Woo, and Suzanne Scott fielded questions from students and early career researchers seeking to pursue a career in the field. The discussion concluded that FS, while having a distinct subject that has been the focus of academic study for over 30 years, continues to face institutional barriers in separating itself from its parent disciplines. As such, FS still finds itself mostly relegated to media and communication or literature departments of universities around the world (e.g., Chin, 2019). Media and communication research remains its closest forebear, based on the preoccupation of FS research with media practices and cybercultures (e.g., Booth, 2015; Couldry, 2002; Hellekson & Busse, 2006; Jenkins, 2006a). FS also overlaps with audience studies where fans are included as a part of audience cultures (e.g., Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998; Evans, 2012; 2019; Williams, 2015) and at the same time defines itself against them when it distinguishes media fan cultures from the practices of more typical or mainstream audiences (e.g., Coppa, 2006; Duffett, 2014; Hills, 2002; Sandvoss, 2005). More recently, FS literature has included the study of geek culture (Scott, 2019; Woo, 2018). Woo (2019) proposes that FS researchers must situate fans in the context of a broader and more diverse array of media-oriented practices to avoid essentialising and exceptionalising fan identities. Woo (2019) argues for a re-engagement with fans’ everyday lives through the “digital mundane” (p. 10), which is “the affective machinery of everyday life. It is where sensibilities are shaped, worked on, intensified, assuaged, and attenuated, where worlds are simultaneously opened up and shut down.” (Wilson & Yochim, 2017, p. 17) The digital mundane provides a perspective that echoes Floridi’s (2014) notion of onlife experience in the context of media fans (Woo, 2019).

Sandvoss, Gray, and Harrington (2017) divide the development of the field of FS into three “waves” (pp. 2-7). They contend that each wave is differentiated by its methodological orientations, aims, and conceptual reference points. The first wave of fan studies was “activist

research”, ethnographically oriented by scholars who enjoyed “insider” status with the fan cultures they studied (Sandvoss, Gray & Harrington, 2017, p. 3). These scholars⁸ advocated against problematic representations of the fan in academic and public discourses (e.g., Jenson, 1992). In the 1980s and early 1990s, mass media “had a near monopoly on the representation of fans” (Sandvoss, Gray & Harrington, 2017, p. 3), which resulted in negative stereotypes even in instances where fans were portrayed as protagonists (e.g., *Revenge of the Nerds* (1987), as discussed by Woo, 2018, p. 4). Based on such representations, fans were assumed to be “uncritical, fawning, and reverential” (Sandvoss, Gray & Harrington, 2017, p. 3; e.g., Jewett & Lawrence, 1977), until first-wave scholarship reframed fandom as a “tactic of the disempowered, an act of subversion and cultural appropriation against the power of media producers and industries” (Sandvoss, Gray & Harrington, 2017, pp. 2-3). Jenkins’ (1992/2013) canonical use of de Certeau’s (1984) metaphor of “poaching” as resistance against institutions and Fiske’s (1992) cultural economy of fandom as a strategy to “enhance the fan’s power over, and participation in, the original, industrial text” (p. 43) are examples of how first-wave scholarship set out to defend and distinguish fans against negative representation by non-fans. As such, first wave FS is framed by an “incorporation/resistance paradigm” (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998, p. 15). The energy of first-wave scholarship inspired a new generation of researchers on the cusp of a digital transformation that would alter how fans and consumers fundamentally engaged with media. Today, that energy still pervades and perpetuates the field, for example, when addressing issues of marginalisation and around the discourse of the “acafan” [or, academic fan] (e.g., Chin, 2019).

The second wave of FS moved beyond the compelling paradigm of incorporation/resistance to one that situates media fandom within the broader sociology of consumption and *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1984). Authors like Hills (2002) examined fandom within this larger context⁹. Second-wave scholarship was not a “purposeful political intervention” that

⁸ The canonical text *The Adoring Audience* (Lewis, 1992) is a collection of some of the most influential first-wave scholarship, including Fiske (1992), Grossberg (1992), and Jenson (1992). Other canonical first-wave texts include: Jenkins (1992/2013), Bacon-Smith (1992), and Penley (1991) among others.

⁹ Sandvoss, Gray, and Harrington (2017) cite several second-wave authors that explored the social and cultural hierarchies of fan subcultures. Hills (2002) offers a discussion on the use of Bourdieu’s (1984) cultural capital which includes first and second-wave interpretations (pp. 20-36). Hills himself problematises second-wave scholarship in the same way as Sandvoss, Gray and Harrington (2017), however he shares the second-wave preoccupation with situating hierarchies of fan subcultures in relation to broader cultural formations. Note that the notion of “waves” and positioning of different authors within that scheme remains fluid; for example, Sandvoss, Gray, and Harrington (2017)

perceived fandom as an “a priori tool of empowerment” like the work of first-wave FS, but rather sought to demonstrate how fans’ interpretive communities are “embedded in existing social and cultural conditions” (Sandvoss, Gray & Harrington, 2017, p. 5). However, by re-situating the fan in the realm of cultural economies and focusing on the structuration of subcultural hierarchies, second-wave scholarship ran the risk of essentialising the rich and unique social lives of fans and omitting their “individual motivations, enjoyment, and pleasures” (Sandvoss, Gray & Harrington, 2017, p. 5).

Third wave FS emerged from the increasing pervasiveness of ICTs and its transformation of the cultural consumption and production practices of fans. Sandvoss, Gray & Harrington (2017) explain:

When Jenkins wrote *Textual Poachers* (1992), fan communities were often relegated to conventions and fanzines. Today, with many such communities’ migration to the Internet, thousands of fan discussion groups, websites, and social media networks populate cyberspace, and plenty of lived, physical spaces too. Similarly, mobile media bring fan objects out with their users everywhere. In turn, these changing communication technologies and media texts contribute to and reflect the increasing entrenchment of fan consumption in the structure of our everyday lives. (p. 6)

This transformation democratised fan consumption, asserting the ways in which we are all, in different ways, fans (Booth, 2015). The third wave of FS is, therefore, about understanding this transformation to the subject of the media fan, which increased the scope of inquiry to questions beyond institutional resistance or economies of consumption. As a result, FS has drifted into diverse, neighbouring realms, such as geek culture (Scott, 2019; Woo, 2018), archival studies (De Kosnik, 2016; Swalwell, Stuckey, & Ndalians, 2017), and IB (Price, 2017). Instead of advocating for a disempowered subject (first-wave FS) or conceptualising how fan typologies shape and are shaped by cultural economies (second-wave FS), third-wave scholarship refocuses

position Hills (2002) and Sandvoss (2005) among third-wave scholars based on the use of psychoanalytically inspired approaches, when they are arguably more representative of second-wave scholarship according to the orientations described.

on the *micro* level that is concerned with the relationship between fans' selves and their fan objects, which offers fundamental insight into the *macro* level of modern life. This dual focus dispenses with the discourse of the "exemplary" fan (or the typical/minimal fan) and instead allows the subject to identify and define themselves through empirical investigations rather than essentialising typologies (Duffett, 2013; Woo, 2019). Issues of gender, class, race, and identity, therefore, are still of primary importance, but are now studied from multiple disciplinary perspectives in ways that do not separate the media fan from the totality of everyday lived experience. This latest development in the field takes what was previously a "loosely coherent subfield" and extends it into "multiple projects with multiple trajectories" that all ultimately aim to "tell us something about how we relate to ourselves, to each other, and to how we read the mediated texts around us" (Sandvoss, Gray & Harrington, 2017, pp. 6-7). There is also potential to integrate this approach with everyday research in IB, which is further explored in the current study.

2.4. FanLIS

As noted previously in Section 2.2.3, there are areas of IB and IS that overlap with FS (Dresang & Koh, 2009; Kofmel, 1997; Mackey, 2011; Ross, 1999; Rothbauer, 2004; Serantes, 2014). These information researchers are forerunners that have laid a groundwork for a bridge between IS and FS. In the last few years, there has been increasing interest in IS and IB explicitly framed around media fans and fan practices (e.g., De Kosnik, 2016; Fiesler, et al, 2017; Kizhakhethil, 2021; Price, 2017; Stobbs & Oak, 2018; Waugh, 2018). This work has emerged from the reader studies, genre studies, and literacy studies that preceded them, creating a fertile ground in which to bridge the gap between IS and FS.

In May 2021, for the first time, a group of scholars held a virtual symposium for the #FanLIS project. #FanLIS is an "interdisciplinary project bridging the fields of fan studies and library & information science" (<https://blogs.city.ac.uk/fanlis/fanlis-symposia/fanlis-2021/>). Recently, the online journal *Transformative Works and Cultures* published selected papers from the symposium (Price & Robinson, 2022), demonstrating how the interdisciplinary project has taken root and inspired a community of researchers. Indeed, when I first undertook this research at the start of 2016, there were few studies in IS that focused on media fans; however, since then,

a body of scholarship has flourished to help fill the research gap, some of it under the auspices of the *#FanLIS* project (Emmanouloudis, 2022; Miller, 2022; Price, 2017; Thomas, 2022) and some emerging separately yet tracing a parallel trajectory (Fiesler, et al., 2017; Kizhakhethil, 2021; Stobbs & Oak, 2018; Waugh, 2018). Using the label this new community has embraced, I employ “FanLIS” to refer to the entire body of scholarship that brings together IB and FS, including the *#FanLIS* project’s forerunners and equivalents. This scholarship is situated in relation to IB and is also representative of third-wave FS. The following paragraphs explore the scholarship of FanLIS.

When compared to other categories of information user, such as readers and consumers, fans have received far less research attention in IS (Price, 2017, p. 80). As an example of this, Price (2017) investigates existing literature on the bibliographic control of fan works and fanfiction. While there has been a growing scholarly interest in folksonomies and fan-created classifications (e.g., Bullard, 2014; Dalton, 2012), she notes that this interest has not yet translated to a broader application and acceptance within the IS domain. The Library of Congress, for example, does not possess a classification scheme for fan works (Price, 2017, p. 80). One of the earliest studies of media fans in IS, as noted by Price (2017, p. 78), suggests the reason for this historical gap is that fans are dismissed as “at best deviant or at worst dangerous” (Hart, et al., 1999, p. 82). This position reflects negative representations of fannish behaviour as obsessive, hysterical, deviant, and pathological (Jenson, 1992). Early fan scholars, as discussed in Section 2.3, challenged these stereotypes by providing evidence of fan communities that developed unique practices as a means of resisting dominant social structures using an incorporation/resistance paradigm (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998; Sandvoss, Gray & Harrington, 2017). Fans under the label of amateur producers or “produsers” (Bruns, 2008; Price & Robinson, 2016, p. 652) are more frequently covered in FanLIS: fanfiction authors and writers of unauthorised texts that expand upon an existing authorised narrative, garner the most attention. Pecoskie and Hill (2015) explore fanfiction from the perspective of information dissemination, proposing that it represents an evolution in models for publication and, as a result, an assured challenge for copyright lawmakers (Romanenkova, 2014; See also Hill & Pecoskie, 2017). Bullard (2014), Dalton (2012), Johnson (2014) and Gursoy (2015) studied the classification and indexing structures developed by fans through the establishment of online

fanfiction repositories. Fiesler, et al. (2017) and Robinson and Price (2021) also explore this fruitful area of information research by looking at the folksonomic practices of the online fanfiction archive, *Archive of Our Own*. Recent studies also explore other forms of fan production (cf. Price & Robinson, 2021). For example, Thomas (2022) examines the documented conflicts of *Adventure Time* fan encyclopedists in online wikis, where disagreements around attribution and episode order highlighted the unexpected complexity in identifying media producers. Rasmussen-Pennington (2016) and Magree, et al. (2014) examine the IB and archiving practices of music fans, while Adams (2009), Nyman (2010) and Stobbs and Oak (2018) study practices emerging from the role-playing game (RPG) community. Emmanouloudis (2022) presents a case study of “pure fan-generated narrative” by examining the community of players and audience members on the Twitch channel *Twitch Plays Pokémon*. The channel allowed viewers to control and play the video game *Pokémon Red*; Emmanouloudis (2022) examines how fans documented the stream’s history and created archival records via external social platforms Discord, Reddit, and issuu.com (https://issuu.com/audreydijeu/docs/the_book_of_helix).

As noted previously, fans have also been studied in their context as readers. Kofmel (1997) examines the experiences of science-fiction readers, reflecting that the semblance of reading as a solitary act fails to capture the real interactions and deeply felt interpersonal connections that reading evoked in her participants. Kofmel’s work demonstrates that the pleasure-reading practices of science-fiction fans—including the affective and interpersonal negotiations inherent in reading—are truly representative of de Certeau’s (1984) concept of *arts de faire* (the practice of “making do”), while remaining far less visible than the fan productions more commonly studied under various terms (e.g., “participatory culture”, “producers”, etc.). Similarly, Serantes (2009; 2011; 2014) explores the reading experiences of comic books fans (2014, p. 8). In this way, Serantes achieves a bridge between fan studies and the IS community, highlighting a parallel interest in the culture of the comics fan/reader. Rothbauer’s research on reading as everyday life practice explores aspects of fandom in the context of queer and rural youth (2004; 2011). Her research provides evidence that reading fanfiction and other fan-based literary activities play a significant role in identity formation and the development of social connections. Rothbauer (2004) highlights the need for research to critically examine the appeal

of a diverse range of “mass media texts” (p. 128), including digital and internet-based texts (e.g., e-zines, web comics, message boards and social media). Waugh’s (2017; 2018) study of teen Nerdfighters, discussed in Section 2.2.2, answers Rothbauer’s call to action with insights on the digital lives of teen fans as represented through the use of social media platforms. Similarly, Skjerdingsstad and Rothbauer (2016) re-casts 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” (p. 4). Miller (2022) examines how folksonomic structures are used by fans, by investigating the searching and information-seeking behaviours of young adult fanfiction readers. Kizhakhethil’s (2019; 2020; 2021) study of the fanfiction reading and writing practices of a gendered online community through the critical lens of diaspora small world is among the most recent and notable entries in FanLIS scholarship. This work is deeply embedded in the theoretical foundations of IB while also expanding outward to offer fundamental insight into the *macro* level of modern life.

Information issues and, specifically, the information seeking of fans have only recently become the focus of research in the field of FS. Even these instances, such as Bury’s (2017) consideration of information seeking as a participatory fan practice, often do so without the context of IB as a source of theory on the concept. Nevertheless, the role of information in the lived experiences of media fans can hardly be dismissed in FS literature. For example, De Kosnik (2016) and Derecho (2006) expand on Derrida’s “archontic” principle with a catalogue of examples that demonstrate how fans are like archivists involved in “unifying”, “identifying”, “classifying”, and “consigning” information (Derrida, 1995, p. 3). Aardse (2014) examines how transmedia fans of the television series *Lost* and players of *The Lost Experience* augmented reality game (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,” and succeeded in developing a profoundly engaged fan community (p. 116). Bore and Hickman (2013) explore the information-sharing activities of fans of *The West Wing* on Twitter. Black (2009), Soto (2015) and Henderson (2015) contribute insights into the role fanfiction plays in the development of traditional and digital literacy among young people. Pugh’s (2005) exploration of a wide variety of practices surrounding fanfiction, such as beta-reading, resource guide writing, feedback culture and Livejournal reclisting, demonstrates an interest in activities and

attitudes that are (to IB scholars) recognisably information behaviours. Van Steenhuyse (2014) further expands Pugh's conclusions in her study of an online community of Jane Austen fanfiction writers, noting how fans read stories across media and negotiate a contextual frame internally and with others (i.e., their own personal understanding of the storyworld). In a study of crossmedia adaptations, Dicieanu (2014) characterises information seeking in the guise of fan engagement, remarking that fans of a given narrative (e.g., *Harry Potter*) are likely to seek out its adaptations and media extensions, and will make sense of the combined information to form their own interpretation of the storyworld. In her research on fan reaction to the popular video game *Mass Effect 3*, Ganzon (2014) describes how 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 studies emerge from research on fans outside the field of IS, and yet reveal important findings on how media fans access, use, and share information. As such, they can be read as forerunners to FanLIS as third-wave FS, demonstrating that information concepts can be engaged with by researchers without starting from the perspective of IS. However, FS must also integrate the decades of research findings and theoretical advances in IB, to ensure that future studies are robust.

The first and foremost research output that can be tied to the #*FanLIS* project described at the start of this section is Price's (2017) model of fan information behaviour (p. 319). Price (2017) maps the behaviours described by participants in her study around the creation, acquisition, organisation, preservation, and understanding of information to include the interconnections of processes for information seeking, assimilation, dissemination, communication among fans and producers, semiotic production that includes enunciative ("fan talk") and textual outputs (encyclopaedic and transformative fan texts), gatekeeping, and understanding (or meaning making). She summarises her findings with a set of key observations (p. 320):

- 1) Fan information behaviour is generous.
- 2) It is participatory and collaborative.
- 3) It is informal.
- 4) It is based in fantasy, play and performance.

- 5) It disregards traditional methods of bibliographic control for its own.
- 6) It favours creative freedom over copyright and intellectual property laws.
- 7) It encourages mentorship and peer learning.

These observations provide a foundation upon which researchers can build a more extensive exploration of the IB of media fans.

Price's research represents a rich area for the advancement of IS research as an example of how FanLIS contributes empirical observations on media fans, not just as information users but as makers and creators of information (e.g., through the development of their own methods for bibliographic control, as illustrated in Price & Robinson, 2021). The many examples discussed in this section illustrate how fan productions and fan works, like art, can be understood as information creation (Gorichanaz, 2019). The development of a (soon to be published) special issue of *Library & Information Research* around the topic of information creation, extending from Gorichanaz's (2019) synthesis of information creation in IB and Huvila, et al.'s (2020) discussion of makers and making, also demonstrates that FanLIS taps into current discourses that are of great interest to the IS discipline in general. The growing community and body of scholarship behind FanLIS addresses Woo's (2019) call for a re-engagement with fans' everyday lives through the "digital mundane" (as mentioned in Section 2.3). The following section examines specific concepts relevant to FanLIS and the project that Woo (2019) proposes, including: intertexts (Kristeva, 1980), paratexts (Genette, 1982/1997; 1987/1997), transtexts (Branch, et al., 2017; Kurtz & Bourdaa, 2016), media convergence (Jenkins, 2006a), transmedia storyworlds (Dena, 2009; Klasturp & Tosca, 2014; Ryan & Thon, 2014), engagement (Evans, 2016; 2019), post-object fandom (Williams, 2015), and contextual framing (Emmott, 1989; Hills, 2002).

2.5. Paratexts, Intertexts, Transtexts, and Engagement

As discussed in Chapter 1, Section 1.5, media fan objects are constituted from the tapestry of interconnected texts that make up a storyworld (Ryan & Thon, 2014). As such, fan objects are also intertexts, meaning that they are referential and analogic, containing traces of other related texts. Kristeva's (1980) concept of intertextuality as a "mosaic of quotations" is useful in understanding how every fan object is a representation of a storyworld (p. 66). Texts,

especially when encountered in 21st century onlife environments, are not limited to words on the page; they are the multimodal productions that contribute to the experience of narrative. The concept of storyworld allows us to situate fan objects (i.e., the thing with which a fan is engaged) and fan productions (i.e., the things a fan produces through their engagement) within the “general organization of the semantic domain of texts as a universe” (Ryan, 2014, p. 32). It also focuses our attention on fan engagement as a “process of simulation” and immersion in a given storyworld (Ryan, 2014, p. 32). Genette’s *paratext* offers a way to understand the informational components involved in this process of simulation. The paratext, as the content or semantic information that “binds” a text (Genette, 1982/1997, p. 3), is the textual artifact that represents the interpretative labour of readers. In Genette’s (1987/1997) formulation, the paratext can be made up of *peritextual information* produced and circulated in conjunction with the source text itself (i.e., hypotext) or *epitextual information* generated outside the source text, circulating freely “in a virtually limitless physical and social space” (p. 344). Peritexts are traditionally footnotes, prefaces, reference lists, and back and front matter found in print media; applied to other visual (film, television, video games) and digital media, peritexts might include physical boxes or cases, liner notes, summaries, credits, trailers, music, and download links. In this sense, peritextual information provides cues that can be textual, visual, and aural that facilitate interpretation for a reader/viewer/player at the moment of engagement with the source text (e.g., viewing the episode). The epitext is any text outside of the source text, and can include reviews, interviews, commentary, correspondence, and conversations. Epitextual information provides cues that facilitate interpretation for a reader/viewer/player *after* the moment of engagement with the source text. A crucial difference is that epitexts must be sought since they are not presented with the source text. For example, reviews and comment threads hosted in online communities and on fan websites are paratexts that contain *epitextual information*, meaning they represent information that is sought or encountered and shared outside of the source text. Moreover, our understanding of epitextual information as something generated in a social space outside the source text and, often, without the original author, means that the definition of a paratext can be extended to include fan-generated content. Applied in the onlife context to all forms of narrative media that fans encounter and engage with every day (books, comic books, films, television shows, video games, fanfic, streaming video, web forums, social media sites, social content sites,

and networks of transmedia productions), paratexts are semantic informational content; they gradually grow epitextually to surround fan objects over time as more and more people encounter them, and as narratives are interpreted and reinterpreted.

Media convergence, the collision and merging of media that has occurred due to the rise of ICTs (Jenkins, 2006a), incites an increasingly rapid evolution in the ways we access, use, and share information. One approach to the study of media convergence has been to examine the information behaviours that surround transmedia systems or “transtexts” (Branch, et al., 2017; Kurtz & Bourdaa, 2016). A transmedia system is an interconnected network of productions in the form of textual, audio, video, digitally mediated and/or multimodal content, physical media, and live performance (Kinder, 1991; Jenkins, 2006a). “Transtexts” are the material objects (the texts, peritexts, and epitexts) that co-exist through meaningful interconnection to form a comprehensive narrative world, or storyworld (Ryan & Thon, 2014). Transtexts are designed with the intent of being experienced within a larger narrative context spread across multiple media platforms (Jenkins, 2006a; Kurtz & Bourdaa, 2016). A classic example of a transmedia system and storyworld is *The Matrix* (1999), a narrative created in direct collaboration with many artists spanning four live-action films, several animated short films, two video games and numerous comic books (Jenkins, 2006a, p. 101). An alternate example of a transmedia storyworld is *Game of Thrones (GOT)*, a television series that has been expanded and spread through many authorised, semi-authorised, and definitively unauthorised productions by other creators across media (e.g., books, videos, music, artwork, video games, board games) and fan productions (Klastrup & Tosca, 2014). Many of *GOT*’s associated transtexts, unlike those of *The Matrix*, are not planned or sanctioned collaborations with the television franchise or book series. It is worth noting that *The Matrix* was an early digital transmedia production; the increased access to digital production tools and pervasiveness of ICTs has contributed to the spreadability of unauthorised and semi-authorised content (as noted in Chapter 1, Section 1.3), and this may be one reason why transtexts associated with more recent transmedia systems like *GOT* are increasingly transformed and disseminated in unplanned and unexpected ways. Yet all transtexts, authorised or not, are part of the same storyworld (Dena, 2009, p. 23; Ryan, 2014; 2015; Ryan & Thon, 2014): a narrative universe that contains a complex network of paratexts and intertexts that fans voluntarily and enthusiastically negotiate through their engagement.

Transmedia storytelling, the underlying principle that governs a transmedia storyworld, is defined by Jenkins (2006a) as a process whereby elements of a narrative are “dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience” (pp. 95-96; see also Long, 2007). This definition has undergone some revision from scholars over the years, who have debated the notion that narratives must be dispersed “systematically” by official authors and, as a result, any unintended product (arising from fan engagement, for example) must therefore be disregarded (Stein & Busse, 2012, pp. 13-14). An alternate approach defines transmedia storytelling as relational and context-driven, where the relationship between official and unofficial narrative articulations are matched against the cultural memory associated with the storyworld (Harvey, 2015, p. 2; Hills, 2002). An even more inclusive definition allows for the co-construction of transtexts, in which fans as well as official authors contribute to the expanding storyworld (Kurtz & Bourdaa, 2016; Stein & Busse, 2012). IS literature has primarily studied transmedia based on the more restrictive definition (e.g., Carman, 2011; Dresang & Koh, 2009; Gutierrez, 2012; Vukadin, 2014), while fan studies have tended toward the most inclusive definition in order to facilitate research of fan-produced texts (e.g., Booth, 2015; Dicieanu, 2014; Ganzon, 2014; Van Steenhuyse, 2014). The onlife experience of the everyday, that is, the ways in which the totality of our experiences are continually mediated by ICTs, suggests that modern life is, by definition, *transmedial*. Our own life stories are inscribed across media through our very consumption and use of media. Booth (2015) observed that “as consumers of media, we play with the texts, meanings, and values created by media industries. But playing fandom isn’t just what we do with our everyday media; it’s also what our media do with us” (p. 1). Booth implies that, in an onlife environment, the boundaries between consumer and producer, fan and creator, are constantly being negotiated. Furthermore, even as they are empowered by technology to reshape their narrative experiences, inevitably, fans themselves (as discussed in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5) are shaped by the technologies that mediate their experience, and the institutions that control these technologies.

Engagement is understood as the process of simulation (Ryan, 2014) that a fan experiences when they encounter and immerse themselves in a storyworld. This is a challenging concept to articulate because it represents the invisible interpretive labour that occurs in the mind of an individual whenever they encounter information that meets a subjective threshold of

semantic value. In Section 2.2.3, I discussed the ways in which engagement is taken up in IB literature, often in reductive ways that limit the scope of understanding to human-computer interaction (e.g., Arapakis, et al., 2014; Laplante & Downie, 2011; Nahl, 2007). I concluded that section by taking these existing definitions and suggesting that engagement is a process that emerges when a person feels that something is interesting and wants to do something about it. Seeking to understand engagement in the context of transmedia storyworlds and how audiences interact with them, Evans (2019) begins her exploration of the concept with the most basic example of “watching TV” (pp. 1-2). She argues that engagement suggests “something more than simply watching”; it is “a meaningful experience that is privileged and stands out from other, everyday experiences” of media (Evans, 2019, p. 2.). Evans (2019) defines a fan’s engagement with media in terms of *moments*, each composed of three components: a type of behaviour, a form of response, and a cost (p. 37). Taken together, these moments of engagement provide value to the media industry and transmedia producers. Evans’ (2016; 2019) understanding of engagement as moments composed of behaviour, response, and cost, originates from the perspective of the audience. Audiences perceive engagement as “a set of common feelings, actions, behaviours, responses” shared across different media (Evans, 2016).

Meanwhile, media industry producers predominantly see engagement as tied to a specific medium’s characteristics (otherwise known as “medium specificity”; Evans, 2019, pp. 19-29). Evans’ (2016) analysis finds three kinds of engagement discussed by both transmedia producers and audiences, which are immersive (or receptive), interactive, and para-active (pp. 13-14), and which correspond to the type of behaviour (cf. Evans, 2019). Para-active engagement is a powerful concept in the context of media fans because it represents the activities that take place around and beyond the narrative source text in the near limitless paratextual space (Genette, 1987/1997). Evans (2016) includes the reading of wikis and comment threads as examples of para-active engagement. Such practices are also examples of information-seeking (e.g., Waugh, 2017).

Other researchers, by comparison, define engagement in terms of fans’ textual productions (Booth, 2015; Jenkins, 2006a; Stein & Busse, 2012). Citing an influential blog post by a fan, Stein and Busse (2012) and Booth (2015) study fan engagement in terms of affirmational fandom (i.e., the creative practices of fans that aim to promote and celebrate the

authorised source material) and transformational fandom (i.e., creative practices that seek to “fix” perceived issues in the source material) (Booth, 2015, pp. 12-15). Booth provides a nuanced interpretation that suggests the information behaviours of fans tend to hover somewhere between “affirmational” and “transformational” engagement (pp. 14-15). The use of digital media to share information and publish fan-produced content is the most visible outcome of fan engagement (e.g., *SuperWhoLock* Tumblr, as described by Booth, 2015, p. 25). Finally, Jenkins (1992/2013; 2006a; 2006b; Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013), through an evolving definition of the concept of participatory culture, repeatedly addresses the role of digital media in empowering and engaging fans, providing new and improved means of sharing, appropriating, remixing, annotating, and archiving texts.

A succession of moments of engagement with media results in different kinds of complex fan practices that tap into the identity and self-construction of the fan. An example of this is Williams’ (2015) concept of post-object fandom. Post-object fandom takes the concept of “pure relationships” (Giddens, 1990; 1992) to explore the self-identity and self-narrative of fans coping with the “emotional void and forced detachment” (Costello & Moore, 2007, p. 10) from a fan object when it becomes dormant and is no longer producing new instalments, like the death of a character or the end of a television series (Williams, 2015). As a consequence of modernity, according to Giddens (1992), a “pure relationship” is disconnected from external associations and is part of self-identity; it exists solely for the satisfaction and rewards it can deliver (as cited by Williams, 2015, p. 21). Williams (2015) indicates these rewards are two-fold: (1) the reflection of a desirable and appropriate self-identity and self-narrative; and, (2) a sense of ontological security or trust (p. 21). When applied to the context of media fans, there are two types of “pure relationships”: fan/object pure relationships (a fan’s attachment to a fan object, such as a character or narrative) and fan-fan pure relationships (a fan’s attachment to fellow fans). For example, *Game of Thrones* fans have a fan/object pure relationship with the storyworld. When rewards from a fan/object pure relationship are threatened, such as when a character dies or a television series ends, a fan’s trust in the narrative’s ability to sustain engagement and their own self-identity as a fan are challenged. A fan must determine if there are still rewards to reap through that relationship and adjust their self-identity accordingly. Post-object fandom is the study of such threats and transitions.

Finally, a fan's engagement with the texts, intertexts, and paratexts of storyworlds is also the channel for a dynamic internal cognitive and affective process of interpretation known as "contextual framing" (Emmott, 1989; 1997; Sanford & Emmott, 2012). Contextual framing refers to the individual fan's simulated universe for a storyworld (Ryan, 2014), as mentioned in Section 2.2.3. It is analogous to de Certeau's (1984) description of the activity of reading and Barthes' (1974) writerly text. For de Certeau (1984), reading is "silent production" (p. xxi). When a reader creates the world described on the page in their imagination, they are in effect inhabiting the text: "A different world (the reader's) slips into the author's place. This mutation makes the text habitable, like a rented apartment" (de Certeau, 1984, p. xxi.). Similarly, Barthes (1974) proposes that the writerly text is one that invites "*ourselves writing*", a co-construction of meaning, before a particular interpretation can be imposed by institutions or ideologies (p. 5). In this sense, what Evans (2019) refers to as receptive engagement is already active, because internal activity is taking place in the mind of the audience member as they encounter and make sense of information; they fit it into a mental framework that they are themselves responsible for constructing.

Contextual framing is not new or unique to a particular school of thought. In fact, the idea that understanding is achieved through a negotiation or dialogue lies at the heart of hermeneutics (Gadamer, 2004, p. 361). According to Gadamer (2004), interpretation is *productive* practice: information is not simply passed along unchanged from person to person, from author to audience, but is re-evaluated and re-shaped through the interpretive process. People use "their current frame of understanding, their current ways of being in the world, their current discourses," to "interpret" the information they encounter, making a "difference" to it (Eagleton, 1996, p. 62; See also McCormack, 2014). This idea influences other strands of research, such as reader response and reception theory, where a reader "fills in gaps, draws inferences and tests out hunches" through the "unconscious labour" of reading (Eagleton, 1996, p. 66). It can also be traced back to the philosophy of consciousness; Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, for instance, is devoted to how the meaning of things is constituted in and by the consciousness of the individual (Carr, 2003, p. 183).

Psycholinguistics offers compelling practical research on contextual framing. Emmott (1989) introduces the concept of "frames of reference" in the context of narrative processing,

which she derives from Goffman's (1974) *Frame Analysis*. The frame is defined as "a mental store which records contextual information" (Emmott, 1989, p. 80). While Emmott's body of work (1989; 1998; Sanford & Emmott, 2012) focuses on the underlying psycholinguistic properties of narrative processing for practical insights, such as modelling the cognitive negotiation of textual units like anaphora, she recognises the larger implications of the concept: "When we form a mental store and keep it activated over a period of time, we are *monitoring* the information. We need to monitor information in order to make sense of the world" (1989, p. 81, emphasis in original).

An in-depth review of IB research literature indicates that the use of the concept of contextual framing from psycholinguistics has not been explored, despite parallels to relevant theory, such as Savolainen's (1995) ELIS model. Chafe (1994) proposes an approach that combines the study of language (discourse) and consciousness. His profound observations, which dig into the constituent units not just of written language, but of music, art, and spoken communication generally, offer valuable insights into the flow of information in subjective experience. Others contribute to this discourse-based approach to the study of information and communication (e.g., Clark & Brennan, 1991; Clark & Haviland, 1977; Prince, 1981). The communication model proposed by Robson and Robinson (2015) is an example of the application of such an approach in the IB context. However, a compelling support for contextual framing comes when considering the limitation (or, perhaps, the strength) of narrative media and forms. Eco (1979; 1994) argues that a text (or *transtext*) is a "lazy machine" that is only capable of hinting at everything that might exist in the world it is illustrating (1979, p. 214; 1994, p. 3). It is up to the reader (or fan) to use their imagination and, more to the point, their contextual frame to fill in the gaps.

Genette's (1987/1997) concept of the paratext adds a layer of complexity to the study of form. The notion that a narrative text is surrounded by additional content that informs interpretation by a reader makes it clear that context is of paramount importance (Genette, 1987/1997, pp. 1-4). Keats (1899) famously referred to this aspect of the narrative form as "negative capability": "that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, and doubts without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (p. 277). Hemingway (1932) offers a similar take using the metaphor of the iceberg to describe his minimalist storytelling aesthetic (p.

154). While both Keats and Hemingway considered that negative capability is a quality shared only by the most talented storytellers and “solemn writers” (Hemingway, 1932, p. 154), it is paradoxically this quality when manifested in a narrative form that inspires fans to seek out answers and expand storyworlds (Long, 2007). Hills’ (2002) concept of “hyperdiegesis” as “endlessly deferred narrative” (p. 101) is particularly apt at illustrating this perspective: “the creation of a vast and detailed narrative space, only a fraction of which is ever directly seen or encountered within the text” (p. 104).

The distributed nature of transmedia storyworlds, Long (2007) argues, enhances the negative capability of narrative (the “lazy” capacity of “hinting”) (pp. 9-10; pp. 19-21; see also Eco, 1994, p. 3). The negative capability of narrative media and the motivated narrative gap-filling of media fans are two sides of the same coin. Price (2017) considers the process of contextual framing part of “understanding”, which constitutes the final stage of the information communication chain (p. 13; p. 303). Contextual framing and understanding are defined as the fan’s meaning-making practices behind “fanon” (Price, 2017, p. xii) and “headcanon”, that is, “individual fan interpretations of a fandom, not necessarily supported by the official canon” (p. xiii). The study of the information behaviours of fans, as the project undertaken by FanLIS, must remain conscious of the dynamic ways that fans encounter and make meaning from narrative information. Not as a passive and reductive process where a person is perceived purely as an information receiver, but rather as the dynamic and active interpretive labour of an individual co-constructing an entire universe through their engagement with interconnected texts, intertexts, paratexts, and transtexts.

2.6. Everyday Life Practice and Tactics

As noted in Chapter 1, Section 1.2, everyday life practice is a framework for human “ways of operating” (de Certeau, 1984, p. xix) that comprise the “informal, routine, mundane activities of daily life” (Rothbauer, 2004, p. 14). This framework is understood as an “ensemble of practices” that ordinary people perform within networks of institutions (Highmore, 2002, p. 151), like the media industry, governmental structures, educational systems, the military and religious organisations that constitute the “disciplinary (and dominating) forces of society” (Rothbauer, 2010, p. 54). “De Certeau’s investigations illustrate how consumption is actually

“another production”, a *hidden* one manifested through the *ways people use* the products (and information) “imposed by a dominant economic order” (pp. xii-xiii). De Certeau (1984) states the rationale for his project:

For example, the analysis of the images broadcast by television (representation) and of the time spent watching television (behavior) should be complemented by a study of what the cultural consumer “makes” or “does” during this time and with these images. The same goes for the use of urban space, the products purchased in the supermarket, the stories and legends distributed by the newspapers, and so on. (p. xii)

Representation, in this sense, is the *information* that people continually and persistently encounter through participation in daily life. This includes going to the supermarket, reading, or watching the news, and engaging with the narratives that make up the fertile loam of popular culture. It is important for researchers to recognise that these various activities do not happen in isolation, but that the everyday is constituted by the totality of lived experience (Ocepek, 2018). Representations encountered through banal happenstance, such as seeing an ad, a social media post, or a television show, or hearing a conversation, have the potential to impact other areas of lived experience not traditionally associated with the mundane; therefore, the study of everyday life practices cannot be reduced to non-work contexts (Savolainen, 1995). Written in a predigital context, de Certeau’s (1984) work is nevertheless prescient of the challenges faced in a world that is mediated increasingly by digital technologies. He remarks that the “steadily increasing expansion” of institutional systems of media production have removed any “place” where what people *make* or *do* with such productions can be indicated (p. xii). He predicts the modern “productivist technocracy” that makes all of society into a book, wherein “reading” is an art that is “anything but passive” (p. xxii). His use of the word *reading* anticipates a much broader definition than laying eyes and hands on the printed text. Society *is* representation, in the myriad ways that it is represented by and through media (what Floridi refers to in our 21st century context as the “infosphere” and “onlife environments”, which I discuss in the next section). The world itself is text, and “reading” is how we inhabit it (p. xxi; p. 167). Everyday life practice, therefore, is the practice of *inhabiting the text*.

The strength of de Certeau's (1984) theory comes from his elaboration of "tactics", a concept he uses to illustrate what consumers make/do with representations (pp. 34-39). A tactic is a behaviour performed in response and in service to information. Mundane examples of tactics include: using the snooze button on an alarm to gain a few additional minutes of sleep; meeting a friend for coffee as a pretence for conversation; immersing oneself in a favourite television program; scrolling through a Twitter feed for important highlights of the day and posting a related anecdote. In each of these examples, people are encountering, interpreting, using, sharing, or creating information as a function of their daily lives. Each of these examples illustrates how people live and operate *within* "a grid of discipline" imposed by institutions (Highmore, 2002, p. 159): the alarm that wakes you up so you can get to work on time, the use of coffee as a social and discursive practice, the experience of media productions for entertainment, the use of social media websites as an aggregate source of information and a designated place where you can socialise with others and contribute new information. At its most basic, a tactic is this practice of *inhabiting*: the act of carving out one's own space where it does not already exist. Therefore, a tactic is employed by someone who is dominated by institutions, who has the autonomy only to affect small changes (i.e., hidden productions). They are "weak" in relation to institutions and their hegemonic systems of production. Tactics are defined in opposition to "strategies", which are the manipulations of power relationships by a subject with will and power (i.e., institutions), that delimits a particular place that is its own (de Certeau, 1984, p. 35). Strategies are proprietorial, dictating the accepted conventions for the place that it claims authority over (Highmore, 2002, p. 158). They are defined by a "regulatory imperative" to govern how a place is constructed and used and deployed to maintain the "network of disciplinary apparatuses" that distribute "products" to "consumers" (Rothbauer, 2010, p. 55). The production and circulation of representations that impose an ideology, politics, frame, or narrative on users is a type of strategy.

In a system that privileges authors, the concept of canon, for example, is a strategy of the author to impose a particular order and interpretation on the reader (de Certeau, 1984, p. 167). Tactics, on the other hand, are "calculated actions" by ordinary people that lack the will and power to maintain a claim on a place of their own (de Certeau, p. 36). They are transient, nomadic, moving between places designated by institutions, like renters or squatters using

another person's property (de Certeau, p. xxi). They take the text (which is here defined as any set of interrelated representations produced by an institution as part of a strategy) and transform it through their engagement with it. In contrast to the previous example of canon as a strategy employed by an author, the reader's power to interpret an authored text according to their own will is an example of a tactic (de Certeau, p. xxi). A reader can exert this power purely within their imagination, or manifest it through more tangible productions that extend engagement beyond the original representations: conversations with others, searching for related information, posting on social media platforms, remixing content, purchasing related products, writing derivative content (e.g., fanfiction), making derivative products (e.g., fanart), and otherwise playing with the representations (e.g., roleplaying a character or performing cosplay). These examples are not passive, but instead reflect the hidden productions of readers *doing reading*. Tactics inscribe new images in the places of more powerful "producers" and over existing representations, creating a palimpsest where the reader's world "slips into the author's place" (p. xxi). Different tactics of the reader ultimately have the same outcome of inhabiting the text, however briefly.

Media fans are members of the group de Certeau (1984) loosely classifies as the *cultural consumer* (p. xii). FS scholars like Jenkins (1992/2013) have made much of de Certeau's characterisation of fans as "textual poachers" (nomads and transients) that routinely take what they need and make it their own to assert themselves against the dominant economic order of the media industry. The study of these small "resistances" represents an important part of first-wave fan research (as discussed in Section 2.3), where fans' engagements are described as "appropriations" (Hills, 2002, p. 35). However, as subsequent fan scholarship argues (e.g., Booth, 2015; Couldry, 2003; Hills, 2002; Sandvoss, 2005), not everything a fan does with media content is a resistance or an appropriation that distances itself ideologically from the system that produced it. More often, the analytic and interpretive discourses of fans affirm the centrality of texts and authors, rather than seek to disrupt or transform them, and offer no evidence of ideological meaning (Booth, 2015, p. 12; Sandvoss, 2005, p. 155; cf. Stein & Busse, 2012). In these instances, the hidden productions of fans and consumers are part of "media rituals" that perpetuate the belief that the structures and systems of media production are central to society (Couldry, 2003, p. 3). Indeed, the mere fact that what fans do with media is ritualised, routinised,

and normalised in a visible enough way that permits them to be categorised, suggests that they are not as “quasi-invisible” and “clandestine” as de Certeau (1984) claims (p. 31; Rothbauer, 2010, p. 54). In the 21st century context, the concept of media rituals suggests that there *is* a place for fans to stake claims and document what they do with fan objects: the internet. Booth (2015), for example, provides a multitude of digital fan practices that are inscribed in virtual space, from GIF fics to digital cosplay performed on social media platforms. Indeed, platforms like Tumblr, Twitter, and *Archive of Our Own* provide places for fan productions to not only exist but to proliferate and take seed in the rich soil of popular culture, regardless of whether such productions represent resistances or affirmations of the media industry. For fans, these tactics and rituals may not always be invisible or clandestine, they may not always resist, but they all dwell in the realm of what de Certeau (1984) refers to as “commonplaces” (p. xxii). Everyday life practice, the practice of *inhabiting the text*, is also the practice of *inhabiting* these commonplaces, that is, those places in human experience that we continually return to, day after day. The commonplace of fans, specifically, is where popular culture resides.

Everyday life is critical to studies in IS and IB, which can also benefit future research in FanLIS (e.g., Fisher & Julien, 2009; Ocepek, 2018; Pawley, 1998; 2003; 2009; Ross, 2009; Rothbauer, 2004; 2007; Savolainen, 1995; Wiegand, 1999). For example, Rothbauer (2010) has extended the application of de Certeau’s (1984) theory in the IS context by illustrating how the tactics and strategies encountered in daily life relate to the ways in which people interact and use information. More recently, Ocepek’s (2018) “everyday information behaviour” makes broad use of Lefebvre’s (2014) complementary theory of the everyday, to provide a compelling approach to the study of information practices at the “nexus of work, leisure, and family life” (Ocepek, 2018, p. 399).

2.7. Floridi’s Philosophy of Information

As discussed in Chapter 1, Section 1.1, there are two key terms that underpin the study’s research questions:

- **Infosphere:** the technologically mediated, semantic environment in which millions of people spend their time (Floridi, 2011, p. 25; 2002, p. 141)¹⁰;
- **Onlife:** The everyday lived experience within this environment, that is, of “a hyperconnected reality within which it is no longer sensible to ask whether one may be online or offline” (Floridi, 2015, p. 1; cf. 2014). Life in the infosphere, or “onlife”, is to experience the world through a mediated lens that dissolves the boundaries between real and virtual.

These two concepts are part of Floridi’s *philosophy of information* (PI), a project that has spanned roughly 25 years (Floridi, 1996; 2002; 2004; 2010; 2011; 2014; 2015; 2019). Floridi (2002) defines PI as:

the philosophical field concerned with the critical investigation of the conceptual nature and basic principles of information, including its dynamics, utilisation, and sciences, and the elaboration and application of information-theoretic and computational methodologies to philosophical problems. (p. 123)

This broad mandate is concerned with many of the same questions with which IS and IB are concerned (e.g., Bawden & Robinson, 2017; Floridi, 2004; Martens, 2015). Its interest in the “dynamics” and “utilisation” of information is shared with IB research (Spink & Cole, 2004). Yet, while PI has received warm recognition in Floridi’s own discipline of naturalistic philosophy (Ess, 2008), it has experienced only a lukewarm reception from researchers in IS (Bawden & Robinson, 2017; Herold, 2004; Martens, 2015). A special issue of *Library Trends* (i.e., Herold, 2004) captured interest and debate around Floridi’s (2002) philosophy and its potential application in IS, but few information researchers have explored its potential since that time (e.g., Bawden & Robinson, 2017). Furner (2010) and Martens (2015) offer in-depth discussion of the potential reasons behind this ambivalence; they observe that IS (and IB) literature finds sufficient justification to ground research within social epistemologies, with which it is associated historically (see Shera, 1961). Recently, Floridi’s ideas sparked renewed

¹⁰ I refer to the infosphere throughout this document as onlife environment(s), to highlight the relationship between the two terms.

interest, particularly around issues of information ethics (Bawden & Robinson, 2020; Burnett & Burnett, 2020).

Despite mixed responses to PI in the past, Furner (2010) elaborates key benefits of Floridi's project that may be particularly applicable to FanLIS (pp. 172-173). Specifically, Furner (2010) highlights PI's embeddedness in social theory and, by extension, the way that it privileges the impact of technologically mediated experience on social construction. Floridi (2002) describes the process of "semanticisation of the Self" as the "filling of semantically empty space" with meaning (p. 130). It is a process that emerges from the infosphere, that is, the conceptual environment constructed by the mind through mediated experience, the "environment in which more and more people tend to live" in an information society (p. 131). This process develops self-narrative from the information people encounter in their everyday lives. Semanticisation, in the narrower context of what people do with narratives, is therefore analogous to the motivated gap-filling behind fans' hyperdiegesis (Hills, 2002) and psycholinguistic contextual framing (Emmott, 1989; Sanford & Emmott, 2012). Floridi (2002) argues that the technological transformations associated with the modern information society realign the physical and the cultural with the virtual so that our experience of the world (our ideas, values, emotions, narratives, and personal identities) are reified as information objects that "quietly acquire an ontological status comparable to that of ordinary things like clothes, cars, and buildings" (p. 131; Furner, 2010, p. 172). Jenkins (2006a; Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013) arrives at similar conclusions based on his research on media convergence. He describes a "networked culture" in which the same information-sharing activities that took place in a "predigital world" now take place at an exponentially greater speed and scope (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013, p. 12). Semanticisation is grounded in the onlife experience of the everyday, at the "nexus of work, leisure, and family life" (Ocepek, 2018, p. 399). It is, therefore, embedded in the practice of everyday life in the information society: a culture in which ICTs are fully integrated into everyday experience in such a way that digital practices are indistinguishable from non-digital practices. Everyday onlife is thus a vital perspective for understanding the information behaviours and practices of media fans.

2.8. Conclusion

The current project, which investigates the onlife fan, is positioned within FanLIS at the intersection of IB and FS. It seeks to answer Woo's (2019) call for a re-engagement of the fan subject through the digital mundane, or rather, the combination of everyday life (de Certeau, 1984) and onlife (Floridi, 2014). This approach addresses gaps in the existing literature, by contributing further rationale for the study of the everyday as a "nexus of work, leisure, and family life" (Ocepek, 2018, p. 399), by focusing on the representational information that is central to de Certeau's (1984) theory of everyday life.

In the context of media fans, everyday representations are fan objects. This approach also contributes novel research in the area of onlife that is specifically grounded in IB. This benefits the ongoing project of PI with empirical data applied in the IS discipline. The analysis of fan practices described by interview participants in Chapter 4 provides key examples of how onlife experience shapes information behaviours and *ways of doing*. Through the examination of the *ways of being* of the interview participants, Chapter 4 also offers new insights for the social positioning and discursive identity construction of media fans, an important approach in IB. This analysis provides important definitions of engagement in the context of the media fan as information user. It also introduces new examples for media and audience studies scholars that re-casts engagement as tactics, in the sense used by de Certeau (1984), through the case study results presented in Chapter 5. Finally, the analysis contributes a model for the information behaviour cycle of onlife fans that builds upon current FanLIS scholarship (Price, 2017), and offers valuable insights and future opportunities for this emerging area of research, as discussed in Chapter 6.

3. Research Design

3.1. Introduction

The goal of this study was to develop an understanding of the information behaviours of media through an empirical examination of fans' everyday experiences, particularly those characterised by the merging of analogue and virtual (i.e., onlife). In Chapter 2, I outlined scholarship from the fields of information behaviour (IB) and fan studies (FS), as well as the emerging interdisciplinary subfield of FanLIS that bridges the two, in order to establish the need for research on fans that applies an everyday onlife perspective. In the following sections, I describe design elements that shape this research, including: (1) research questions, (2) epistemological, theoretical, and methodological considerations of the research approach, and (3) methods used for data collection and analysis.

3.2. Research Questions

As stated in Chapter 1 (Section 1.8), my exploration of IB in media fans and fandoms is guided by two research questions:

- 1) Who or what is the *onlife fan*, and
- 2) What are the information behaviours of onlife fans.

These questions highlight ways of being (identity) and ways of doing (action) and are based on the criteria of researchability, precision, and openness (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013, pp. 11-14). According to Luker (2008), an effective social sciences research question must propose a set of relationships between concepts, and that understanding these relationships will explain a process or phenomenon present in social life (pp. 51-52). At their most basic level, the research questions articulate a relationship between media fans and information and communication technologies (ICTs), which suggests a previously unexplored subject: the onlife fan. Digging deeper, the questions propose a bridge across domains of research. As indicated in Chapter 2, the proposed research rests at the intersection of multiple domains of research (i.e., media and communication studies, audience studies, information science (IS)), but primarily FS and IB. As such, it is

intended to bridge the gap between fields and introduce a dialogue largely absent in the literature up to this point. By doing so, it situates itself in the emerging subfield of FanLIS, where this dialogue is starting to take place (Price and Robinson, 2022).

The research questions each include a sub-question to establish the scope and approach of inquiry (see also Section 1.8, Table 1.1):

- 1) In what way(s) do contemporary media fans identify themselves as fan, consumer, and information user?
- 2) In what way(s) do contemporary media fans access, make sense of, engage with, and/or produce information through their engagement with fandom?

The first sub-question helps manifest the bridge between fields by associating the concepts of fan (i.e., FS), consumer (i.e., media and communication studies and audience studies), and information user (i.e., IS and IB). It also provides context for what is implied by the term *onlife fan*, that is, a person in whom the three subject positions overlap. Chapter 1 (Section 1.3) outlined other specific subject positions that are commonly understood in all research domains (i.e., reader, viewer, player, producer, and participant) and aligned them with the fan / consumer / information user. This context delineates specific sites for researching the onlife fan by pinpointing the sets of identities, behaviours, and practices associated with each of these positions.

The second sub-question clarifies what is meant by information behaviour by linking it to the specific actions of accessing, sense-making, and engaging with information. Access is a concept that evokes the role of ICTs in mediating the information people encounter. Making sense of information emphasises the cognitive process involved in information behaviour. As discussed in Chapter 2 (Section 2.3.3), the psycholinguistic theory of contextual framing is an important way of conceptualising how fans make sense of narrative information encountered through texts, intertexts, paratexts, transtexts, and storyworlds (Emmott, 1989; Sanford & Emmott, 2012). Engagement is a crucial process for the IB of fans that remains poorly understood yet is used commonly to refer to the many ways people interact with the world around them (Evans, 2019; Nahl, 2007). The second sub-question highlights this common usage

as an area to focus inquiry and at the same time proposes to develop a better understanding of engagement as an information process. The use of the word “contemporary” addresses Alvesson and Sandberg’s (2013) criterion of precision by focussing on media fans in the present. These are not the subcultural media fandoms that were historically studied for their incorporation/resistance paradigm (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998), nor even the bloggers and vidders of the early 2000’s that were the first digital textual poachers (Jenkins, 2006b). They are today’s media fans, living in the fully realised infosphere that Floridi (2014) describes.

The sub-questions also make clear that I am studying fans in the ways they *identify themselves*, that is, from a perspective grounded in the individual’s experience and not based on prior theoretical projections of the “exemplary fan” or “typical fan” (Duffett, 2013; Woo, 2019). Empirical analyses of the data generated through in-depth interviews with participants and online corpora of user comments from the *AV Club* (avclub.com) and Twitter are employed to address the research questions in Chapters 4 and 5. Conclusions, in Chapter 6, demonstrate how a grounded approach for interpreting fan practices, in the context of information encountered in the onlife experience of the everyday life of fans, offers new perspectives and new insights for researchers in IB, FS, and FanLIS.

3.3. Research Approach

This chapter follows Crotty’s (1998) framework of progressively narrower elements of research: epistemology, theory, methodology, and methods (p. 4). According to Crotty, the epistemological position of the research flows into the theoretical perspective, from which flows in turn specific methodological decisions, and, ultimately, the selection of methods and procedures used to address the research questions. To qualify Crotty’s instruction, the approach for this research is also informed by the process of establishing a rigorous and compelling qualitative research methodology as stated in an entry in *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Methods*, which includes the following: (a) selection of guiding paradigm (i.e., epistemological framework); (b) identification of research questions; (c) development of a formative conceptual model; (d) site selection, study population, and study sample; (e) topics, procedures, and tools for data collection; and (f) procedures for data analysis and interpretation (Schensul, 2008, p. 518). This *Encyclopedia* entry thus takes an alternative view to Crotty, in which “methodology” is the

sum of all other research elements. Both views are useful in structuring the following sections. While the structure of subsections below follows Crotty's example, I also take the opportunity in each section to emphasise the overarching influence of Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) (Charmaz, 2014) as a particular methodological framework consistent with the epistemological and theoretical positioning of the research. Sections 3.4 and 3.5 delve deeply into site selection, study population, and sampling, as well as topics, procedures, and tools for data collection, data analysis, and interpretation.

3.3.1. Epistemology: Social Constructionism

Epistemology represents the theory of knowledge upon which a research design is founded (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). Based on the interpretive paradigm (e.g., Carr, 2003), my research subscribes to the view that individuals construct knowledge and experience through social interaction rather than acquire knowledge through an external objective reality (Constantino, 2008; Crotty, 1998, p. 42). With an interest in information-based ways of being (identity) and doing (action) evident in both individual and community contexts, my research allows that the construction of meaning occurs through social discourse rather than taking place entirely in an individual's mind (Gergen, & Gergen, 2008). This epistemology, which distinguishes itself from the broader constructivist paradigm, is referred to as social constructionism.

The use of this paradigm to inform the research design is appropriate given the project's preoccupation with the many ways in which IB is manifested among media fans and fandoms, specifically in onlife experiences. The undertaking of a sociological examination of people's perceptions regarding their engagement with media, the roles ICTs play within their everyday engagement with storyworlds, and their individual and shared understandings of the storyworlds themselves, each align closely with the epistemological and ontological views associated with constructivism and social constructionism. The concept of a socially constructed reality informs the use of in-depth qualitative interviews as the primary method for data generation (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p. 163-166; see also Johnson, 2001). User-generated content (e.g., blog and forum posts, message board threads) and behavioural trace data sampled from public online fan communities provide secondary sources of data that explore the variety of relationships and social discourses of transmedia fandoms in onlife environments (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p. 163;

Lampe, 2013). The evaluation of data obtained from these methods using Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT), which informs theoretical perspectives and is also the methodological framework for the project, is explained in Sections 3.3.2 and 3.3.3. Additionally, social constructionism offers reflexivity on the relationship of the researcher with the subject (Gergen & Gergen, 2008). In the case of interviews, the view holds that meaning is co-constructed between interviewer and participant (Kvale, 1996). The importance of reflexivity is addressed in greater detail in Section 3.3.4 (*Methods: Overview*).

3.3.2. Theoretical Perspectives: Sensitising Concepts

The study primarily makes use of two perspectives, or *sensitising concepts* (Blumer, 1969, pp. 147-148; Charmaz, 2014) that, together, form an initial conceptual model for understanding how people engage with information in everyday life today. These two perspectives, everyday life practice (de Certeau, 1984) and onlife (Floridi, 2014), were introduced in Chapter 1 and reviewed in detail in Chapter 2, Sections 2.4 and 2.5. As such, they are only briefly mentioned here. This section instead focuses on the value of sensitising concepts in grounded theory research, and what it means for an empirical and inductive research methodology when theoretical concepts are introduced into the research design. Inductive data analysis, and exploratory research more generally, should not be undertaken with either *a priori* theory or variables, but rather should emerge through the inquiry itself (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 204). This is, in fact, the problem Woo (2019) perceives at the heart of FS research, particularly second-wave scholarship, which takes previous theoretical formations of the exemplary fan as a basis for conclusions, rather than building new understandings of media engagement, fan, and fandom from empirically grounded data. The use of theoretical perspectives and prior knowledge as framing devices for research, in other words, must be approached with caution. All expectations and presuppositions on the part of the researcher must be carefully and continuously interrogated. Nevertheless, it is neither possible nor practical for a qualitative research question to be formulated without some external conceptual influences (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013). Indeed, as a starting point, theory often informs the design of qualitative study, whether researchers are aware of it or not (Glaser, 1978; cf. Bowen, 2006). Charmaz (2014) describes this application of theoretical concepts as a way for researchers to develop “initial but tentative ideas to pursue and questions to raise” (p. 30). She goes on to say:

Sensitizing concepts can provide a place to *start* inquiry, not to *end* it. Grounded theorists often begin their studies with certain guiding empirical interests to study and, consistent with Blumer (1969), general concepts forming a loose frame for looking at these interests. (p. 30, emphasis in original)

Charmaz (2003) notes that the outcome of CGT is to facilitate the development of an “abstract theoretical framework” that explains the process under study (p. 311). Therefore, it is important not to confuse the sensitising concepts employed as a starting point with the theoretical framework that is the eventual endpoint of a CGT study (see Figure 3.1.1).

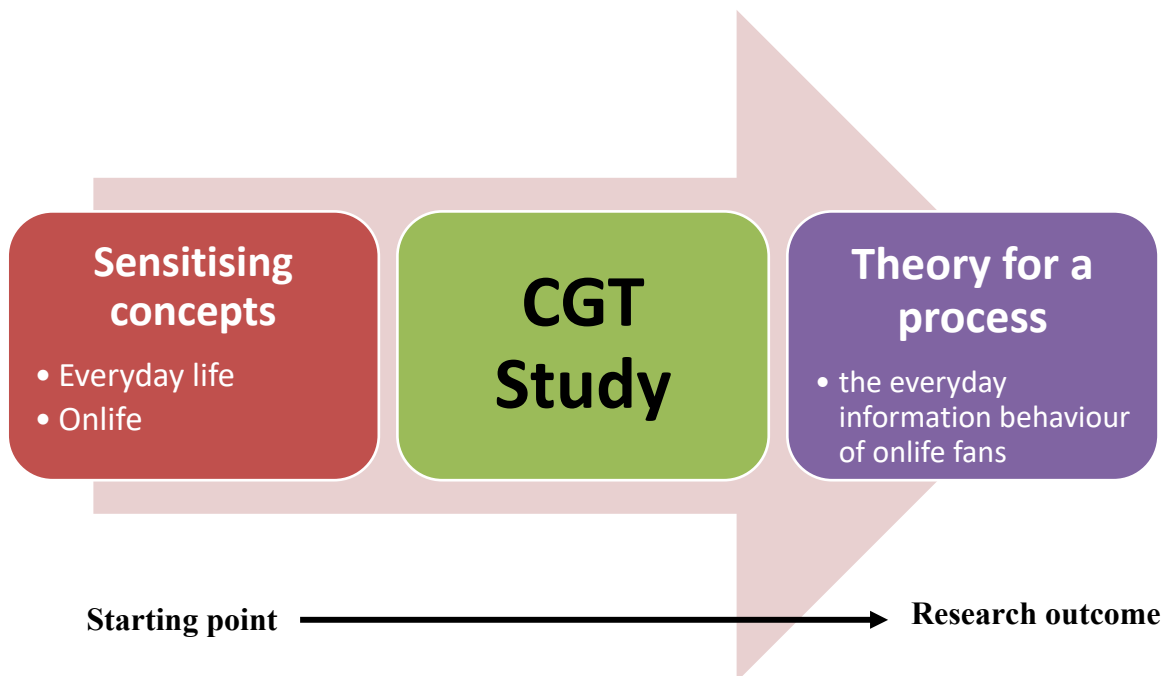


Figure 3.3.1 Model for theory development in a CGT study

The two perspectives of everyday life practice and onlife, therefore, represent theories used as a starting point for this project, and which are revisited throughout the discussion of results in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. In addition to the perspectives of Floridi (2014) and de Certeau (1984), other concepts from the literature are considered in the discussion of study results, to examine how findings and theory emerging from the grounded analysis of the data support, alter, or otherwise impact understandings in the research domains of IB and FS. These include: serious leisure perspective (Stebbins, 2007/2015), social positioning theory (Van Langenhove & Harré, 1994), naturalistic information acquisition (Lee, Ocepek, & Makri, 2022), information creation

(Gorichanaz, 2019; Huvila, et al., 2020), engagement (Evans, 2019), and post-object fandom (Williams, 2015).

3.3.3. *Methodological Framework: CGT*

CGT is an inductive research methodology that encourages the persistent interaction with data, while remaining constantly involved in emerging analyses (Bryant & Charmaz, 2010, p. 1) and adopts a constructivist orientation (Charmaz, 2000, 2014). The purpose of CGT, just as in objectivist grounded theory, is to generate theory from the data themselves about a “basic social process” (Bryant & Charmaz, 2010; Glaser, 1978, p. 106; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). CGT methods are “systematic, yet flexible guidelines” for collecting and analysing inductive data using iterative strategies that keep the researcher interacting with the data and emerging analysis (Charmaz, 2014, p. 1). This iterative approach is called the “constant comparative method” (p. 18), where the analysis consists of qualitative coding of “rich” data (p. 22). Theoretical categories are developed through the constant re-evaluation of data as new information is introduced, either through the collection of new rich data or successive phases of analysis. Constant comparison is the cornerstone of CGT, as it determines theoretical sampling and saturation (concepts which are further described in the context of data collection and analysis methods in Section 3.4):

- *Theoretical sampling* is when the researcher’s understanding of the process or phenomenon is incomplete and further data collection and analysis is required to answer questions.
- *Theoretical saturation* is when the review of data ceases to raise new theoretical categories.

Charmaz’s (2014) *Constructing Grounded Theory, Second Edition*, provides examples and guidelines for the application of CGT in a qualitative research project. This study adopts CGT as a methodological framework for studying how media fans access, make sense of, engage with, and/or produce information through their engagement with fandom, and to supply an emergent theory for the everyday information behaviours of onlife fans.

3.3.4. *Methods: Overview*

Based on the epistemological, theoretical, and methodological approaches adopted by this research, the use of qualitative research methods, specifically in-depth semi-structured interviews and content analyses of online fan communities, are appropriate. Qualitative research methods are commonly used by IS, IB, and FanLIS researchers (e.g., Hepworth, Grunewald & Walton, 2014; Kizhakkethil, 2021; McKechnie, et al. 2016; Miller, 2022; Price, 2017; Rothbauer, 2004; Waugh, 2017; Willson, 2016) and FS scholars (e.g., Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998; Booth, 2015; Evans & Stasi, 2015; Freund & Fielding, 2013; Hermes, 2009) alike. According to Ellis (1993), the reasons these methods are particularly valuable are numerous: they help reveal the facts of people's everyday lives, the needs that exist and motivate information-seeking behaviour, and, by better understanding needs, understand the meaning that information has in people's everyday lives. Both interviews and content analyses are conducive for collecting "rich" (quality) and "thick" (quantity) data more likely to reach saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015, p. 1409, p. 1413; Dibley, 2011). Section 3.4 explores the methods employed in detail (see Table 3.3.1).

Table 3.3.1 Methods, descriptions, and sample sizes

Method	Description	Sample Size
Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Reactive data collection method- Approximately 90 minutes- Face-to-face- In-person or over Skype (video)- In-depth (i.e., exploratory)- Semi-structured (i.e., use of scripted questions and unscripted prompts)- Participants provided informed consent- Participants given the option of selecting a pseudonym or creating their own	- 17 participants
Fan Site Case Studies (i.e., content analyses)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Nonreactive data collection method- Rich narrative data and behavioural trace data on social media websites- Sites must be publicly accessible (i.e., via web browser or API)- Procedures follow recommendations for internet research (i.e., AoIR (http://aoir.org/ethics/))- User selected screen names used as they appeared in comments, based on the published recommendation of internet researchers (Bruckman, Luther & Fiesler, 2015)	- Two online communities

This research distinguishes a particular type of media fan in the contemporary context: the onlife fan. As a first step, understanding how fans perceive themselves, their communities, and their individual and collective practices helps determine the role of information in a rarely

studied context. This first step of the research was achieved through the analysis of in-depth one-on-one interviews with 17 participants. Participants were encouraged to discuss the ways they access, make sense of, and engage with their fandoms. A laptop or tablet with an internet connection was available during interviews, so that participants could volunteer the public online spaces that make up their infosphere, if they chose. A second step of data collection in the form of content analysis of selected cases, informed in part by interviews, was then employed to identify and explore examples of fan communities for case studies. The case study approach, as the second method for data collection and analysis, mined samples of user comments and behavioural trace data in public online fan communities (i.e., *Game of Thrones*' Newbies and Experts comment threads on *AV Club* (avclub.com) and the *#FakeWesteros* community on Twitter). Both forms of data collection were subject to CGT analysis in the form of qualitative coding and constant comparison. As themes and patterns emerged through the iterative review of data, additional interviews with new participants were completed and additional samples of comments from the selected communities were selected, in order to dig more deeply into the behaviours identified. In this way, both individual and collective practices were observed, documented, and studied empirically, using reactive and nonreactive data collecting methods, to develop an emergent theory of the onlife fan. Section 3.4 and 3.5 explain in detail the specific procedures involved for each method of data collection and analysis.

3.4. Interviews

I posted calls for participants locally in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada via online ads (e.g., <https://edmontonnerdlist.com/classifieds/>) and social networks (e.g., Facebook, Twitter), and through intermediaries (i.e., previous participant) through a process of snowball sampling. All three of these approaches provided a URL to a brief summary of the study on ericforcier.ca, with interview details and contact information, including an email address that potential participants could use to express interest. Refer to *Appendix A: Recruitment Ad*, for a sample approved by a sub-committee of the Swinburne Human Research Ethics Committee (SUHREC) and used for recruitment. Upon initial contact I completed a short series of pre-screening questions over email with potential participants to develop a profile for sample selection. All questions were voluntary, and I disclosed the reason for the pre-screening instrument as a selection tool to potential participants in the email. Initial criteria for selection included how they heard about the

study, age, and favourite narratives and fandoms. Over time, the questions used in the pre-screening were expanded to permit theoretical sampling. These additional questions included fan communities that a potential participant belongs to, specific fan practices and interests/practices (e.g., reading, cosplaying, roleplaying, video games), and level of media use. In practice, some potential participants volunteered sufficient information in their response to the recruitment ad so that only some of the questions were asked. In two instances, where a potential participant expressed interest directly, they provided sufficient information so that the pre-screening was not necessary. In two instances of snowball sampling (i.e., where a potential participant was referred to me for the study through an intermediary), sufficient information was provided beforehand so that the email pre-screening was not used. In all other cases, the pre-screening was administered. Refer to *Appendix B: Pre-Screening Instrument (Example)* for an example of how I administered the pre-screening, recruited potential participants, and shared study information in the form of an information letter with a participant over email.

I selected participants based on the results of the pre-screening. Selection occurred using a purposive sampling approach for maximum variation of pre-screening criteria (Creswell & Poth, 2017, pp. 158-159; Patton, 2002, p. 235). After the initial coding of the first six interviews, I also employed theoretical sampling to select remaining participants based on their pre-screening responses to further expand emergent theoretical categories and develop the most comprehensive understanding of individuals' information behaviours and fan practices (Charmaz, 2014, p. 204-205; Patton, 2002, p. 238-239). I invited selected participants via email following the pre-screening questions by attaching a formal information letter (PDF document). The information letter was framed as a detailed invitation to participate, and included statements regarding informed consent, participant rights, confidentiality, data management, and research ethics board approval. The letter also included the contact information for myself and my supervisor. Participants were also invited to ask questions about the research, to further ensure informed consent and to encourage a rapport. Refer to *Appendix C: Information Letter (Sample)*. At the start of the interview, I reviewed a consent form with each participant and asked them to provide their consent. The consent form is also where participants were asked to select a pseudonym (or to create one). The ethical considerations around the use of pseudonyms and anonymising approaches are discussed in Section 3.4.2 (and Section 3.5.3 as it relates to the fan

site case studies). Refer to *Appendix D: Consent Form (Sample)*. In all but one case, interviews took place in-person at a site mutually agreed-upon beforehand. Interview sites included university campus buildings and public areas (e.g., Starbucks) that were easily accessible. I assessed these locations beforehand to ensure that they offered a reasonable expectation of privacy. In one instance, in March 2020, the interview was completed over Skype video chat due to restrictions related to the global COVID-19 pandemic. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed; transcriptions were then used for thematic coding, as outlined in Charmaz (2014).

I conducted interviews with 17 participants from June 2018 to March 2020. The interview schedule (see Appendix E: Interview Guide) was piloted in initial interviews to ensure that questions and prompts were effective in capturing participants' experiences and addressing the research questions. The pilot phase included the first six interviews and only minor revisions were required to the schedule, as indicated in the italic notations in Appendix E. Sixteen interviews were one-on-one. For one interview, the participant asked to have their partner as a supportive observer in the interview setting. The observer was not subject to interview questions and therefore was not included as an additional interview participant. Periodically, I evaluated theoretical saturation to determine the need for additional participants and/or data. Mason (2010) points out that saturation can be elastic (para. 30), while Charmaz and Keller (2016) indicate that less than ten interviews is not sufficient to undertake a PhD dissertation (para. 27-28). As the CGT analysis progressed, I also considered the option of "within-case" sampling (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2013, p. 33) in the form of follow-up interviews with previously interviewed participants to dig deeper into their experiences, however I determined that it was more valuable to focus on recruiting new participants instead, given the limitations of time related to the PhD. Data triangulation through the content analyses of the fan site case studies proved extremely beneficial in this regard, by increasing the reliability (i.e., objectivity, truth, and validity) of study results within a reasonable time frame (Denzin, 2009, 2012; Fusch & Ness, 2015, pp. 1411-1412).

Interviews were semi-structured, in-depth, and exploratory, meaning that participants were guided by questions and prompts to speak discursively about their fandoms and fan practices. Participants were prompted to provide thick description of their engagement with specific fandoms in their daily lives to generate narrative data (e.g., Bates, 2004). Questions and

prompts were conversational and open-ended to further encourage detailed responses. Once an understanding of the participant's information behaviours began to emerge and the participant had described online communities or fandoms in which they participated, I described to the participant the second phase of the research in the form of fan site case studies and asked if they would be comfortable with me considering the community website for a case study. I also offered my laptop if they wanted to show me the website. This is how the case study of the #FakeWesteros Twitter community was selected through the interview with Kerra (see Section 3.4.3 and Section 3.5).

Unstructured and semi-structured interviews are commonly used in CGT research (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Charmaz, 2014). A benefit of this method of data collection is that it encourages a familiarity between researcher and participant, which may increase self-disclosure (Johnson, 2001); this in turn permits the researcher to probe deeper into participants' experiences (Willson, 2016), resulting in rich and thick data. While it was important for me to strive for a level of understanding that approaches my participants as members living out the fan experiences in question (Johnson, 2001), it was equally important that I consider the theoretical significance of the information being shared. As Charmaz (2014) indicates, narrative prompts may give way to a mutual conversation about theoretical categories (p. 19). Kvale (1996) describes the interview as a form of knowledge sharing in which knowledge is created between two (or more) participants in a conversation (p. 296). As such, I sought to maintain an awareness of my own role as researcher, interviewer, and interpreter and the influence I could inadvertently have on participants' responses (Dowling, 2008). Memo-ing and the review of field notes following interviews and throughout the analysis of interview transcripts was the method I used to maintain a critical awareness of my influence on the research data.

3.4.1. Analysis and Theoretical Sampling

Audio recordings of interviews were transcribed and imported into NVivo for qualitative coding and analysis. NVivo is a software package that supports all the functions necessary to conduct CGT analysis on textual, visual, audio, and mixed media data, including word- and sentence-level coding, annotation, and memo-ing. It also supports several different approaches to the sorting and classification of codes, including nested codes and classification schema at the

code and document level. This functionality allowed for the development of a comprehensive codebook over time. As previously indicated, the cornerstone of CGT analysis is constant comparison (Charmaz, 2014, p. 18). Transcripts of the first interviews underwent an initial phase of qualitative coding (i.e., “initial coding”, Charmaz, 2014, pp. 109-137). At this stage, codes were *in vivo*, meaning that they represented topics in the words used by participants and are characteristic of the participants’ social worlds as fans (Charmaz, 2014, p. 135). This process of coding was “incident-by-incident”, or rather story-by-story, meaning that segments of interview that included one or more lines were coded for a particular topic or theme, as a common approach used by grounded theorists (Charmaz, 2014, p. 128). Coded segments represent a particular example, anecdote, story, or incident described by the participant; multiple codes were used to represent different ideas present in an interview segment that are linked conceptually (e.g., Kerra describing toxic behaviours encountered on Twitter when she live-tweeted episodes of *Game of Thrones* as part of the #FakeWesteros community represented multiple abstract concepts that I coded, including “livetweeting” as a fan practice, “barriers” as the challenge to her engagement with the community, and “toxic” for the negative behaviours she described). I compared segments within the same interview and between different interviews to identify patterns of codes and establish conceptual relationships, and *in vivo* codes were replaced with more descriptive labels (e.g., I interpreted the emergent code “toxic behaviours” as a subtheme to “barriers to fandom”). I used these as a basis for sampling of additional participants (i.e., “theoretical sampling”; Charmaz, 2014, p. 212).

The pre-screening instrument described in the previous section was helpful in flagging potential participants that appeared to fill a theoretical gap or missing link in observed patterns that could confirm whether there were new insights to be had. The transcript for each subsequent interview was similarly analysed through an iterative process of “initial coding” (Charmaz, 2014, pp. 109-137) and “focused coding” (pp. 138-161). Focused coding involved a process of reviewing and classifying initial codes to identify analytic categories that describe my data “incisively and completely” (p. 138). This process looks at large segments of data; in practice, when using NVivo, I would often examine all of the segments under an initial code or set of codes from multiple participants, rather than at a specific interview. It is through this process, for example, that a framework emerged for conceptualising participant experiences through different

frames of context (see Chapter 4, Section 4.2 for *hobbyist context*, and the contextual frames of making, playing, and collecting). Focused coding also presented the opportunity for reflexivity, as it required me to identify any preconceptions apparent in initial codes and to challenge instances where my analysis was being influenced by literature or “common sense theorizing” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 155). For example, early on in coding I sought to capture references to specific media platforms and technologies, with the belief that these codes would lead to insights about onlife fan engagement and information use. During focused coding, I realised that this approach was forcing a preconception about the role of ICTs in participant experiences. Instead, by reviewing *in vivo* codes that captured behavioural contexts, the role of technology, digital platforms, and information encounters for each participant emerged naturally. Initial coding and focused coding were done repeatedly and iteratively as the data from new interviews were introduced into the analysis, in successive phases (see Figure 3.4.1).

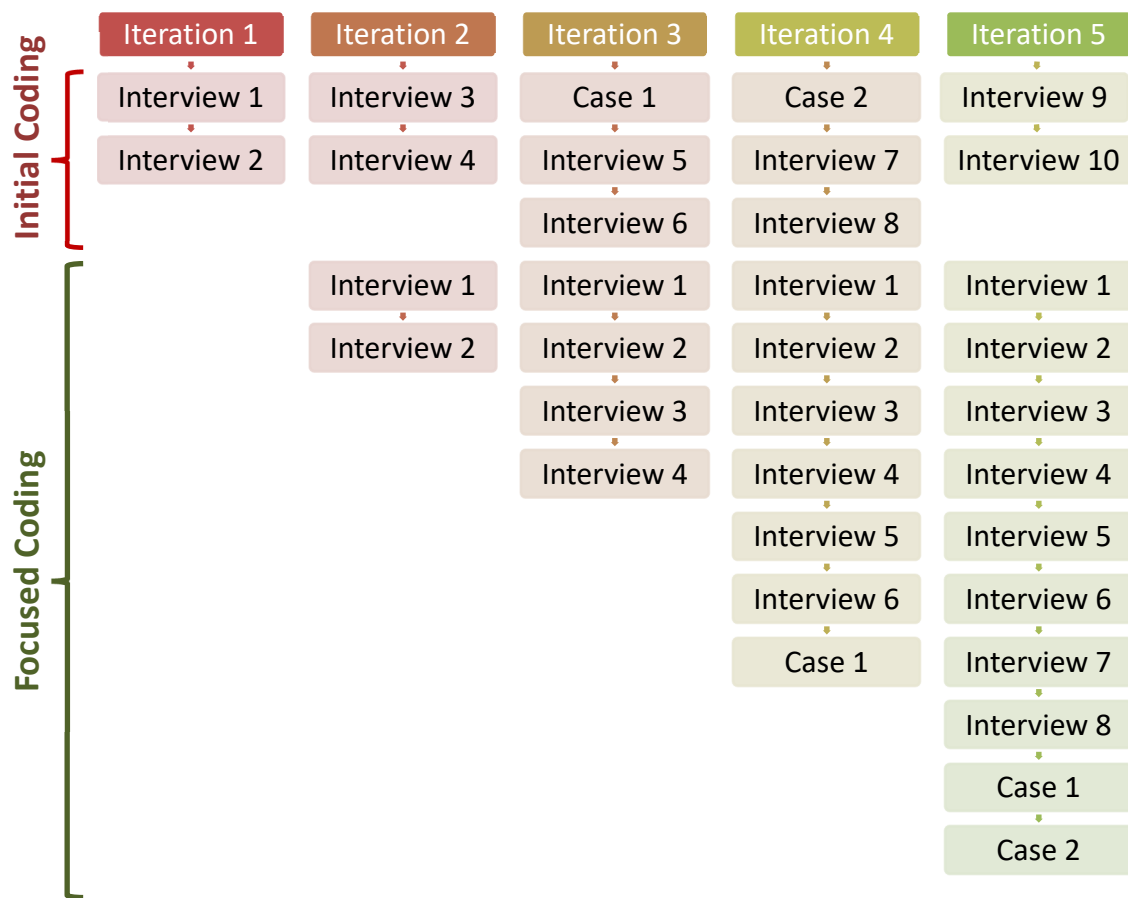


Figure 3.4.1. Example of CGT iterative coding process distinguishing phases of initial and focused coding.

As discussed briefly below in Section 3.5, case studies were coded in a separate NVivo project to manage the size of digital files, but the codebooks for interviews and case studies were compared for insights in the same way that coding was compared between interviews. Memo-writing (Charmaz, 2014, pp. 162-191) is another reflexive strategy employed in CGT that I used throughout the analytic process to make sense of observations and patterns that I perceived in the data. Memos are analytic notes that explicate and fill-out categories (p. 163). Memos served as space to work out the implications of observed patterns and represented early narratives that were included in drafts of the study results.

Theoretical sampling dictates the need for additional data collection. As indicated previously, saturation is required to ensure the rigour of the study (Bowen, 2008; Fusch & Ness, 2015). Pre-screening results provided information to facilitate selection of new participants for

theoretical saturation. Sufficient patterns of observations regarding specific frames of context for onlife ways of doing (i.e., making, playing, collecting) and being (i.e., core identities, spectra of engagement, impact and intentionality) were identified after 17 interviews to present results. Additional theoretical categories that require further data and analysis are indicated in Chapter 6 (Section 6.7, Opportunities for Future Research).

3.4.2. *Ethical Considerations*

The potential for harm to participants in this study was considered minimal. Risks associated with the study included the disclosure of personal and potentially sensitive information, which may prove stressful or embarrassing for some individuals. Sensitive issues relating to gender, sexuality, politics, and beliefs did, at times, arise in interviews when they impacted participants' descriptions of affective engagement with media fandom. To minimise risks, the study adhered to an informed consent process, which was reviewed and approved by a sub-committee of the Swinburne Human Research Ethics Committee (SUHREC). In addition to the information letter (see Appendix C), participants also reviewed a consent form prior to the interview taking place (see Appendix D). Using Freund and Fielding's (2013) approach, at the time of the interview I provided participants with the option of creating a pseudonym and having their data anonymised during the analytical process. Anonymisation of data, in the case of interviews, was considered appropriate to minimise the risk of personally identifying information and to address concerns from participants related to the publication of such information (i.e., impact to employment, social interactions, etc). Bruckman, Luther and Fiesler's (2015) review of when it is appropriate to anonymise participants was also used as a guide to inform this decision. Participants also had the option at any point during the interview to stop data collection or to not answer specific questions/prompts, as indicated on the consent form (see Appendix D). Participants had the right to withdraw their data from the study up to two weeks after the date of the interview.

Several methods texts provide guidance for developing ethical qualitative research (e.g., Creswell & Poth, 2017, pp. 53-57, pp. 149-151, p. 182, p. 226; Patton, 2002, pp. 408-409; see also Hammersley and Traianou, 2012; Pellegrino, 2017). A potential risk of my interview approach (given my own, personal experience as a fan) was the loss of neutrality, or as Creswell

and Poth (2017) put it, “going native” (p. 57). This is a risk at both the data collection and analysis stages. In order to address this risk, I marshalled several strategies. First was the collection and comparison of widely divergent interview participants through purposive sampling for maximum variation. This enabled me to explore onlife experience through different perspectives as they relate to different fandoms. A second strategy I employed was the inclusion of a nonreactive observational method, as described in Section 3.5, to triangulate my interview results and to offer new insights that apply to fan communities as opposed to fans themselves. Finally, through the rigorous application of CGT’s reflexive approaches to continually monitor my influence on the construction of knowledge generated by the study ensured that I maintained a neutral position in the conduct of the research (Dowling, 2008). Institutional ethics review addressed specific considerations related to data management, retention, and security. The study followed recommended guidelines as advised by SUHREC. Printed notes and documentation (e.g., consent forms) were secured in a locked file cabinet and electronic data were saved on an encrypted hard drive and regularly backed up on an external hard drive that was similarly encrypted. Analysis was completed on the local drives of a desktop computer and a laptop computer that were also password protected.

The information letter provided participants with a URL to the project webpage (ericforcier.ca) for future reference, where updates such as conference presentations, publications, and news about dissemination of results after the interviews are also shared. The purpose of this was to maintain a positive and generative relationship throughout the lifecycle of the project and beyond. Booth (2013) and Freund and Fielding (2013) both recommend the ongoing inclusion of participants in research decisions and outcomes to maintain a strong rapport. This also represents a way to give back to the communities that I studied. Describing his own experiences interviewing *Doctor Who* fans, Booth (2013) suggests that, for fans, becoming “part of the conversation” matters (p. 135).

3.4.3. Overview of Interview Participants

As I was completing this research on a part-time basis, I conducted interviews with 17 participants from June 2018 to March 2020. All participants were self-identified media fans. Interviews were approximately 90 minutes in length, loosely following a series of questions and

prompts (refer to Appendix E: Interview Guide). Questions addressed the different ways participants identified and engaged with their fandoms. Answers revealed the extent to which their identities and practices as fans are onlife and embedded in everyday life. Each participant's age and fandoms were discussed in pre-screening and/or in interviews, which ensured maximum variation and theoretical sampling. Participants were assigned or created a pseudonym at the time of the interview when completing the consent form. The following table provides a brief summary of the interview participants details, which are referenced throughout later chapters.

Table 3.4.1 Interview participants

Pseudonym	Age	Preferred Pronoun	Fandoms
<i>Agnephi</i>	41	He/Him	Transformers, Inhumanoids, MCU
<i>Amriel</i>	31	She/Her	Game of Thrones, Marvel
<i>Asteraoth</i>	35	She/Her	Harry Potter, Doctor Who, Pokemon
<i>Aziraphale</i>	38	She/Her	Teen Wolf, Buffy, DC Comics
<i>Codec</i>	37	He/Him	Netrunner
<i>Dagiel</i>	38	He/Him	Dungeons & Dragons, Civilization (game), Wheel of Time, board games, fantasy genre
<i>Empyrean</i>	50	He/Him	Star Trek, DC Comics
<i>Eriner</i>	36	He/Him	Dungeons & Dragons
<i>Esme</i>	23	She/Her	WWE, MCU
<i>Isthi</i>	26	She/Her	Teen Wolf, Red vs. Blue, Glee
<i>Jael</i>	34	He/Him	Mass Effect, Star Wars, <i>Dungeons and Dragons</i> , Rimworld, Naruto
<i>Kerra</i>	26	She/Her	Game of Thrones, Supernatural
<i>Malakh</i>	26	She/Her	Sherlock, Marvel comics, Doctor Who
<i>Razael</i>	31	He/Him	WWE, Marvel comics, Final Fantasy, Game of Thrones, Star Wars, Star Trek
<i>Rhamiel</i>	25	She/Her	Star Wars, Sailor Moon, Supernatural, True Blood, Marvel Comics
<i>Tabrith</i>	30	She/Her	Harry Potter, Jurassic Park, Studio Ghibli
<i>Uilleand</i>	45	She/Her	Star Wars, Mass Effect, Dragon Age, So You Think You Can Dance

3.5. Fan Site Case Studies

Inspired by netnography and digital ethnography (Hine, 2012; Kozinets, 2012), I employed secondary sources of data to facilitate theoretical development. The first step was to

identify potential sources of data in the form of fan websites and online communities. These sources represent the enunciative production of fans, or “fan talk” (Price, 2017, p. 319), specifically user comments that comprise the discourse between members of a particular fandom. The sites considered included online message boards and forums (e.g., avclub.com, thekittenboard.net, watchersonthewall.com), as well as communities within specific media fandoms (e.g., *Game of Thrones* fandom, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* fandom, *Red vs. Blue* fandom) that are hosted on social media platforms such as Reddit, Tumblr, and Twitter (e.g., [#FakeWesteros](https://twitter.com/FakeWesteros), rvbficwars.tumblr.com). Message boards hosted on fan-run websites are historically where fans have carved a space in the web environment, but Web 2.0 platforms that do not require the technical knowledge and investment needed for fans to administer their own webspace offer an alternative for interaction and participation (Booth, 2015; Coppa, 2006; Jenkins, 2006a). Both message boards and Web 2.0 platforms present unique challenges for data collection. While message boards and forums are structured hierarchically in such a way that posted comments can be easily identified according to topics, and the content is specific to the community that hosts it, scraping the data for analysis can be difficult. User comments must be collected manually by copying pages of web content or using a web scraper that is specifically scripted for the purpose of data collection. Platforms like Twitter provide access for researchers through a public API (application programming interface), which makes collecting posts much easier. However, such platforms are not limited to a single community, and therefore markers such as hashtags, lists, and other trace data are required beforehand to limit the scope of any query to only relevant posts. The study included one fan site that used message boards (i.e., avclub.com, see Section 3.5.2 for details) and one that used Twitter (i.e., [#FakeWesteros](https://twitter.com/FakeWesteros), see Section 3.5.3 for details).

Each community selected was examined using a case study approach. I undertook the first case study as a pilot for this method, using a site that was identified as a rich source of data prior to the interviews (see Section 3.5.1). The second case was selected from fan communities identified by interview participants (see Section 3.5.2). Both represent different fan communities within the *Game of Thrones* fandom and at significant moments in the history of the fandom (i.e., the airing of the episode “The Rains of Castamere” in season three and the airing of the final season). This research was designed with the option to include additional case studies based

on the communities that interview participants identified and took part in, but the data collected from the two cases was sufficient for the development of theory around onlife fan information behaviours, within the scope of a doctoral research project (see Chapter 6, Section 6.6, for a discussion of how the case study approach could be extended in future research). The decision to examine two communities within the same fandom allowed the analysis to focus on the differences and similarities of fans' engagement situated in the digital affordances of the platforms they used (i.e., threaded message board posts and Twitter) and in the discursive practices they demonstrated, rather than the differences in the storyworlds with which they engaged. As a fan of *Game of Thrones* who is not a member of either community, the selection of these two sites was also ideal given my prior familiarity with the television series, novels, and related paratexts; this provided me with a deeper understanding of the fandom and its contexts, but without personal experience of the platforms being examined in the study, to maintain neutrality. My knowledge of *Game of Thrones* was invaluable in sub-sampling during the analysis and allowed me to recognise references during analysis that a non-fan might not identify.

There are several benefits to accessing user comments online as a source of textual and discourse-based data within the context of this study. First, as a nonreactive observational method for data collection, it permitted triangulation and validation of results from interviews, which are reactive and participatory (Janetzko, 2008; Seale, et al., 2012; Webb, et al. 2000). Seale, et al. (2012) indicate that the orientation of individuals may differ radically when representing themselves within their community or online as opposed to in an interview with a researcher. Secondly, this approach provides a large quantity of rich narrative data in addition to behavioural trace data (i.e., records left by people as they use online communities, such as profile information, timestamps, upvotes and records of interactions; Lampe, 2013). These data offer useful insights on the individual information behaviours of community members, by situating discourse in time and in relation to media (e.g., air dates of *Game of Thrones* episodes) and indicating the level of engagement with a particular comment or dialogue within the community and fandom. Moreover, user comments within the cultural context of a specific fan community provide an understanding of shared behaviours that cannot be obtained from interviews.

While I consulted multiple sources addressing content analysis as a qualitative method (e.g., Creswell & Poth, 2017; Charmaz, 2014; Hine, 2012; Kozinets, 2012; Patton, 2002), I ultimately chose a CGT approach for case study analysis that was consistent with the interview analysis. Just as interview transcripts were subject to qualitative coding and constant comparison, so too were data from fan sites. The case approach to collecting and analysing data provided a level of scalability that permitted the integration of content analysis and cross-comparison with patterns emerging from interviews. For example, the comparison of focused coding and memoing of interview data with that of fan site data provided insights that were useful for identifying parallels between the individual experiences of interview participants and the collective experiences observed in fan comments. This was crucial for developing a model of onlife information behaviour that included both individual and group contexts (see Chapter 6, Section 6.4). As discussed previously, Figure 3.4.1 is an example of how the analytical processes for both interview data and fan site data coordinated together. Behavioural trace data, such as timestamps, user profiles and threading (i.e., nested comments that are part of a conversation; Lampe, 2012), were also referenced to provide context for dialogic content. As with interviews, theoretical sampling dictated the need for more data to achieve saturation. As discussed in Section 3.5.3, the analysis of #FakeWesteros comments began with a small sample of Twitter posts (tweets) during the air times of the first and last episode of the final season of *Game of Thrones*. Since theoretical categories were still emergent after these samples were analysed, I expanded them across a wider time frame (e.g., adding one hour before and after the original sample) and sampled comments during air dates for other episodes during the season. The following section provides a brief overview of *Game of Thrones*, to contextualise the selection of cases in the study.

3.5.1. What is GOT fandom?

HBO's *Game of Thrones* (GOT) was a fantasy television series that spanned eight seasons and 73 episodes, with an average viewership of 44.2 million viewers per episode in 2019 (Pattern, 2019). It has prompted the production of multiple 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 memes, podcasts, fanfics, fanvids, and other fan-based creations. The series itself is an adaptation of the

ongoing book series, *A Song of Ice and Fire* by George R.R. Martin (1996), which has its own pre-existing fandom. The series, the novels it adapted, and the variety of productions it has generated are all part of the same storyworld. The *GOT* storyworld is a transmedia system that contains a complex network of texts, paratexts and intertexts that fans enthusiastically negotiate through their engagement. This engagement, by and between fans like interview participant Kerra, is what shapes the fandom and what creates communities like *AV Club* and *#FakeWesteros*.

Few television series have achieved the same pinnacle of mainstream success in the last decade. As a result, *GOT* has developed a global following and fandom. Focusing on how different groups of fans reacted to and engaged with specific momentous incidents during the television series run provided unique insights into the community's onlife experience. Two distinct events in *GOT* fandom were: "The Rains of Castamere" (season three, episode nine), in which the bloody Red Wedding from the pages of the novels was adapted to the screen; and the final eighth season and its six episodes, which departed from adaptation and marked the previously untold conclusion of the narrative for television. "The Rains of Castamere" was received with acclaim from critics and awe from fans. Many fans posted their reactions to the internet to capture this moment. Fan sites like watchersonthewall.com compiled this content, in the form of videos and social media posts, to remind the fandom of its lessons: "GoT taught everyone what George R.R. Martin had taught some of us years before in ASOIAF [*A Song of Ice and Fire*]: no one is safe!" (Watchers On The Wall, 2016). In contrast, producers faced severe backlash following the final eighth season, due to the perception among viewers that storytelling was rushed and inconsistent with quality fans had come to expect (Tufekci, 2019). As the *#FakeWesteros* community Twitter posts examined in Section 5.4 demonstrate, many in the *GOT* fandom were deeply conflicted during this period.

3.5.2. *AV Club*

I identified the first case site while writing my initial doctoral research proposal. For the first four seasons of the series, staff writers at *The AV Club* (www.avclub.com) published two reviews for each episode: one for viewers familiar with the books upon which the television

series is based (i.e., “Experts” (VanDerWerff, 2013) and one for viewers unfamiliar with the books and averse to spoilers (i.e., “Newbies”, Sims, 2013). Communities of “expert” and “newbie” fans formed on the website and, once published, each review engendered discussions in which community members enthusiastically participated. A pivotal moment in the series is the season three episode, “The Rains of Castamere” (Benioff & Weiss, 2013), which adapts the events of the Red Wedding from the novels. The graphic character deaths depicted in the episode represent a profoundly affective moment for fans (e.g., Concha, 2013; Blake, 2013). The two *AV Club* reviews of the television episode, therefore, document the fans’ initial reactions, responses, and interpretations related to the episode: one comment thread where commenters, as readers of the novels, had anticipated (or thought they did) the retelling of these character deaths, and one thread where the fans were unaware. The “Experts” thread includes ~2,200 comments while the “Newbies” thread includes ~3,300 comments. The analysis employed the same qualitative coding approach as interviews by coding “incident-by-incident” to reveal the patterns in how fans framed their responses to the episode and to each other in virtual space (Charmaz, 2014, p. 128). To reach a saturation of qualitative codes, the first 10 per cent of comments from each thread (i.e., a total of approximately 550 comments) were coded separately for emergent themes. The threads were reviewed in chronological order, from the earliest comment to the most recent, so that responses and discussion sub-threads posted immediately after the publication of each review were given priority. I also read each thread in its entirety, to ensure that this approach to sampling the content was appropriate and would not result in the exclusion of significant incidents or themes. The codes from each thread were then compared for insights regarding the discursive practices that were shared between “Experts” and “Newbies”, and where they diverged. Finally, as is discussed in detail in Chapter 5, Section 5.3, the analysis drew conclusions on the observed forms of response of *AV Club* members overall, and theorised how posting on the website fits into a broader understanding of media fan engagement and online experience.

3.5.3. #FakeWesteros

I selected the second case site following a discussion with an interview participant (i.e., Kerra) who identified themselves as a member of the community. *FakeWesteros* is a group of fans around the world that perform parodic versions of characters from *Game of Thrones* on

Twitter, posting live as the episodes air (i.e., livetweeting) in a shared viewing, discursive, and role-playing practice. In May 2019, shortly after the series ended, I published a profile of *Game of Thrones* fandom and the *FakeWesteros* community in *The Conversation* (Forcier & Given, 2019), which in turn received positive responses from the community (e.g., DrogotheKhal, 2019). It was especially important, in my role as researcher, that I not silence or stifle the voices of this community through an overabundance of caution by anonymising their words; as I discuss briefly in Section 3.5.3, I perceived the common practice in online ethnography of anonymising informants to be more harmful than not, as it would steal the agency these fans worked so hard to assert in the virtual world (Bruckman, Luther, & Fiesler, 2015). The analysis identified members with the Twitter hashtag “#FakeWesteros” in their profiles or that appeared in user-created lists associated with the community and published on Twitter and related fan website *Watchers on the Wall* (watchersonthewall.com). I then generated a list of the 50 most active Twitter users during the airing of season eight from 12 April to 20 May 2019. Using the Twitter API, I collected the timelines for members during the above period, representing a total of 27,775 tweets. I used R and Python scripts to collect and pre-process the data before loading it as a series of text files into NVivo. Data analysis considered air dates and times. The earliest airing was on HBO Sunday nights at 21:00 Eastern Standard Time (EST). While the episode was available in simulcast in other time zones and on other networks (for example, the simulcast on Foxtel aired episodes at 11:00 AEST on Mondays) and was also available on NOW TV and HBO Go streaming services after that time, the episode officially aired again on Sky Atlantic Monday nights at 21:00 GMT. Livetweeting, that is, members posting their responses as they watch the episode, generally took place at one or both times. Indeed, the most active users would livetweet multiple viewings of the same episode. Livetweet sessions were often immediately followed by commentary within the #FakeWesteros community. For this reason, data were collected and sampled to ensure full livetweet sessions were captured. Comments that were not about *Game of Thrones* were excluded from analysis. Initially, coding was limited to two, two-hour windows (the hour during and the hour after the different episode air times on HBO and Sky Atlantic) for the first and last episode of the season. This window was expanded by an additional two hours (before and after the episode). This represents a sample of approximately 3,700 tweets. Later, analysis of the frequency of posts on and between air dates identified additional periods of

activity to examine and verify emerging patterns from the tweets that had already been reviewed. In total, approximately 5,000 tweets were reviewed for analysis, which was sufficient for theoretical saturation of themes related to forms of response and categories of behaviour in the onlife environment of these community members.

3.5.4. Ethical Considerations

The collection and analysis of online data for this project was guided by current, published recommendations from the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) on ethical decision-making and Internet research (Markham & Buchanan, 2012; see also <http://aoir.org/ethics/>) and on ethical considerations for ethnographic research specific to the media fan context and virtual context (Boellstorff, et al., 2012; Bruckman, Luther & Fiesler, 2015). Recommendations emphasise the importance of viewing research on the internet in the context of human research (p. 4), and as such I have carefully considered the need to safeguard the communities under study and their rights to disclosure while also balancing the need for the meaningful presentation of results. Unlike interviews, where participants were granted an expectation of confidentiality and were therefore provided the choice of a pseudonym to protect anonymity, users posting on *AV Club* and members of *FakeWesteros* have already assumed personae to represent themselves within their communities. To strip comments of these personae would remove important context for the comments and would also fail to attribute the production of these fans under the identities they have asserted. Community members like *CookieMonster* and *NiceQueenCersei* represent what Hellekson and Busse (2006) refer to as “big name fans” within their respective communities (p. 11). As Bruckman, Luther & Fiesler (2015) point out, it is entirely reasonable that they would want to be credited for their work (p. 254). It is also not practical to anonymise members of a community, when words can be easily associated with the person by other members of the community or through a simple keyword search (Boellstorff, et al., 2012, p. 137; Bruckman, Luther & Fiesler, 2015). It is for these reasons that I used the fan-selected usernames as they appeared on comments, rather than employ an anonymising strategy.

With that said, I was also cautious in the discussion of results when sharing what could be seen as problematic or challenging commentary, such as when the *AV Club* “newbies” participate in a collective revenge fantasy (see Section 5.3.2). It is important to recognise that the

discourses of fan communities take place in deeply contextual spaces that are often circumscribed by values and norms that are not readily apparent to outsiders. Throughout this document, I aim to provide sufficient background to readers so that user comments are not interpreted out of context and that the norms that shape these communities are understandable and relatable. I have only shared content from data where they contribute to the discussion of results. The potential for harm from including specific quotations from fans has been evaluated on a case-by-case basis to ensure that the risk of harm remains minimal. Both fan sites, as noted in 3.5.1 and 3.5.2, are publicly accessible (i.e., a login and password are not required to access published content). As the AoIR recommendations indicate, “public” and “private” may hold contested definitions from the perspective of subjects (Markham & Buchanan, 2012, p. 6). For this reason, I have taken the precautions as outlined above. Finally, in the case of *FakeWesteros*, I have maintained contact with Kerra during the review of data and dissemination of preliminary results (for example, the profile published in *The Conversation*, as noted in Section 3.5.2) to ensure that the community was informed and welcomed this research activity.

3.6. Summary

This project adopted a social constructionist paradigm, informed by the dual perspectives of everyday life practice (de Certeau, 1984) and onlife (Floridi, 2014). This epistemological and theoretical position inspired the application of a CGT methodology to the design of the research. Data collection in the form of exploratory interviews and content analysis of fan sites provided triangulation to develop a comprehensive understanding of the information behaviours of onlife fans. The following chapters explore these information behaviours, first through the results of interviews (Chapter 4) that examine the onlife ways of being and doing illustrated in participants’ experiences, then in the fan site case studies (Chapter 5), which generate important insight into media fan engagement through observations about forms of response and categories of behaviour. Finally, Chapter 6 synthesises the results of both sets of analyses to develop theory on the tactics and onlife engagement of fans in their everyday lives and to present a model for the information behaviour of onlife fans.

4. The Onlife Fan: Interview Results

4.1. Introduction

One becomes a “fan” not by being a regular viewer of a particular program but by translating that viewing into some kind of cultural activity, by sharing feelings and thoughts about the program content with friends, by joining a “community” of other fans who share common interests. For fans, consumption naturally sparks production, reading generates writing, until the terms seem logically inseparable...

(Jenkins, 2006b, p. 41)

Interview participants shared their experiences engaging with media fandom and storyworlds as fans. Their accounts included descriptions of their use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) that facilitate their engagement, and specifically how digital fandom that takes place in virtual and network spaces (e.g., Tumblr, Twitter, Facebook, Twitch, Archive of Our Own, Roll20, video and mobile games, etc) that are integrated into their everyday life practice. Their perspectives demonstrate that the distinction between digital fan practices and physical fan practices are fuzzy, as for example the way participants characterised and enacted cosplay (as described in Section 4.2). Similarly, fan identity was manifested and constructed by participants in ways that merged the virtual and the physical/analogue. Their perspectives offer many rich examples of what it means to be onlife.

The perspectives of interview participants are examined in two parts. The first part of the chapter, Section 4.2, focuses on fan practices as the external actions and media engagements of the participants (i.e., ways of doing). These sections explore the different hobbyist contexts of making, playing, and collecting, and the specific information behaviours of participants within each context. In the second part of the chapter, Section 4.3, I examine the underlying fan identities that are constructed through responses and behaviours (ways of being). These sections explore overlapping identity facets for the onlife fan as they emerged thematically in interviews, through the lens of three loci for identity formation: fan-becoming (i.e., the core facets of

participants), spectra of engagement, and impact/intentionality. These sections offer insight into how onlife experience influences the identity construction of the individuals as fans, consumers, and information users.

Ways of being and of doing that emerged in the interviews showed how the integration of ICTs into everyday life is tacitly known and understood. As described in Chapter 1 (Sections 1.1, 1.3) and Chapter 2 (Section 2.7), cultures and societies today are structured around ICTs and manifest mediated environments that are partly physical and partly virtual (i.e., onlife environments), which people navigate in their daily lives. People experience these environments every day through their work, their interactions with each other, and their engagements with information, media, and entertainment. Floridi's (2014) concept of onlife experience, which describes how we perceive the spilling over of the virtual and networked online world into the physical and analogue offline world, has implications for those individuals who are living it. Everyday life practice comprises the "informal, routine, mundane activities of daily life" (Rothbauer, 2004, p. 14) that are rooted at the nexus of work, leisure, and family life" (Ocepek, 2018, p. 399). And, when such activities take place through a mixing of the digital and the analogue, they become part of the onlife experience. The perspectives of interview participants provide a basis for us to theorise a new development in de Certeau's (1984) framework for everyday life, and to offer a fresh perspective on Floridi's philosophy of information, through the introduction of *everyday onlife practice*.

4.1.1. *Fandom as a Way of Life*

Ways of doing (as explored below in Section 4.2) and ways of being (as explored in Section 4.3) can be understood together through the trope "fandom is a way of life" (Eney, 1959, p. 62; fanlore, n.d.). This trope, and how it was reflected through interview participants' perspectives, helps frame the analysis appearing in in Sections 4.2 and 4.3. This first section, then, offers overarching observations from interview results that connects the analysis to the information behaviour (IB) context.

When asked if she considered her *Sherlock* fandom a "hobby", Malakh replied:

I think people who aren't a part of your fandom might view your fandom as just a hobby, and everyone who is part of it views it as an identity.

Malakh's phrase "*just a hobby*" implies that fan engagement is not just about what one *does* but also about who one *is*. This understanding of fandom is one reason why the current study's research questions are formulated to look at both external actions, or ways of doing, and identity construction, or ways of being. Malakh's perspective in no way minimises ways of doing, but rather emphasises that these activities are embedded within a fan's identity. In the framing of this study's research questions (Chapter 1, Section 1.7), I proposed three different social identity positions: fan, consumer, and information user. A crucial observation from interviews is that these different identity positions are *not* mutually exclusive. In the past, fan studies (FS) literature has sought to distinguish the fan from the consumer through discourses of the "exemplary fan" (Woo, 2019); the perspectives of the 17 participants in this study suggest rather that fandom is infinitely multifaceted and that such discourses are reductionist. Instead, it is more useful to consider the position of fan as one that includes both consumer and information user, and to demonstrate how consumption and information practices are embedded in fan practices.

Similarly, the interviewees consider themselves fans regardless of whether they engage with a fan object (i.e., a character, a text, a storyworld, or a representation of these things) offline, online, or onlife. The variegated spectrum of backgrounds, motivations, and activities found in participants' experiences demonstrate that the blurring digital/online and analogue/offline in daily life imposes few restrictions on how individuals perceive and identify themselves as fans. While the "digital mundane" (Woo, 2019, p. 10), that is, the increasingly commonplace use of digital technologies, does not significantly impact participants' identity as either consumers or fans, it does at times lead to interesting insights about the pervasive influence of technology on fandom. For instance, some participants consciously distinguished old (i.e., predigital) and new ways of consumption or engagement. Others experienced moments of realisation during interviews when faced with their own examples of their engagement with fandom and how it had transformed over time. Participants perceived themselves as consumers (and, sometimes in the same breath, as producers) through different types of transactions that exchanged time, effort, labour, and money for participation in, and deeper, more meaningful engagement with, a fan object or fandom. They perceived themselves as information users when they sought contextual and paratextual content to extend their engagement with fandom, and

when confronted with the fact that the consumption of media content represents a form of information use.

Interestingly, most participants did not consciously frame themselves as information users. Instead, interviews revealed that information use is a tacitly understood component necessary to fans' engagement with fandom (i.e., ways of doing) rather than a specific identity (i.e., ways of being). Research suggests that consumer and information practices are a part of the totality of experience that is the "everyday" (Ocepek, 2018). As such, it is unsurprising that media fandom, which contains both, is a rich area for examples. These examples not only bring to the fore consumer and information behaviours, but also highlight how ICTs have become a mundane feature of everyday life. Ultimately, onlife ways of being and of doing are most explicit in the ways that participants identified as information users after prompts that encouraged a deeper reflection on the role of information in their fannish activities. Interview questions that explored the idea that content from fandoms, which participants encountered and shared every day, could be understood as information are the most revealing. During these moments in the interviews, participants were able to reflect on the embedded role of ICTs in their activities and contexts, and how the specific ways they engaged in fandom are understood as information behaviour.

4.2. Hobbyist Contexts: Ways of Doing

FANAC Fan activity. Devoting time, energy, and money to non-profit pursuits in the general field of fantasy and fandom. This includes reading, collecting, corresponding, belonging to organizations, writing, publishing, recruiting new fans, visiting fellow stfnists [scientifictionists], perhaps living with them in a science-fiction house, and attending fan gatherings.

(Eney, 1959, p. 57)

Robert Bloch (1956, p. 16) coined the abbreviation "fanac" to refer to fan activity, such as the production and distribution of mimeographed fanzines, creation of fan clubs, attending conventions and participating in the social world of science fiction and fantasy fans birthed from the letters column of pulp magazines. The term is not common outside the 20th century science

fiction and fantasy fandom context, which precedes much of the scholarly discourse in FS; media fans today use the narrower term *fan works* to refer to fan-made content (Busse & Hellekson, 2006, p. 5). FS scholars refer to *fan labour* to include less-tangible forms of fan production (Stanfill & Condiss, 2014; Gray, Sandvoss & Harrington, 2017). Others, like Jenkins (1992/2013; 2006), use *participatory culture* for the sum of shared fan activities. Ultimately, all of these terms are about the same thing: what fans *do*.

The goal of the following sections is to understand the onlife information behaviours of contemporary media fans by examining how fans describe what they do. Through participants' voices of their experiences, I identify ways of doing: specific contexts of experience in which the fannish activities, tactics, behaviours, and practices of the study's participants take place. These sections explore each of these contexts and the types of information behaviours associated with them. The variety of activities captured within these contexts represents, in its totality, the everyday onlife experience of the media fan.

Interviews explored each participant's background and the different ways that they identified as a fan, but the richest examples of information behaviour emerged when the participant turned to the different activities they engaged in every day. These activities relate to a fan's extension of their engagement to other creative and labour-intensive forms of activity, such as fic writing; digital bricolage in the form of videos (i.e., fanvids), graphics (e.g., memes, GIFs), and artwork (i.e., fanart); making websites; curating and recommending content; costuming and cosplaying; role-playing; playing video games; collecting; buying and selling; and displaying collections. These activities are broadly categorised as "hobbyist", based on the use of the term in serious leisure research (Hartel, 2003, p. 230), demonstrating a specific and substantial labour and commitment of time, money, and other resources. Virtually all participants agreed that their engagement with a particular fandom constituted a "hobby" as a substantial and agreeable activity that is a part of their everyday life (Stebbins, 2007/2015, p. 5). Any disagreement with this characterisation was due to connotations associated with the word "hobby", as with Malakh's use of the term in the chapter introduction (see Section 4.1.1). Descriptions of fandom-as-hobby indicate that hobbyist tendencies represent facets of a person's engagement with a particular storyworld or fan object. Such tendencies are manifested through the many different activities listed above. These activities include, but are not limited to, the types of

hobbyist pursuits described by Stebbins' (2007/2015) Serious Leisure Perspective (SLP). As such, SLP is used as a sensitising concept to help frame the results in the following sections. The primary hobbyist pursuits for fans that emerged from interviews fall under three contexts, or frames: making, playing, and collecting.

4.2.1. Making

"Transformational" fandom, on the other hand, is all about laying hands upon the source and twisting it to the fans' own purposes, whether that is to fix a disappointing issue (a distinct lack of sex-having between two characters, of course, is a favorite issue to fix) in the source material, or using the source material to illustrate a point, or just to have a whale of a good time.

(obsession_inc, 2009, para. 7)

Making is a very specific way of *doing* that requires a combination of creativity, skill, and intent. Together, they permit the “twisting” implied by transformational fandom (obsession_inc, 2009, para. 7). Ways of making specifically identified in the participant interviews are: writing fanfiction (referred to by participants as fanfic or just “fic”); making GIFs and GIF sets; making fanvids and other video production, including livestreaming on platforms like YouTube and Twitch; creating artwork (i.e., fanart); developing websites; and designing and assembling costumes for cosplay.

Unlike collecting, which has a single identity label to describe a set of practices (“collector”, see Section 4.2.3), making can be found under many different guises based on the creative production. For example, Isthi, Aziraphale, Malakh, and Uilleand were fanfic writers. Aziraphale also made GIF sets and posted them to Tumblr, and painstakingly constructed YouTube videos by setting obscure clips of favourite actors to music. Rhamiel’s artistic ambitions included the making of fanvids, fandom-inspired artwork, and costumes for cosplay with her friends. Agnephi drew sketches inspired by his favourite TV shows and shared them on Twitter and through Patreon to help promote his original artwork. Amriel and Tabrith were also active cosplayers, like Rhamiel, that devoted much energy to the design and construction of costumes and props to represent their favourite characters. Kerra channelled her passion into web

design, building elaborate fan websites for the actors/celebrities and TV shows she engaged with. Razael created and hosted a Facebook group for fans of *Solo: A Star Wars Story*. Ten participants, fully half of those interviewed, told accounts of their making activities. The following five subsections review the onlife information behaviours that emerged from their stories, specifically the following fan works: writing and sharing fanfic, making GIFs and fanvids, making fanart, making websites, and making cosplay costumes.

Writing and sharing fanfic: “I wonder what the fic is?” When considering fanfic as a way of *making*, I focus specifically on participants’ writing and sharing of their personal fannish productions (i.e., fan works). Other fic-related activities that fall within the hobbyist context, such as community knowledge sharing through participation and games (e.g., “fic wars”, “reclisting”), beta reading, commenting, tagging, and searching are discussed in Section 4.2.2. Isthi, Malakh, Uilleand, and Aziraphale were fic writers who shared their writing online. Table 4.2.1 describes the information behaviours associated with the practice of writing and sharing fic that emerged from their experiences.

Table 4.2.1. Information behaviour associated with writing and sharing fanfic.

Examples	Information behaviour	Theories and Concepts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing fanfiction (Isthi and Aziraphale) • Sharing fanfiction with an audience online (Isthi and Aziraphale) • Collaborating (Isthi and Uilleand) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imagining untold scenarios from a narrative or storyworld • Searching to see if anyone else has written it yet • Researching the storyworld to ensure that a scenario is canon-compliant • Writing imagined scenarios (for private enjoyment or to share with others) • Posting writings online on fan forums or fanfiction websites like FanFiction.net and AO3 • Learning conventions specific to the community of writers and readers on the website (tagging, categorising, moderating, interacting) • Soliciting and responding to feedback from readers online 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Radical change theory (Dresang & Koh, 2009) • <i>Archontic</i> principle (Derrida, 1995; Derecho, 2006) • <i>Hyperdiegesis</i> (Hills, 2002)

“Pretty much every time I watch something or read something,” Isthi said, “I wonder what the fic is about this?” Isthi described herself as primarily a content creator and consumer of fan works, rather than someone involved in meta-theorising¹¹ with friends. Her pursuits as an academic have provided her with a different perspective of fanfiction than other participants, but she explained that her engagement with fic began before she identified as an “acafan”; first, as a reader of *Harry Potter* and *Supernatural* fics in high school, and later as a writer of *Teen Wolf* and *Red vs. Blue* fics as an undergraduate student. The existence of multi-fandom archives *Fanfiction.net* (FFN) and *Archive of Our Own* (AO3) is what allowed her to access fanfiction and become “hardcore involved” in writing her own. The ability to easily explore so many different texts and approaches to writing them contributed to her heightened engagement as an author. Her first step before writing fic was to search online to see if anyone else had written the same scenario. The multi-fandom archive is particularly suited to this task. Then, she began writing. She frequently returned to the source texts (i.e., television series) to ensure that the details she was inserting in her fic were consistent with the storyworld. Isthi said her writing was as close as possible to being “canon-compliant”, meaning that she tried not to contradict character backstory, explicit motivations and continuity expressed in the canonical text. This commitment to canon-compliance required her to research the source material and to be well-read in that fandom’s fan works. Sometimes she started a fic and then put it on hold (“shelf” it), because she needed to conduct more research before she was comfortable completing and sharing her story.

Aziraphale offered a much different perspective on fic writing and the influence of multi-fandom archives, particularly AO3. At the time of our interview, her fan practices were primarily involved with collecting, but that was not always the case. “I’ve written fanfic in a bunch of universes, some of which I’ve posted, some of which is quietly stuffed away somewhere in the hopes that no one will ever read it.” The creative impulse does not require for a fan to share their

¹¹ Isthi used this term to refer to the diegesis (or “hyperdiegesis”, see Hills, 2002, p. 101) that fans participate in when speculating about the elements that comprise the storyworld or universe in which a narrative is situated. “Meta” is also a word used independently by fans to refer to the production of fans through diegetic analysis (e.g., *teenwolffmeta*, n.d.).

writing for feedback or to receive “kudos”¹²; just as Aziraphale derived pleasure in the solitary appreciation of her collection, she also enjoyed writing fic that was not intended to be read by anyone else. During the interview, she described the *Buffy* fics that she wrote and shared with other fans online. The websites she posted on were “Chosen Two” (chosentwofanfic.com), a Buffy/Faith slash fic community, and “The Kitten Board” (thekittenboard.net), a Willow/Tara community. These sites are now defunct, and it is not clear if this is because there are fewer fics being written by *Buffyverse* fans or if many of the fic writers have abandoned them in favour of multi-fandom archives. Aziraphale’s account suggests that it is the latter. For her, the creative impulse faded when smaller online forum communities that focused on a single fandom gradually became less relevant and were eclipsed by the evolving practices introduced by AO3. The problem with the bigger sites like AO3, Aziraphale explained, is that they do not afford as many opportunities for discussion.

I mean, you can post comments and stories and things, but it’s not really the same as it was back when you were posting it on a forum and, you know, people who were also really interested in what you were doing, asking questions and speculating about what was going to happen next.

Aziraphale’s perspective on AO3 and the changing environment around online fanfiction is in sharp contrast to that of Isthi. There are numerous factors that distinguish Aziraphale and Isthi’s views: age, point of entry into fandom, motivations for writing, and personal relationships to the fan community, to name a few. Aziraphale was an older, long-time fan of *Buffy*, whose making of fanfiction developed in earnest after years of participating in online fandom. Having developed as a fan in the early days of the Web, she fondly recalled the message boards and forums that represented a significant part of the internet’s social landscape prior to the rise of Web 2.0 and popular social media platforms Facebook and Twitter. Ruefully, she pointed out that she also shared fic on Livejournal.com “back in the day”, before it got “filled with nothing

¹² The “kudos” button was introduced to AO3 in 2010 (fanlore, “Kudos”, n.d.). Other fan content sites, like Tumblr, have similar functions that are analogous to Facebook and Twitter’s “like” feature. There is debate within the fic community about the pros and cons of such functions. An example of a fic writer’s perspective is @ellenannes (2018) article on Medium, “What’s Wrong with the Kudos Button on Ao3 and What to Do About It” (<https://medium.com/@ellenannes/whats-wrong-with-the-kudos-button-on-ao3-and-what-to-do-about-it-203a9cc45cfd>).

but Russian bots”. Isthi, on the other hand, was awakened to fanfiction more recently and might not have found the same fulfilment in fandom if not for a website like AO3. Each fan’s point of entry is firmly situated within the digital environments and technologies available to them at the time, and both exhibit the information behaviour particular to their individual contexts. Radical Change Theory (Dresang & Koh, 2009) is a useful perspective for understanding how information behaviours are affected by the affordances of digital technologies. One principle of Radical Change Theory is that change in behaviour occurs when barriers to access information are broken (Dresang & Koh, 2009, pp. 27-28). For Aziraphale, who possessed advanced computing knowledge and experience with pre-Web 2.0 online communities, there was no initial barrier to access fic communities where she was comfortable sharing her writing. Isthi, on the other hand, lacked Aziraphale’s knowledge and experience to identify and successfully integrate into these fic communities, and so the changes in the digital environment that were introduced by AO3 represented the breaking of that barrier to her fandom. Aziraphale’s ambivalence toward AO3 suggests that what represents increased access for Isthi, in turn represents a barrier to access for her. Without the changes introduced by the multi-fandom archive, Isthi might not have discovered her passion for fanfiction and Aziraphale might have continued to write Buffy/Faith stories and posting them on “Chosen Two”.

Malakh and Uilleand’s stories are comparable to those of Isthi and Aziraphale. Malakh, like Isthi, has shared her writing on AO3 in the past when she had more time, and continued to participate on the website as a beta reader. Uilleand used many sites indiscriminately, including the multi-fandom sites Fanfiction.net, AO3, and the fan content website DeviantArt, as well as *Star Wars* role-playing (RP) forums similar to Aziraphale’s *Buffyverse* message boards. For Malakh and Uilleand, writing was a collaborative activity, whether it is through the weaving of a communal narrative by posting RP narratives that are part of storyworlds like *Knights of the Old Republic (KOTOR)* or the *Potterverse*, or through reciprocal beta reading and reviewing of fic with friends who share privately or post to archives for feedback. Uilleand’s most productive collaboration was with two friends she made in online RP communities. Uilleand, like Aziraphale, had been involved in fic writing since before Web 2.0 and contemporary social platforms. Malakh, of an age with Isthi, started writing fic in the integrated online fan environments generated by AO3, Fanfiction.net, and Tumblr; this is the participatory world that

she was familiar with and online fandom prior to these platforms was outside her sphere of experience. These differences are generational and experiential: Aziraphale and Uilleand were fans and fic writers that shared their productions with other fans before the multi-fandom archive, learning to navigate the online environment of early internet and the fan communities that existed at the time.

In contrast, Malakh and Isthi encountered fic writing thanks to the multi-fandom archive and the increased access it offered. This finding is linked to the “mainstreaming” of fandom that has taken place since the start of online fandom (Booth, 2012; Booth, 2015). Interview results suggest that “mainstreaming” of fandom is not merely an outcome of emergent cybercultures, but rather sign of a larger cultural shift towards onlife experience. Malakh and Isthi may not have become fic writers if not for the increasing popularity of multi-fandom archives. If not for AO3, specifically, it is likely that they would not have found fandoms and communities they considered themselves a part of. It is doubtful they would have felt comfortable enough to share their writing or to participate in fandom at the same level without the mainstreaming effects of online fandom. Digitally supported and mediated interactions are an essential part of these participants’ specific fan making activities, and therefore illustrate how the merging of digital affordances into everyday life contribute to onlife experience.

While the creative impulse to imagine new scenarios or extensions to storyworlds and commit them to words are behaviours that are common to both pre-digital and contemporary fic writers, Malakh, Isthi, Aziraphale, and Uilleand’s information behaviours (e.g., searching, finding, reading, and sharing fic with other fans) are defined and shaped by the current internet landscape and by ICTs and network infrastructure that make websites like AO3 a hotbed for fan works. These participants’ fandoms and their fic writing practices were so embedded in digital technologies and virtual spaces, it is questionable whether they would have become fanfic writers in the pre-digital age. This is significant because it demonstrates how fic writing, a practice that traces back to the hand-crafted, mimeographed pages of zines (Jenkins, 2006b, p. 42; Coppa, 2006), has been transformed by the digital. It has been made more accessible to new generations, attracting more fans, developing new genres, approaches, and tropes, and increasing its potential cultural influence as “celebrational” making (obsession_inc, 2009, para. 4).

There is a more profound and fundamental question related to fic writing, that is: *why* write fanfic? Are there underlying behaviours or hidden practices behind participants' motivations? Uilleand explained:

...I write for fun, I write to get my brain out, I write when I have partners like S—and L--. ...To have that sort of communal writing. We all have the same stories... I'll write a page, and then she'll write a page, and then he'll write a page and it'll go around.

As mentioned, previously, fic writing as a collaborative group activity is an important part of how Uilleand approached her practice. What she described is a particular way of creating information that is “communal”. This round robin approach follows the tradition of play-by-post role-playing games (PBP RPGs), a distinct type of fic writing with links to chain letters historically circulated among pre-digital zine fans (“Round Robin”, Speer, 1944), pen-and-paper RPGs like *Dungeons and Dragons*, and the multi-user dungeons (MUDs) that were the virtual worlds of the early internet (Pearce & Artemesia, 2009, p. 9). In this section, I discuss Uilleand's writing as fic, but some of the more idiosyncratic aspects of role-playing writing (referred to by participants as “RP” and “RP-ing”) are discussed further in Section 4.2.2. Uilleand considered the textual output of RP a form of fic. Malakh also indicated that she participated in PBP RPGs online but did not explicitly connect these to her fic writing or posting on AO3. However, Malakh's supportive interactions with other writers, like beta reading each other's fics, is another example of collaboration in fic writing. More to the point are the “bangs”, “exchanges”, and “fic wars” that Isthi participated in with other fic writers and fan makers, where many fics and artworks within a fandom were produced by a group of fans as part of an event (e.g., <https://rvbficwars.tumblr.com/>). These include round robins and other formats for creative collective writing.

For these participants, then, fic writing is a community activity. In Uilleand's case (as discussed further in Section 4.3.1), the role of community was central to her engagement. This view of fic as a community-based artistic practice is what Derecho (2006) describes as “*archontic* literature”, based on Derrida's (1995) use of the word to describe archives as perpetually open and ever expanding. In this sense, fic writers are *archivists*, “unifying”,

“identifying”, “classifying”, and “consigning” information to “produce more archive” (Derrida, 1995, p. 3; p. 68; See also Chapter 2, Section 2.4 for details). This is a valuable observation not just for how fans make sense of narrative information from a source text through creative experimentation, but for how fans generate, collate, and share information in their communities through the medium of fic.

In comparison to Uilleand’s motivations, Isthi was driven by her interest in exploring gender identities and queer readings of fictional characters. Mindful of the strategy of “queerbaiting” (i.e., the attempt by canon creators to draw in a queer audience by implying or hinting at a gay relationship that is not and will never actually be depicted), she perceived fanfiction as a method for empowering fans to explore the hidden possibilities of narratives. She described her approach to engaging with narrative and writing fic:

Because queerbaiting works so well on me (laugh)—I’m just one of those people who are like, all of my children are gay and I love them...—and so that’s sort of how I interact with fandom. My “in” to it, I guess, my *entrée*, is how do I queer this? How do I make this, how do I tease out the queer possibilities that have been brought up by this canon, whether or not they wanted them there. And whether or not they wanted to follow through with them, they’re still *there*. And, what do I *do* with this?

Like many participants, Isthi indicated that the digital, online, multi-platform, and transmedia experience of any storyworld, including both the authorised, canonical narrative instances and unauthorised paratextual extensions in the form of fan works, has a significant impact on her interpretation and engagement. Watching a television show live as it airs encourages a “hyperfocus”, she said, an immediacy or urgency that heightens engagement, while binge-watching the same content on Netflix permits the viewer to perceive the story differently, to see larger arcs they did not realise were there. That knowledge influences a fan’s writing. Speaking about transmedia extensions, specifically in the context of the television series *Lost*, its tie-in novels and the *Lost* ARG (e.g., Aardse, 2014), Isthi pointed out that these “extra-diegetic *entrées*” (her words) into the story allowed her to be immersed in that particular storyworld even outside the hour that the show was airing, and sparked her imagination in ways that made her

want to know more about that world. Her *entrée* into the making of her own queer fan works could be seen similarly as “extra-diegetic”, meaning that it takes place outside the core narrative. Or, instead of being “extra”, Isthi’s queering-through-fanfiction could in fact be described as *hyperdiegetic*. As mentioned in Chapter 2 (Section 2.5), Hills (2002) uses this term to refer to the endlessly deferred narrative hinted at in a story but never fulfilled except in the imagination of the audience. If fan works are considered part of an extended storyworld, then they remain diegetically linked to the canon. And, just like the canon’s authorised transmedia extend the storyworld through tie-in novels, ARGs, and digital and multi-modal extensions, fan works are also shared digitally, online, and across multiple media platforms, further expanding the many-levelled onlife fan experience. Isthi’s queering-through-fic is, in that case, a *hyperdiegetic entrée* into onlife modes of making.

“For *Buffy*,” said Aziraphale, “it’s, I think, more than anything the range of stories that it can tell.” Like Isthi, she recognised the hyperdiegetic potential of the storyworld, and writing fanfiction as a way to creatively tap into it. Uilleand’s immersion into the world through the eyes of the character she RPs, and the community-driven exploration that follows it, is also hyperdiegetic. These are merely other ways that fans fill in the gaps allowed by a source text. From an information perspective, these examples support how the outgrowth of media and emergence of *onlife* environments in our modern context generate new ways of making meaning and sharing knowledge with each other (Floridi, 2014). IS, FS, and media and communication scholars have provided ample data that supports this premise in other contexts (e.g., Booth, 2015; Dresang & Koh, 2009; Hellekson & Busse, 2006; Jenkins, 2006; Price & Robinson, 2016). The impulse to fill narrative gaps, as demonstrated by participants, also reveals the cognitive process behind fan engagement; once and for all, it dispels the myth that information and entertainment are mutually exclusive (Case & Given, 2016, pp. 127-134).

Making GIFs and fanvids: Preservation, curation, and creativity through digital bricolage. GIFs (a digital image format commonly used for the dissemination of memes) and fanvids (or just “vids”, videos created by fans using video clips and images from source material, often accompanied by music) were not forms of making that were common to interview participants. However, all participants were involved in viewing and accessing GIFs in the form of memes, and fanvids on YouTube or other video streaming platforms, and sharing them on

social platforms like Tumblr, Facebook, Twitter, and Reddit. The forms' influence in fandoms is evident in how all participants treated them as common fannish content that they encountered every day through their interactions online. As such, it is appropriate to focus briefly on the two participants that made GIFs and vids.

Table 4.2.2 describes Aziraphale's and Rhamiel's ways of making GIFs and fanvids.

Table 4.2.2. Information behaviour associated with making GIFs and fanvids.

Examples	Information behaviour	Theories and Concepts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making and sharing GIF sets (Aziraphale) • Making and sharing fanvids (Rhamiel) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying resources and assets representing the fan object that can be reused and remixed • Imagining a visual representation using existing resources and assets belonging to the fan object, which adds or contributes in some way to the narrative, storyworld, or fandom • Learning/acquiring the skills and tools (i.e., specific equipment and/or software) necessary to put resources and assets together for production • Applying skills and tools necessary to combine resources and assets for the production of a GIF, GIF set, or fanvid • Posting online on Tumblr or YouTube • Sharing links to GIFs and fanvids on fan community websites and social media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copyright and Fair Use Doctrine, in the context of YouTube (Solomon, 2015) • Semiotic production (Fiske, 1991) in the context of fan information behaviour (Price, 2017)

Aziraphale enjoyed working with images and video as a way of extending her engagement with her fandoms, which include *Buffy*, *Teen Wolf*, and *Glee*. "I still make GIFs when I can. I've got a copy of Photoshop and access to some resources, I'll do that." In addition to GIFs, she used to make videos and post them on YouTube. "...before YouTube started getting really, you know, hammering down on the copyright thing, 'cause there's something kind of disheartening about spending three weeks on it and then having it up for an hour before YouTube hammers it down."

The impact of copyright on fan making is a common topic in the research literature (Fiesler, 2013; Katz, 2019), particularly in the context of YouTube. In addition to prohibiting

content that may infringe copyright, YouTube also offers a tool to premium users called “Content ID” that allows them to register as the rights holders of content and issue takedowns of any matching content on the site (Burgess & Green, 2018; Solomon, 2015). A discussion of copyright laws in North America and around the world, in the context of making, is outside the scope of the current study; however, it is important to note that Aziraphale’s account supports previous research indicating that the application of current copyright laws and the policies of internet service providers (ISPs) and social content websites, like YouTube, favour mass media copyright holders, and discourage users from creating content that might otherwise be considered fair use (e.g., Christian, 2013; Fiesler, 2013; Solomon, 2015).

Aziraphale described her process for creating GIF sets and videos:

For videos and GIF sets I actually recorded a lot of my own, I had a, I forget what the name of the company was now but it was a box, you just run your DVD player into it and then into the computer and then you can just record clips, and then, you know, pull things out of clips and throw in music and stuff like that through, like, I think I used Windows Movie Maker back in the day, as embarrassing as that is. For GIFs, I’ll generally just do the same thing: find some high quality video, and just throw it into Photoshop and pull it out. I tend to do that more for rare stuff. Like, there’s an actress from *Glee* that I’m quite fond of, Dianna Agron, and... some of her older stuff is kind of hard to find and also mostly terrible. ...I can make these GIF sets and throw them up for people so that they don’t have to watch the movie themselves.

The example of Dianna Agron, actor from *Glee*, strikes at the heart of what makes GIFs and GIF sets effective at sharing information related to fandom, and as another online mode of making through Tumblr. In this example, Aziraphale’s focus on the “older”, “rare stuff” represents a form of post-object fandom, referring to “fandom of any object which can no longer produce new texts” (Williams, 2015, p. 16; see Chapter 2, Section 2.5 for details). Creating GIF sets and posting them on Tumblr is a way for Aziraphale to extend her engagement: with *Glee*, now that the show has ended; with Agron, as a celebrity; and with Agron’s past body of work.

At the same time, by providing this re-packaged and remediated content, Aziraphale presented an opportunity for other fans of Glee and Agron to engage in ways they may otherwise never have done. For some fans, this may lead to the discovery of new objects of fannish interest in Agron's other performances, and for others it may simply be a way to extend their existing attachment to the character she plays in Glee. By making GIF sets, Aziraphale is participating in an information exchange with other fans within her fandoms, creating new information resources that extend her and others' engagement with a storyworld and character. This particular set of information behaviours demonstrates the kind of "semiotic production" described in first-wave FS scholarship (Fiske, 1991), and which leads to the more specific forms of "produsage" theorised in Price's (2017) model of fan information behaviour (p. 319). Aziraphale's example further expands on this model by illustrating the complex relationship between information and engagement taking place through individual making practices.

The sort of bricolage evidenced in Aziraphale's videos and GIF sets was shared by Rhamiel, an artist who was also a fan of Sailor Moon that made fanvids. These "video remixes" are created from clips of television shows or films, rearranged, and set to music (Burwell, 2015). She described her experience with making fanvids:

I used to make, like, anime music videos! So, I would scour the internet and have to convert all these clips from animes. And then I would pick a song. And then I would make, like, a music video theme, like a different narrative using those clips... I was just telling my brother, before I could make the videos I would use [Microsoft] Powerpoint (laugh)... But I would have it all timed perfectly. And there would be GIFs sometimes involved, as well, and it would be, like, its own narrative to it. ...And he's like, "No one does that. Who uses Powerpoint?" This was before I even really knew how to use video, because I was 12, 13 at the time. And if I had more time, I would definitely make more, because it was always so much fun.

Although Rhamiel referred to her productions as music videos, her description of the process aligns with the characterisation of the distinct production of fanvids. Rather than creating images

to popularise a piece of music, fans that make fanvids, or “vidders”, “use music as a kind of script through which to re-imagine the original text, placing a greater emphasis on visuality and image” (Burwell, 2015, p. 311). Indeed, Rhamiel used clips from *Sailor Moon* and other anime to generate a “different narrative” (her words), that is, a new spin on the source material. Both Rhamiel and Aziraphale appeared to be unfamiliar with the fannish terms “vid” and “vidder” in their interviews. There are many possible reasons for this lack of familiarity, not least of which may be that they are not deeply embedded within vid-based fan communities or vidder culture. This is significant because it suggests that current literature about vidding (e.g., Burwell, 2015; Coppa, 2008) may be overlooking a segment of fans that independently produce fanvids as part of their engagement while remaining outside studied communities. As such, this is an area that could benefit from further research. Coppa (2008) notes that the fanvid functions as an interpretive lens that offers an alternate perspective of the source text. As an onlife mode of making, Rhamiel and Aziraphale’s fanvids demonstrate an involved process that requires translation of source content across different media into a final, digital format, often with some inventive DIY problem-solving along the way. Rhamiel’s use of Microsoft Powerpoint as a workaround for making anime fanvids is an example of the creative thinking required by fan makers working in a digital space.

While the making of GIFs and fanvids was uncommon among participants, their relevance was apparent in the way that all participants encountered them in their online activities. GIFs were commonly produced and shared as memes, and many participants like Malakh, Kerra, Tabrith, Razael, and Codec included viewing, re-posting, and sharing of this content in descriptions of their fan activity. Malakh, for example, described *#red pants monday* as a particular meme related to BBC’s *Sherlock*, emerging specifically within the Sherlock/Watson slash fandom (i.e., “Johnlock”). “...Suddenly there’s an explosion of a brand-new hashtag with *#red pants monday*, and you probably shouldn’t open your Tumblr on Monday in a public space because you have no idea what’s gonna show up!” Many *Sherlock* fans on Tumblr followed the hashtag *#red pants monday* to view and share artwork, fics, images, and GIFs that celebrated Johnlock (Romano, 2012). Malakh described encountering representations of this aspect of *Sherlock* through this collective participatory practice of liking, replying, and sharing content created by others. As described in Chapter 1, Sections 1.2 and 1.3, these online

interactions represent the concept of spreadability (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013), which offers important insight into the everyday practice of onlife experience. Other examples for the reuse of GIFs and memes by fans are discussed in Chapter 5, in the context of the *#FakeWesteros* Twitter community (Section 5.4).

Making fanart: Practice, inspiration, and homage. Beyond fanfiction, fanvids, and GIF sets, fanart is used as a broader term for “artwork that copies or is inspired by commercially produced materials” (Manifold, 2009, p. 8). Three participants, Rhamiel, Agnephi, and Emphyrean, described making and sharing visual artwork inspired by their fandoms. Isthi and Uilleand described collaborating with artists making fanart (i.e., fanartists) when writing fanfic that was part of a shared theme or community event (See Section 4.2.2, *Fanfiction: Reading and Writing as Play*).

Table 4.2.3. Information behaviour associated with making fanart.

Examples	Information behaviour	Theories and Concepts
Making fanart (Rhamiel, Agnephi, and Emphyrean)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imagining a particular visual interpretation of a character or scene from canon • Applying learned artistic skills (sketching, use of graphic design software like Photoshop) to render an interpretation • Using platforms to share with others (e.g., Twitter to share themed sketches; Twitch to capture live sketches) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spreadability (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013) • Homage (Seymour, 2018)

Rhamiel and Agnephi were both professional artists and, therefore, their fan-based making moved beyond the hobbyist and into the vocational. Rhamiel created original characters with “underdog” backstories (her term). She found the narrative of the hero triumphing over impossible odds particularly compelling, and it is a characteristic shared between her original creations and some of her favourite characters in fandom: Rey Skywalker, Sailor Moon, and Deadpool. In addition to her original characters, she sold sketches of her favourite characters from multiple fandoms, including *Star Wars*, *Sailor Moon*, and *League of Legends*. “And then I kind of just make up my own and throw them in there. And let people think that it might be fanart (laugh).” Like Rhamiel, Agnephi also had positioned himself on the inside of the artist’s booth at fan conventions, selling books of his completed webcomics, prints, and artwork, which

sometimes consisted of sketches of his favourite characters or figures from other properties. He also sold prints and sketches on his website. His fanart is inspired by his favourite stories, allowing him to engage with *The Mandalorian*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, and *Transformers* in new ways. But they were also a way for him to practice and hone his craft as an artist. At the start of 2020, he promoted #JANdalarion, posting photos of his sketches on Twitter that were inspired by the Disney Plus series, *The Mandalorian*.

At that point I'd finished doing three books... and I'd done them entirely digital on my iPad or working on my desktop in Photoshop. So, I really wanted to get back to doing something, working with watercolours, working with ink... working with my hands, basically. I always said I would never work digitally, but now I work 95% digitally.

Previously, Agnephi had participated in similar social media-based events, like #TMNTober and #TransformeroftheWeek. He described how he challenged himself during the former:

I just wanted to draw Ninja Turtles. So, I did these 4 x 6 drawings of every character from the game *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 3 [TMNT 3: The Manhattan Project]*, released in North America in 1992] on the NES [Nintendo Entertainment System]. ...I did one every day, just based on the way the characters looked in the game. ...When it was all finished, I scanned them all, coloured them all, and I made a little digital sketchbook, and I release that as an incentive for my Patreon subscribers.

Agnephi's followers on Twitter and Instagram were able to see his progress during these events as he posted the results online. Ostensibly, by sharing his fanart, he increased traffic to his website and also generated material to share on Patreon, a subscription platform that allowed him to engage directly with his own fans. Such grassroots-based social promotion tactics are part of the digital culture of spreadability (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013). At a deeper, more individual level, Agnephi engaged with other properties as a fan himself, taking pleasure from the nostalgia he felt for the characters and storyworlds of his childhood. His artwork extended that sense of nostalgia, allowing him to share the experience with like fans (some of whom are also fans of his

own original comics and books). From this, we can decipher motives for making that are similar to motives for collecting (which are discussed in Section 4.2.3 in greater detail): Agnephi's collection of *Transformers* action figures and his fanart are both expressions of what Baudrillard refers to as "the problem of time" (1996, p. 95). Baudrillard posits that the organisation of the collection itself replaces time, meaning that it exists atemporally as a system within which the collector can re-experience the past in the present. Agnephi's renderings of 8-bit Ninja Turtles also represent a way for him to construct a portal to his past. His making activity differs from his collecting activity, however, in one crucial aspect. Fan artwork is not an object in history in the same way that a toy that is played with as a child is, but rather an interpretation of that object from the perspective of the present. In that sense, Agnephi's making is indeed transformational, as obsession_inc (2009) defines it.

The fact that Agnephi's fanart is an exercise of back-to-basics, handcrafted, entirely analogue creation only highlights the digital ways in which he shared them. His fanart took the form of scans posted to social media platforms like Twitter and Instagram, of customized downloadable files for his Patreon subscribers, and of physical prints, which he sold through his website. Even as he actively sought an escape from a perceived tyranny of digital technologies, Agnephi's information behaviours as they relate to his artistic activities and output remained firmly within onlife practice. This observation is instructive because it demonstrates just how deeply embedded the use of social media is for the sharing of fan-made content. His Twitter posts were re-circulated (retweeted) by his followers to their own networks, spreading his handcrafted sketches digitally. As seen previously with GIFs and fanvids, artistic content spreads online through social media channels. All participants used social platforms regularly to access, share, and re-share content related to their fandoms, thus perpetuating the cycle of making and spreading fan works. This practice represents a set of online behaviours that was prevalent among participants, whether they identified as makers or merely consumers of fan works. The impact of digital technologies on fan practices has been widely acknowledged previously by researchers (e.g., Booth, 2015; Jenkins, 2006), but Agnephi's example emphasises the degree to which the digital has become embedded in people's everyday lives.

Rhamiel shared her fanart in a different way. Besides posting sketches to DeviantArt ([deviantart.com](https://www.deviantart.com)), a popular online community for artists and fanartists, she used the video streaming platform Twitch:

Sometimes what I'll do is that I'll have a sketch already done, and I'll do the line work while I'm streaming. Or I'll make up a sketch. Or I'll do, like, the colouring of it, sort of thing. Or I've done cosplay makeup for different characters. That's what I've done. ...It's gone all hodge-podge, all over the place.

Twitch allows users to watch a topic-specific live-stream (or channel) and interact with the “streamer” (the user that is broadcasting) and other viewers. It is most commonly used by gamers streaming video game sessions, but there are also channels for other content. In this sense, it is similar to YouTube Live, and is preferred by some users for affording more ways of interacting. Twitch provided Rhamiel with a platform to promote herself as an artist. At the same time, it allowed her to share her fan engagement through art with other fans.

The promotional aspect of her use of the platform is similar to the ways in which Agnephi shared his own artwork on Twitter to engage other fans and draw them toward his website or Patreon. Rhamiel's use of Twitch, however, seemed more indulgent and experimental, as much a part of finding new ways to engage her personal interests as it was a way of honing her craft. Recent research has explored the IB of Twitch users, focusing on identifying instances of information production, information reception, information reactions, and information rewards among upper-mid-sized streamers and their audiences (Diwanji, et al., 2020). Rhamiel's example demonstrates how information is produced for a small streamer, in the specific context of fandom. Rhamiel produced information about sketching, colouring, and doing cosplay makeup. Further research into these topic areas on Twitch would help determine how viewers receive, respond, and use fandom-based information encountered on Twitch and similar platforms. Rhamiel's case also supports previous research that explores how Twitch as a streaming platform encourages fan production (e.g., case study of *Twitch Plays Pokémon* in Emmanouloudis, 2015; 2022).

Though not a professional artist, Empyrean also made digital artwork as an extension of his *Star Trek* and DC comic fandoms. His chosen canvas was the computer desktop wallpaper. Wallpapers are images sized to standard screen resolutions intended for use as the desktop background for a computer or mobile screen. This is a common output for fanart, a digital equivalent to pin-up art from past decades. Indeed, “wallpaper” is its own category on DeviantArt (<https://www.deviantart.com/topic/wallpaper>). It is also a popular user-generated search tag (<https://www.deviantart.com/tag/wallpaper>). Just as fanvids remediate existing visual content, Empyrean took authorised and semi-authorised content and transformed it into desktop wallpapers. Unlike Aziraphale and Rhamiel’s fanvids, the purpose of this activity was to memorialize scenes, characters, objects, and moments from the comic books or television shows, or a particular artist’s interpretation of these, rather than to suggest an alternate reading of the text:

My usual subject for wallpapers is comic books, because there’s so many graphic things to choose from. But occasionally I find a good *Star Trek* picture and say, “yeah, yeah, that. I need that as a wallpaper on my computer.” For sure. Like Drew Struzan—I don’t know if you know the artist—he was an artist that was really popular in the 70’s. But he recently did some sort of crew portraits. ...He’s a really good artist and I found this stuff online. I was just searching online for something, and it struck me. “Hey, I know who did that artwork.” And then, “hey I’ve never seen him do these portraits before. That’s cool! I’m turning that into a wallpaper, ‘cause I need it!”

Empyrean’s initial motivation was to take existing works and convert them into a format he could regularly enjoy from his computer, but he also shared the output with others. He maintained a blog where he posted his latest wallpapers and attributed the source artist so that others could download and use them as well. He showed examples during the interview, such as the wallpaper he generated from the original work of the artist Drew Struzan that depicted crew members of the *Enterprise*. He sometimes took multiple resources, such as separate portraits of characters or different backgrounds or settings and combined them in one large image using editing software. He also shared his wallpapers in message board threads on the website *Comic*

Book Resources (cbr.com), where he and other users posted the wallpapers and fanart that they created. Empyrean's wallpapers are an example of "homage", that is, "a fanwork that celebrates an original work" (Seymour, 2018). In the wallpaper of the *Enterprise* crew, homage is dual-layered: it celebrates the *Star Trek* storyworld and it also celebrates the original artist, Drew Struzan.

Agnephi and Rhamiel's fanart could also be described as "homage". Although they use the activity to practice and improve their professional craft, their artistic productions can also be characterised as the celebration of a source text, character, or world. All three are involved in creative processes that transform the original. Agnephi reproduced 8-bit graphics by hand, from the world of *TMNT*, adding his personal flair to those iconic digital images, and then converted them once more into a digital format to share online. Rhamiel demonstrated her fanart live as it is rendered by video-streaming the act of her creation on Twitch. And Empyrean remixed his favourite elements from existing artwork so that he could make the resulting image a part of his daily experience as a desktop background. None of them intended for their work to be transformational, which is why they can be described as homage. And yet, neither do they fully align with obsession_inc's (2009) concept of "affirmational fandom", because their productions are transformational and potentially disruptive, whether they intend to be or not.

Making websites: Mediating the space between fan and fan object. All participants were involved in building their personal websites, or digital content spaces: Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram pages (all participants referenced having created accounts on one or more of these three platforms), Tumblr blog (Aziraphale, Malakh, Tabrith), Twitch stream (Amriel, Rhamiel), Patreon page (Amriel, Agnephi), personal websites or traditional blogs (Agnephi, Empyrean, Dagiel), online fan news magazine (Amriel), a virtual tabletop game on Roll20 (Eriner), private group chats (Uilleand), and public fan sites (Kerra). These are all different kinds of websites that can be created by fans. The most intensive examples of making websites are the focus of this section, examining the experiences of Razael, Amriel, Kerra, and Eriner. Table 4.2.4 describes the information behaviours associated with the first example of making websites in the form of a Facebook page (Razael).

Table 4.2.4. Information behaviour associated with making a Facebook page (making websites).

Examples	Information behaviour	Theories and Concepts
<i>Star Wars</i> Facebook page (Razael)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using technical skills and knowledge of Facebook to create a public <i>Star Wars</i> fan page • Staying up-to-date on news about the <i>Solo</i> film • Posting relevant information and content to the page • Communicating and responding to other users on the page 	Culture jamming (Dery, 1993/2017)

Razael described himself as a long-time “Facebook junkie”. He used the social platform primarily as a source for information about fandoms and as a way to engage with them. “Facebook is its own series of websites itself, so I do follow quite a bit of, like, fandom websites, and I am in, like, Facebook groups for those fandoms...” Our conversation traced a parallel trajectory for Razael’s growing fan engagement on Facebook and his development as a Facebook user, discussing first how he made use of the platform for accessing information and participating through comments, until he was comfortable enough to create his own Facebook fan page:

...the first day they announced *Solo: A Star Wars Story*—that’s gonna be the name of the Han Solo movie—I created a Facebook [page], so that I actually run the *actual* official—unofficial, but the only one up there—for the *Solo: A Star Wars Story*, Facebook page.

Razael indicated that the page itself had over 9,000 likes. He constantly posted news about the film on the page and tried to attract other users to converse through comments. Dialogue on the page tended to remain limited to only a few comments per post, unlike other fan pages or groups Razael followed that garnered more active participation from users. This suggests that the page was primarily used by other Facebook users and fans as an information source instead of a participatory platform. It was not time-consuming to post (“It takes 2 seconds, right?”), but the activity did demand a portion of the time that he spent daily on Facebook. Razael admitted that he was not sure *why* he did it. “It’s not like I can make money off it,” he said. And yet, he was proud of the page. Maintaining the fan page was a kind of

personal status symbol, or badge. It manifested Razael's identity as a Star Wars fan. This, perhaps more than any other reason, is what motivated his making. Despite using a tactic of resistance by colonising the *Solo: A Star Wars Story* Facebook page before others could, Razael's making is about as far as it gets from Dery's (1993/2017) "culture jammers", counterculture activists and disruptors of media consumption. Like most participants in this study, Razael's engagement is "dialogic rather than disruptive, affective more than ideological, and collaborative rather than confrontational" (Jenkins, 2006b, p. 150).

Fans like Razael produce as a celebration of the existence of media, just as obsession_inc (2009) opined, and are not driven by a desire to undermine the message of corporately controlled media. They perceive "unrealized potentials in popular culture and want to broaden audience participation," and "take knowledge in their own hands" to collaborate with instead of disrupting corporate interests (Jenkins, 2006b, p. 151). From an IB perspective, what this means is that, instead of trying to introduce noises into the signal as it passes from transmitter to receiver, as Dery's culture jammers do, Razael made websites to sharpen the signal and increase the spread of the message. His production added a channel through which information could be shared and accessed, reaching more people. That he curated the information and added his idiosyncratic spin and hot takes to the content he shared does not minimise the fact that he was, in his own words, providing "free publicity". This supports findings from Price (2017), that indicate fan resources are more informative than official ones, being more comprehensive and offering more insights relevant to fans (p. 287).

Amriel's making was more deliberately planned and labour-intensive than Razael's Facebook page. Putting to use writing and editing skills that she acquired as a graduate student, Amriel created an online magazine that featured stories about geek and pop culture from the local scene. Table 4.2.5 illustrates the information behaviours associated with this form of making.

Table 4.2.5. Information behaviour associated with making an online magazine (making websites).

Examples	Information behaviour	Theories and Concepts
Making and editing an online magazine (Amriel)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborating with a team and pooling skills to first create the website and generate content • Researching stories and news to share in articles • Writing articles and reviews / editing contributions for publication • publishing content on the website • Managing and responding to feedback from community of readers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grassroots intermediaries (Jenkins, 2006b) • Produsage (Price, 2017)

At the time of our interview, she was no longer operating the magazine, but issues and articles were still available to access on the website. Following the interview, I looked at some of the content available on the website¹³. As editor-in-chief, Amriel not only produced her own articles, but organised a team of over a dozen contributors to report on topics that included anime, comics/manga, gaming, literature and film, cosplay, nerd culture, and “quirky events”. Monthly issues were made available online in print format using the design and distribution platform *issuu* in 2014 and 2015, and then articles continued to be posted online as a Wordpress blog into 2017. “We covered mainly nerdy events in Edmonton, she said, “so, a lot of video games, anime, cosplay, tabletop events, things like that.” It was because of the magazine that she was introduced to cosplay, another way of making for Amriel discussed later in this section under *Making Cosplay*. The magazine required a great deal of effort to maintain and, as Amriel’s fan interests developed, it was eventually replaced with other projects and other ways for her to engage. Like Razael’s Facebook page, the magazine website was a channel to share information relevant to fans. However, the articles were not simply re-posted content from official sources with a few sentences of commentary; they were tailored to the local context, reporting on specific events, promoting local businesses, and often providing thoughtful, carefully crafted opinion pieces on highly specific topics. Amriel’s making extends passed “free publicity” and into what Jenkins (2006b) describes as “grassroots intermediaries” that “increase the diversity of media culture” (p. 151). For Jenkins, writing 15 years ago, these grassroots intermediaries were

¹³ Reference to the website has not been included, as it would compromise Amriel’s right to anonymity as an interview participant.

bloggers. Today, fans like Amriel may be perceived as the next generation, now fully *onlife*, of intermediaries that enable navigation between knowledge cultures emerging in an increasingly digitally mediated world. Amriel's online magazine is a complex digital/textual production, or produsage, that involves the creation, acquisition, organisation, preservation, and understanding of information; these are the constitutive behaviours in Price's (2017) model of fan information behaviour for the creation of fan works (p. 319). Since the magazine adheres to copyright, Amriel's example is to be considered an "encyclopaedic" fan text according to Price's model. So, too, would Razael's less involved Facebook page. Encyclopaedic works are fact-based, affirmational fan productions, whereas "transformative" works are interpretive and transformational (such as fanfic and fanart) (p. 292). However, by treating fandom from the contextual lens of local Canadians and offering critical analysis, Amriel's production both documents facts *and* interprets information for its readers. Based on this finding, the two types of fan works are not opposed, but instead overlap.

Kerra had spent years honing her craft in web design, exclusively in the service of her fan interests. As a teenager in the 2000's, she taught herself the ins and outs of building fan websites.

It started with a message board I'd been a member of. That, and they had been looking for a team for their website, so they brought me aboard and it just slowly started from there. I learned to code, I learned to edit, I learned to moderate, I learned to whatever, and then I took over full time after a certain number of years...

At the time of our interview, she hosted and managed multiple websites that served as promotional platforms for her favourite television shows and actors, covering timely content for the series *Yellowstone*, for actor Madelaine Petsch who played Cheryl Blossom in *Riverdale*, and for Sophie Turner who played Sansa Stark in *Game of Thrones*, among others. Table 4.2.6 provides examples of the information behaviours she described in her making practice.

Table 4.2.6. Information behaviour associated with making a fan website (making websites).

Examples	Information behaviour	Theories and Concepts
Making a fan website (Kerra)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying resources and assets representing the fan object that can be aggregated and shared with a community • Using web design and developer skills in the service of the fan object • Using social media to as a promotional platform in the service of the fan object • Reporting news and timely information to the community • Filtering interactions between fans and actors/celebrities/creators that represent the fan object 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information creation (Gorichanaz, 2019; Huvila, et al., 2020) • Grassroots intermediaries (Jenkins, 2006b) • Produsage (Price, 2017) • Casual leisure (Stebbins, 2007/2015)

Just as with Razael and Amriel’s ways of making, Kerra’s websites were more information resources than sites of fan interaction, aggregating news about upcoming events, air dates, previews, exclusive photos provided with permission, official social media channels and affiliated fan-based social media. Over the years, she had developed a portfolio of work, which she approached networks and publicists with as a volunteer service for anything that “catches her eye”. Kerra’s approach required planning, she explained. “You see if you can get them on social media or if you can catch them on a live chat or whatever. Generally, if it’s a show, I catch them before the show has even premiered.” She monitored production websites and social media for the publication of scripts, snippets, cast lists, and other information about a new show. “Usually, I kind of skim through them and see if there is anything I think that would be really worthwhile to follow or to promote.” Kerra said her connections and previous work mean that people were usually eager to work with her, knowing that she could be trusted with promotional content. “I’ve never had a bad experience with a PR team, I’ve been very fortunate in the work that I’ve done. I put up my boundaries very early and said these are the things that I will do, these are the things I will not be covering.”

Even though Kerra derived a great deal of satisfaction and pride from her work, making these fan sites was very labour-intensive. She explained that her spare time in the evenings was

often devoted to covering news, live-tweeting new episodes as they aired, and updating content. Kerra was also careful to point out that she was not paid for this work, even though it was work experience she hoped to one day apply to professional employment in the industry.

That's the very tricky thing about the kind of work I do, because it is volunteer, and I am using copyrighted property. It is a very grey line. So I don't work for them officially, I work unofficially. I'm acknowledged, but they cannot pay me, so they give me things in other ways. They send me merchandise or branded things, or they invite me to parties or to events or whatever at the conventions. I get to often meet these people. I get to hang out with them for the day, I get to meet their teams.

She perceived her fan labour as a service to hard-working actors and creators, providing information that fans wanted while serving as a buffer against unwelcome invasions of privacy and toxic behaviour. She served as a “professional voice that’s not going to be...haunting them down the line with a creepy fan or a creepy fandom.” In this way, she was trusted to curate the information that was shared and helped “control the narrative” for avid fans. This labour aligns with Jenkins (2006b) concept of “grassroots intermediaries” (p. 251). Kerra’s fan sites were not just fan resources that she has collected independently, but collaborations with the corporate and institutional interests behind actors and creators. She was, as Jenkins (2006b) describes, a “facilitator”, not a “jammer” of the signal flow (p. 251). Kerra’s making, like Amriel’s, is once more an example of fan production that is affirmational, celebratory, *and* interpretive, filling in the theoretical space between “encyclopaedic” and “transformative” fan works as categories of semiotic fan production (Price, 2017).

Both Amriel and Kerra were only able to produce websites at the level and quality that they did by being highly skilled. Both have had years of experience with content creation in semi-professional contexts. They were able to perform many tasks necessary for a website to succeed over time: aggregating and curating content online, identifying, and engaging information sources, securing legal permissions, writing and publishing original reporting as content. Maintaining relationships with partners and collaborators and managing social media

and online resources are also necessary, to varying degrees, to publish their websites and effectively disseminate information. The acquisition and expression of special skills, knowledge and experience is a key element of serious leisure (Stebbins, 2007/2015, p. 5). This indicates that making websites in the ways that Amriel and Kerra have constitutes serious leisure (e.g., Hartel, et al., 2016; Margree, et al., 2014; Stebbins, 2007/2015). In contrast, Razael’s activity on Facebook, which only required practise using Facebook and knowledge of the fandom, falls under the far less well-understood umbrella of “casual leisure” (Stebbins, 2007/2015, p. 5; p. 37). This is significant because it marks a gap in research. Few studies have explored information behaviours related to casual leisure, such as watching television (e.g., Elsweler, Mandl, & Kirkegaard Lunn, 2014). I discuss the study’s results in the context of serious and casual leisure later in this section under *Making Cosplay*, where additional examples of hobbyist making activities problematise these distinctions.

A fourth example of making that diverges from those of Razael, Amriel, and Kerra is the way that Eriner created a virtual tabletop for a *Dungeons and Dragons (D&D)* campaign that he ran with her friends. Table 4.2.7 illustrates the information behaviours that emerged from this unique form of making websites, or what I refer to as a digital content space.

Table 4.2.7. Information behaviour associated with making and hosting a virtual tabletop game (making websites).

Examples	Information behaviour	Theories and Concepts
Making and hosting a virtual tabletop game (Eriner)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning how to use the tool set for creating a virtual tabletop game using Roll20 • Identifying resources and assets needed to facilitate the game/campaign • Creating resources (maps, descriptions, etc) to facilitate the game • Rendering maps and other resources digitally using Roll20 	Information-seeking behaviours of <i>D&D</i> players (Gibson, 2020)

“Roll20 is kind of our solution to not physically being present,” he said, referring to the web-based platform roll20.net. Since one of his friends moved cities, the only way for them to play *D&D* was online. Roll20 is designed for users with this need, offering a set of tools to host games using a web browser by mimicking the physical tabletop surface and printed character

sheets of pen and paper role-playing games. “The software itself is basically just a series of visual layers. You know, you've got a map layer, a token layer, a GM [game master] layer, all kind of sitting there.” In-person, the game master (GM), maps out locations and encounters in physical space, often with the aid of a printed grid that players can use as a game board. Plastic miniatures or tokens are used to symbolise characters, creatures, and objects. Roll20 allows GMs like Eriner to do this work digitally by designing and preparing a virtual tabletop accessible online to players. “It gives us a way to physically manipulate maps and objects and keep track of those character sheet kind of characteristics. So, no one has to maintain their own individual PDF [document], that information is all housed inside Roll20, and you can update it there.”

Before live play, Eriner still had a challenging task to set up the game. In *D&D*, it is the role of the GM to move the narrative forward, guiding players through a gauntlet of incidents that will test the characters they are playing. The GM’s role as facilitator requires reference materials (e.g., rulebooks, published campaigns modules, websites with helpful resources and examples, and personal notes) they have either painstakingly created or acquired and researched beforehand. Using her source material—a mix of original ideas and previously published content that she has adapted for her group—he prepared the virtual tabletop by creating the maps and tokens needed using the available layers. As a companion to their live play, Eriner also created a Discord channel to support voice and text chat. Eriner was deeply invested in creating a world and challenges that would be memorable for his friends, using whatever tools he had at hand.

A recent study of the information behaviours of *D&D* players indicates that the place most players, including GMs, go to first for information is “online” (Gibson, 2020). The next most common information resources are the physical rulebooks and GMs themselves. As subject matter experts, GMs must have access to information quickly and easily. This need is especially apparent when we consider the knowledge translation the GM takes on in various forms, including: creating engaging plots, settings, and encounters, weaving individual character backgrounds and storylines into an overarching narrative, interpreting rules and mediating challenges. As a participant in Gibson’s (2020) study noted, “Digital is usually the easiest form to allow me quick access anywhere but also for ease of sharing needed information with those [I] am playing with...” (p. 64). Eriner’s labour in making a virtual tabletop with Roll20, rather than

increasing effort, reduced it by automating some of his GM-related knowledge translation tasks through digital affordances:

They [Roll20] have this thing they call a "compendium" which has a lot of the information that would be in source books. So you can just take, "oh! I learned a new spell!" ...you look it up, you drag it over, it pre-populates the flavour text box... So when you click on that, and everyone's like "what are you doing?" You click on it, it populates that whole two-paragraph thing, being like: "If there's a creature within range that you can see, da-da-da da-da..." That whole thing. So you don't have to type it out. It'll even send over the calculation formulas, so that when you click on it, it knows that your roll a 1d8 and add your charisma modifier, or whatever that happens to be.

By automating the procedural elements of running a campaign, Eriner had more time to focus on world-building and storytelling. Research on the affordances offered by Roll20 suggests that the platform leads to a more streamlined game experience by eliminating unnecessary communication (Vossen, 2017). Eriner's account supports this premise and indicates that the use of an online platform like Roll20, which successfully integrates procedural elements of play, can improve the overall gaming experience. Few studies have explored the information behaviours of *D&D* players and GMs specifically (e.g., Gibson, 2020, Harviainen, 2012, Stobbs & Oak, 2018, Wylie Atmore, 2016). When so much of everyday experience is mediated within the online space, greater specificity is required for what we consider online resources, or even if that is still a relevant category in onlife experience. As games are increasingly hosted virtually, the need to better understand how the digital space transforms how GMs and their players access and use information becomes more significant. Section 4.2.2 explores players as media fans, and playing in general as fan practice, in greater detail.

The variety of examples of making websites and digital content spaces emerging from interviews suggests that it is a broad theme. Based on interview data, this activity falls into three broad categories: everyday social media related content generation, casual social media content generation that is fandom specific, and more involved content generation and curation. The four

examples discussed so far from Razael, Amriel, Kerra, and Eriner fall under the last category, demonstrating involved and most labour-intensive activity. Their practice moves beyond casual posting and information sharing on social media and content websites, or personally curated content spaces, and into the hobbyist realm. The productions of these participants, as involved content generation and curation, has a significant and widespread impact on the engagement of other fans that make up their audiences. Before moving on, I briefly examine examples of less intensive forms of making that emerged from interviews and represent the other two categories of activity.

Everyday social media related content generation included practices that are non-specific to fandom. Social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and Reddit, are examples of platforms that afford users their own spaces to generate and share digital content. In the early days of the internet, this form of content creation would have demanded significant knowledge and labour from a user. Today, this activity only requires access to a social media site account that is used in daily life to access, share, and post information; this activity, at least among interview participants, was too routine and mundane to be considered labour-intensive. All participants were involved in this kind of low threshold making. Interviews indicate that there are at least two sub-categories: The first are social content spaces that answer individuals' needs *beyond fandom*. For instance, Agnephi used his Intstagram both for sharing his professional artwork and for commiserating with other fan collectors (Agnephi's collecting practices are discussed in more detail in Section 4.2.3). Asteraoth and Codec used Twitter and Facebook to share posts with friends about fannish and geeky things, but they also shared news that affected them and other aspects of their work and home lives that were separate from their fan interests. The second sub-category was for content spaces that are used primarily as a communication channel or as a gateway to access and sift information within a network. For example, Esme created a Twitter account initially to communicate with other wrestling fans, and then it also became a source of information and news about wrestling.

Casual social media content generation that is fandom specific, where the content space is designed for casually posting and sharing content related to a fan interest and to participate within a fan community. Like everyday social media content generation, the creation of these websites is more about playful participation than meticulous making. For example, Malakh used

her Tumblr page to post about *Sherlock*. Posts included original content in the form of Malakh's written thoughts or reactions, but she could also re-post content such as GIFs or memes, and link to other websites or platforms with related content, such as recommended fanfic. These are essentially productive information behaviours for fans and can be perceived as ways of making that are fundamentally part of the onlife experience. They do not, however, constitute the intensive ways of making within the hobbyist context that we have discussed so far in relation to fic, GIFs, fanvids, and fanart, and so were not highlighted as forms of hobbyist making. It is clear through these examples, however, that onlife experience includes many forms of digital production, some that are more labour-intensive while others constitute the "informal, routine, mundane activities of daily life" (Rothbauer, 2004, p. 14; see Chapter 2, Section 2.6 for details).

Making cosplay: "I made this, and I'm now here." Cosplay, which involves dressing in costume as a character from media, emerged as an activity practiced by participants in seven cases (Amriel, Empyrean, Jael, Kerra, Rhamiel, Tabrith, Uilleand). Interviews suggest there are two distinct elements to the practice of cosplay: *making* the costume and *playing a role* in costume. The play/performance element, which was present in all seven participants' experiences, is discussed in greater detail in Section 4.2.2. Participants who described the making of costumes for cosplay as part of their practice (Amriel, Rhamiel, and Tabrith) are the focus of the current section.

Cosplay as a way of making among participants runs a spectrum from light-hearted pastime to semi-professional undertaking. Rhamiel and Tabrith engaged with their fandoms through costume design as a fun activity. Their commitment to the making of costumes also varied, based on their devotion to a particular character or story, interest in developing their skills in costuming, sewing, and prop construction, and participation within their respective friend groups. Amriel's making, on the other hand, takes a more focused, career-based turn. She has developed a public persona that she deploys online using a promotional website, Twitch channel, and social media, and in-person at a convention booth, to promote her cosplay designs. All four participants engage with information in different ways through their practice of cosplay. The following examples look at participants' motivations, activities, and information behaviours specifically through the lens of making, as it relates to the design and construction of costumes and props.

Table 4.2.8. Information behaviour associated with making cosplay.

Examples	Information behaviour	Theories and Concepts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Designing and creating costumes for cosplay (i.e., costuming) (Amriel, Rhamiel, and Tabrith) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Imagining a particular material interpretation of a character from a storyworld Designing a costume based on a particular interpretation Applying learned costuming skills for the making of a costume Displaying or modelling a costume (see Section 4.2.2 “Playing”) Performing cosplay / role-playing with others (see Section 4.2.2, “Playing”) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Serious leisure perspective (Stebbins, 2007/2015) Naturalistic information acquisition and information behaviour patterns (Lee, Ocepek, & Makri, 2022)

Amriel was already involved creatively and socially in fan cultures within a professional context as editor of an online magazine. This work was fuelled by her personal interests in gaming, literature, and anime. She obtained a ticket to cover the Edmonton Expo, the local annual comics fan convention, and decided to attend in costume, “just for fun” (her words). That one experience ignited a new passion for cosplaying, which has since transformed into a professional aspiration. “I went,” she said, “and I didn’t stop. I haven’t stopped since.” Amriel now demonstrated her own cosplay designs and props on her website and at conventions, promoted her cosplayer persona through the sale of photo prints, judged cosplay competitions, and incorporated her cosplay into a YouTube channel and Twitch channel. This labour-intensive activity falls under Stebbins’ (2007/2015) definition of serious leisure as career centred (p. 5). Hobbyist makers represent a specific category of serious leisure seekers explored under the serious leisure perspective that remains understudied (Stebbins, 2007/2015, pp. 29-30). Stebbins’ (2007/2015) review of research examines how “dabblers” can move from casual leisure to the early stages of serious leisure (p. 30). Amriel’s story marks a similar trajectory from casual interest to serious undertaking. Her story also contributes an example of a hobbyist maker whose activities operate across virtual and physical spheres of experience. This is particularly useful for serious leisure research since the domain lacks scholarship that examines leisure and hobbyist making specifically in onlife experience.

Amriel's perspective also challenges definitions of serious leisure. As mentioned, cosplay is a hybrid practice that combines making and playing. For the most avid cosplayers, it includes the development of skills associated with designing and making costumes that reflect a figure from a storyworld and performing that figure in front of an audience. Amriel admitted that, for some, performing in-character is a defining part of cosplaying. She characterised her own cosplay activity as more creative than performative:

This is also another one of those things where people are defining cosplay in different ways. There are people who don't think you're cosplaying unless you're performing as the character. And to be fair, I often don't. I don't perform as the character. I'm not a good actor. So, it's less of a performative aspect, it's more of a creative, "I made this, and I'm now here" kind of thing. ...And I also do a lot of mash-ups. So, I take liberties with a lot of characters. Post-apocalyptic, or a bunny version, or just completely random.

One of Amriel's more subversive creations takes the male character of Khal Drogo (*Game of Thrones*) and portrays him as female. Gender-bending cosplay is a common practice among cosplayers that shifts the "identified gender and/or biological sex of a fictional character to match the gender identity and/or biological sex of the player" (Turk, 2019, p. ii). Gender-bending can offer an alternative reading of characters by emphasizing and challenging prescribed gender roles through an embodied performance. A gender-bending Khal Drogo does this rather effectively by subverting fans' expectations for the hyper-masculine character. Most of Amriel's designs, however, tend to be normative rather than subversive, paying homage to the women portrayed in her favourite narratives and popularly recognised in fandom, such as Daenerys and Melisandre from *Game of Thrones*, Harley Quinn (*DC/Batman*), Rogue (*Marvel/X-Men*), and Lara Croft (*Tomb Raider*). Each costume is a creative project. For Amriel, once a costume was completed, she could take photos or hold a photo shoot, and then share photos online and at conventions under her cosplayer persona. But the creative project associated with that specific character representation was completed. She was ready to move on to the next character or representation from her fandoms. The serious leisure perspective categorises such activity as "project-based leisure", which is distinct from serious leisure and casual leisure because it is an

occasional short-term and moderately complicated creative undertaking (Stebbins, 2007/2015, p. 43). However, Amriel's example demonstrates a creative and generative engagement with fandom that connects each of her individual costuming projects that is, as previously noted, career centred. Therefore, her practice is both project-based and serious, illustrating that Stebbins' (2007/2015) categories are not mutually exclusive. Additionally, the playful aspect of cosplay that encourages normative and transgressive re-interpretations and "mash-ups" of media representations is among the characteristics of casual leisure (Stebbins, 2007/2015, pp. 38-39). This non-serious activity is described as dabbling and is hedonic, meaning that its purpose is to produce enjoyment: "the fun component is considerably more prominent in casual leisure than in its serious counterpart" (Stebbins, 2007/2015, p. 40). Project-based leisure is a category Stebbins (2007/2015) considers emergent in the study of contemporary leisure, and he notes that there may be other forms of leisure that have not yet been observed in literature. Amriel's example points to an emergent form of leisure that is distinct from serious, casual, and project-based leisure yet shares the characteristics of all three.

Rhamiel demonstrated a more casual approach to making costumes for cosplay and was quick to explain that she did it "purely for fun" (her words). She did not cosplay competitively. "Well... I have, one time. And it was terrifying. (laugh)" For her, cosplay functioned as an artistic outlet, another place where she could practise the DIY problem-solving she once applied to anime fanvids (see Section 4.2.1, *Making GIFs and fanvids*).

My friends and I always joke that we make "trash cosplay" ... I made a sword out of cereal boxes, but you would never be able to know it was cereal boxes. We're always joking, if you flip it inside-out you could see all the snacks I was eating.

Unlike Amriel, Rhamiel's cosplay designs did not strive for professionalism or seek to present a unique narrative take. Instead, she perceived it as a fun way to socialise with her friends and to learn more about her fandoms. "I don't wanna be in the spotlight. It's more of just something like I want to meet other people who are just as excited about the characters." This is very similar to Tabrith's experience, who designed and made a costume each year to cosplay with her friends at fan conventions. This indicates that the participatory and collaborative aspects

of cosplay are equally essential for the making and playing elements of the practice. Stebbins (2007/2015) situates fan-based participatory practices along a spectrum of structural complexity, describing individual fans as “buffs” (i.e., as in the phrase “*Star Trek* buffs”) and groups of fans as “activity-based tribes” (pp. 63-64). Tribes are groups that organise around the pursuit of particular kinds of casual and serious leisure. Rhaniel’s group of friends and their fun, makeshift approaches to making cosplay costumes, represent a tribe. More broadly, the other fans that Rhaniel, Amriel, and Tabrith encounter and engage with when they attend conventions while cosplaying and share their costumes digitally through photos, can also be considered extensions of an activity-based tribe. The question remains whether their cosplaying represents casual, serious, or project-based leisure. For participation to be considered serious it must qualify as “civil labour”, that is, a contribution to the community (p. 64). Paradoxically, the community contributions of cosplaying become more apparent when we examine the play/performance aspect of the practice, rather than the hobbyist making aspect of it. As noted in the last paragraph, play is associated with casual, not serious, leisure. It is the play/performance of cosplay that generates a cultural output that is consumable by other people in the group, tribe, or fandom, through the action of displaying costumes live at conventions or online using social platforms that make digital cosplay possible (e.g., Amriel’s use of Twitch and YouTube, sharing photos and videos of cosplay costumes with friends and other fans in the online space; cf. Booth, 2015, pp. 150-172). This cultural output is also informational, in that it represents information creation and dissemination within the community of fans that share an interest in cosplay representations and costume and prop design (Gorichanaz, 2019; Huvila, et al., 2020). This aspect of cosplay is discussed further in Section 4.2.2. Again, the accounts of Amriel, Rhaniel, and Tabrith position their hobbyist activities as a unique hybrid form of leisure. Their experiences offer the basis for a potential fourth category to add to Stebbins (2007/2015) serious leisure perspective, that of *fan-based leisure*.

The different examples of cosplay making also provide evidence of information behaviours grounded in the everyday experience of fandom. Amriel described this experience in a way that represents the information encounters of the other participants as well:

Cosplay itself is very much information gathering as well. Once you start doing it and take it up as a hobby, you view your fandoms and new

potential fandoms with a bit more of a discerning eye. So, I'll watch the new *Game of Thrones* season, I'll say, "hey the Sand Snakes look really cool. Those costumes also look really cool, what would I need to make that? And where would I go to find that?" ...As a cosplayer you're almost always on the lookout for the next project, and you do it without thinking all of the time and I guess it's a constant need for you to create something new. ...Each new project will lead onto a different project and you're constantly looking to improve materials and improve tactics and all of that to pay homage to the character you're a fan of, usually.

The process that Amriel described illustrates how information is encountered through the experience of fandom. The "discerning eye" and receptive mind of the cosplayer/fan is demonstrative of monitoring and serendipitous information encountering that are key theoretical concepts in IB (Agarwal, 2015; Erdelez, 1995; Ross, 1999; Savolainen, 1995; see Section 2.2.1 for details). This observation can also be expanded to other hobbyist examples that we have seen so far. In the context of writing fanfiction which we explored earlier in this section, Isthi held a question in her mind whenever she read or watched something, "I wonder what the fic is for this?" This is akin to Amriel's "discerning eye" and demonstrates how media engagement fuels information gathering and information creation. And, as Amriel pointed out, new projects occur to her in a semi-conscious way, "without thinking all of the time", and through a driving urge to create. This description is also characteristic of the patterns Lee, Ocepek, and Makri (2022) observed in arts-and-crafts hobbyists' browsing behaviours; the fan maker's engagement with narrative content can also be described in terms of "no goal browsing" and "semi-defined browsing" (p. 602), which can lead to more clearly defined information searching and acquisition once an idea takes hold. After Amriel had a new project idea (as for example, Ellaria Sand of the Sand Snakes in *Game of Thrones*), she could then search in earnest for resources to help plan: more images and descriptions of the character, other cosplayer interpretations of the character, materials, props, and so on. That research, in turn, would drive the design and making of the costume. Amriel's interpretation of a character from fandom would then be shared with other fans on YouTube, Patreon, and other social media platforms, and in the physical costume she modelled and photos she sold at conventions. This process illustrates a pattern of naturalistic

information acquisition shaped by complexly interconnected interactions with information (and media content) that “follow, feed, and facilitate each other” (Lee, Ocepek, & Makri, 2022, p. 595). Finally, this pattern is also an example of everyday information behaviour in the way that participants like Amriel and Isthi encounter information that inspires them through their mundane media engagements. It is only by watching, reading, playing, and participating—the activities they pursue every day as a basic and essential part of their fan-based leisure—that they generate new information through *making*.

To conclude this section on hobbyist making practices that includes the making of fic, GIFs, vids, art, websites, and cosplay costumes we return to the notion of the fan as producer and participant first introduced in Chapter 1, Section 1.4. Fans that are makers and “twist” the source material to their own purposes have been described as “producers” (Bruns, 2008; Jones, 2011; Price & Robinson, 2016). This term foregrounds the fan’s interaction with media technologies required as a means of production by invoking their role as “user”. It also echoes Jenkins’ (2006b) argument that the production and consumption practices of fans are inseparably merged (p. 41), where the access and use of content (consumption) and creative production are part of the same process. *obsession_inc* (2009, para. 4) contends that all fans are “celebrational”, meaning that there is “joy and effort and creativity” in their practices celebrating fan objects, whether they do so in affirmational or transformational ways. Celebrational making takes many forms: fanfiction (Bacon-Smith, 1992; Hellekson & Busse, 2006; Pugh, 2005), fan films (Gwenllian Jones, 2002; Jenkins, 2006a; 2006b), music videos (Rasmussen Pennington, 2016), wikis, blogs, memes, GIFs, fanart (Booth, 2015; Jenkins, 2006b) and encyclopaedic arrangements of online information repositories (Bullard, 2016a; Gursoy, 2015; Hart et al., 1999; Hill & Pecoskie, 2017; Price & Robinson, 2021). The specific ways of making illustrated by the participants in this study, moreover, demonstrate how their experiences are situated in everyday onlife: the movement between digitally mediated experience and the physical/material world occurs seamlessly and effortlessly because that movement is a mundane exercise. The labour of fans comes not from the shift between layers of technological mediation, but from the affective experience of storyworlds and fandoms that motivates a desire to create.

4.2.2. *Playing*

Yet in many other contexts, such ongoing play communities tend to be viewed as outside the norm. This is especially true of communities whose play cultures are deeply tied to imagination, fantasy, and the creation of a fictional identity, such as “Trekkies,” who engage in role-play around the television series Star Trek (Jenkins 1992). Like participants in historical reenactments (Horwitz 1998, Miller 1998), liveaction and tabletop role-playing games (Fine 1983), and the Burning Man festival (Gilmore and Van Proyen 2005), these play communities devote a high level of effort and creativity to their play culture, often to the bewilderment of the population at large...

(Pearce & Artemesia, 2009, p. 3)

While not all participants are “makers”, all produce *something* through their engagement. Some activities that result in a limited form of production, such as commenting on a Tumblr post, clicking *kudos* after reading a fic posted in an archive, or looking up information about a character, actor, or series, are not purposefully creative. Other activities are collaborative and participatory rather than merely creative, like cosplaying at a fan convention, participating in fic wars or “bangs”, beta reading fanfic, joining clubs or societies for fans, playing Dungeons & Dragons, livestreaming a video gaming session on Twitch, or social media-based role-play such as Kerra and her #FakeWesteros friends engaged in on Twitter. The purpose of these activities is not to *make*, but to *play*.

Play is the second context of experience identified in interviews. In its broadest sense, play is a way of doing according to abstract boundaries that are distinct from other domains of activity in a person’s everyday life. Game theorists refer to that abstract bounded space as a *magic circle*: the playground in which exclusive rules and limits of time and space apply (Huizinga, 1949). As players, we agree to exist within the magic circle, to follow the rules and limits—or sometimes to challenge and push them (Caillois, 1961). The moment we step out of the magic circle, the moment we no longer acknowledge the boundaries of that space, we cease being players. But those boundaries can be vast, depending on the context, and play can take many forms. As

players, what do fans play? The integration of ICTs and digital technologies in everyday life influences the many ways that fans play. The following sections explore participants' ways of playing and information behaviours related to play in onlife.

Cosplaying and play/performance: “We are all Diana then.” As mentioned in the previous section, cosplay involving dressing in costume as a character from media was an activity practiced by participants in seven cases (Amriel, Empyrean, Jael, Kerra, Rhamiel, Tabrith, Uilleand). As Amriel noted, aside from the creative aspect of costuming, cosplay is understood as performing-in-character. Therefore, *cosplaying* is *playing a role* in costume, as opposed to the *making* of cosplay designs, costumes, and props. As the play/performance element of cosplay practice, cosplaying is the focus of the current section. As a way of playing, cosplaying was described by participants primarily as a social activity. In most instances, cosplay was discussed in the context of attendance at fan conventions, and as a fun way to engage with the culture of conventions (also known as cons) or other live fan events. Four participants described cosplaying as characters from fandom as an activity they performed with friends (Empyrean, Kerra, Rhamiel, Tabrith). Cosplaying can also be a solitary activity. As discussed in the previous section, *Making Cosplay* (Section 4.2.1), Amriel promoted her cosplayer persona at conventions and commiserated with other fans in-person and via social media, but she felt most engaged with the creative aspect of cosplay that she undertook on her own rather than the performative aspect. Similarly, Jael indicated that he had cosplayed in the past and would like to do it again because he enjoyed prop making. Cosplaying represented several unique information behaviours, including finding the right character to cosplay at a particular event or with a particular group of friends, reading about and researching the character, taking photos in costume, and sharing the experience of cosplaying online. Table 4.2.9 lists examples that explore the uniquely onlife ways of playing of the seven participants that identified as cosplayers, and the IB that emerged from this context.

Table 4.2.9. Information behaviour associated with cosplaying.

Examples	Information behaviour	Theories and Concepts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cosplaying (playing a role in costume) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussing characters to cosplay with friends • Selecting a character or cosplay costume • Researching the character to increase engagement • Attending a fan convention or live event • Taking photos and participating in photo opportunities • Posting to social media • Competing in cosplay competitions • Wearing popular fashions that are representative of fandom (i.e., closet cosplay) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fun-life contexts (Ocepek, et al., 2020) • Presentation of the self (Goffman, 1959) • Closet cosplay (Smith, Stannar, & Kuttruff, 2020)

Amriel, whose aspirations motivated the creation of an entire persona, explained what ultimately drives her cosplaying: “...It starts because you’re a fan. You’re an invested fan. I don’t like choosing my costumes willy-nilly.” In this respect, Rhamiel and Amriel’s perspectives on cosplaying, which were compared in Section 4.2.1, are in agreement. Rhamiel described an instance when she and her friends all went to a con together dressed as Wonder Woman. “Because, I guess, we are all Diana then.” She explained that when her friends pitched the idea of a Wonder Woman cosplay group, she did not know very much about the character or the storyworld but was more than willing to learn.

They know way more than I do about DC [storyworld/narrative universe that includes Wonder Woman], they like *bleed* it. They are like, “you have to read this!” And I end up reading more because we’re going to cosplay something... I don’t want to cosplay something if I don’t know about it... If I don’t feel anything for the character, then it’s not fun. For me, it isn’t.

As a concept, “fun” signals a hedonic response to the experience of an object or activity, such as feelings of pleasure and enjoyment (Stebbins, 2007/2015, p. 40). Some objects and activities are defined by the perceived experience of fun, such as leisure activities, games, and entertainments. For Rhamiel, the experience of learning about a character was fun, and a part of what makes cosplay worthwhile. She needed to *know* the character if she intended to inhabit and

embody them. Amriel's approach to cosplaying was less about embodying the character exactly as they are portrayed in media and more about showcasing a particular interpretation of that character through a unique costume design. However, she follows the same basic constraint as Rhamiel around acquiring knowledge about the character, and by extension, the storyworld within which they exist. The selection of a character to cosplay is not done "willy-nilly"; it requires research and fanish dedication to the source material to be both fun (i.e., hedonic) and worthwhile. When a fun activity becomes worthwhile, it ceases to be merely hedonic; it now becomes emotionally fulfilling and *eudaimonic* (Kari & Hartel, 2007; Taylor, 2021). Eudaimonia is a higher-level quality of fulfillment and well-being through practice that is sustained, rather than hedonia which is seeking after fleeting pleasure and instant gratification (Taylor, 2021). These are concepts that are critical to the emerging area of IB research known as fun-life contexts (Ocepek, et al., 2020; see also Section 2.2.2 for details). As such, the participants' examples, in the context of cosplaying and of their fan practices more generally, make a valuable contribution to this emerging research domain by demonstrating how fun contexts in everyday life can be invested with eudaimonic characteristics. Notions of embodiment and inhabiting the character in cosplaying are also evocative of de Certeau's (1984) description of reading as "inhabiting the text" (p. xxi; see also Section 2.4 for details). Regardless of whether the cosplayer is using their knowledge of the character to attempt an accurate portrayal (like Rhamiel) or to subvert expectations and offer a new interpretation of the character (like Amriel), they are taking power for themselves by embodying the representation. It is indicative not only of a set of information behaviours related to the play/performance of cosplay, but also of a tactic (in the de Certeauvian sense) for asserting their fan identities through the enactment of media representations. This is a valuable observation that offers insight into the interconnection between ways of doing and ways of being. Section 4.3 explores the latter through participant experiences by focusing on the construction of fan identity.

Cosplaying a character from fandom brings with it the risk of social stigma when the cosplayer is perceived to lack knowledge about the character. This is also a motivating factor for the research process that Rhamiel and Amriel described, and which provokes a deeper engagement with storyworlds and fandom. Amriel explained the risk of stigmatisation from her personal experience:

Like I said, I don't usually cosplay characters I don't know very well. I've done it a couple of times, I don't like it because I tend to wear them to conventions and people who are also fans of that character talk about it, and I don't want to be that person who cosplayed that character and don't know shit about that character. ...I don't like to exclude anyone from cosplay, but for me that's not what it's about. It's about, you know, respecting and honouring the characters that you love so much...

Amriel's perspective suggests that the risk of stigma in cosplaying is related to politics of exclusion. Gatekeeping, the behaviour of fans and fan communities that imposes exclusivity and polices membership within a given fandom, and more toxic behaviours, are unfortunately characteristic of media fandoms (Proctor & Kies, 2018). Fans are subject to judgment by their peers, and cosplaying is a practice where such judgments are especially apparent. Rhamiel also provided an example of how another cosplayer was objectified and marginalised on social media because they did not physically resemble the character they were portraying in photos. She also explained that the response to the group cosplay of Wonder Woman with her friends was not all positive:

There were a lot of people who were like, it's not accurate because... my friends happen to be Asian women as well. It's not accurate because she [Wonder Woman] is not Asian. I'm like, "She's from Themyscira." Like, it's not a thing, like, I don't. I want to know who actually looks like an Amazon, because! So, it's things like that. ...I just delete and block people. I don't even engage.

Cosplaying is more visible than other fan practices because of its performativity and is therefore subject to greater scrutiny within the fan communities that practice it. Even when portrayed by avid and knowledgeable fans asserting themselves through the performative practice, cosplayers' authenticity may be questioned and draw negative, misogynist, prejudiced, and racist reactions. As Rhamiel demonstrates, negative attention is a barrier to fandom that can result in breaking engagement. It is perhaps for this reason that other participants like Asteraoth and Razael (discussed later in this section) are more circumspect and find more mainstream ways

to perform their fandoms through fashion. In the previous example, Rhamiel is referring to “not engaging” with toxic fans in the social media space, where she can delete comments and block or unfollow users. But, taken to its furthest conclusion, stigmatisation from toxic fans can result in losing the desire to practice of cosplay entirely, and even ceasing to identify as a fan. When doing cosplay and being a fan ceases to be fulfilling and fun, Rhamiel’s example suggests, it leads to the end of fan identity.

From an IB perspective, disengaging represents information avoidance, a type of affective behaviour that has been studied in non-fan contexts (Bawden & Robinson, 2009; Guo, et al., 2020; Link, 2021; Momson & Ohndorf, 2022; Soroya, et al., 2021; Willson & Given, 2020). Previous research has focused primarily on avoidance as an outcome of fatigue and anxiety when faced with too much information (i.e., information overload), or important yet potentially frightening information (e.g., health information related to the COVID-19 health crisis, Soroya, et al., 2021). Guo, et al. (2020) use the concept of “social overload” in their study of information avoidance on social media sites, which is relevant in the onlife context. They define social overload as the perception of crowding in an online space, where “users feel that there are too many social demands”, such as the investment of time and attention to maintain relationships (p. 3). Rhamiel’s affective response to toxic behaviours can be understood as a distinct type of social overload related to the demands of fandom and confronting exclusionary attitudes. Willson & Given (2020) link the affective experience of stress with information avoidance, and the experience of frustration with discontinuing, in the professional context. Similarly, Rhamiel’s example demonstrates how negative affect, particularly frustration and anxiety experienced in response to toxic behaviours, can result in a discontinuation of fandom when a fan no longer feels like they can engage with the fan community and lose interest in related media storyworlds. Bawden & Robinson (2009) introduce what they call pathologies of information to describe information avoidance and discontinuation (or “withdrawal”, p. 185) as “pathologies of information”. Rhamiel’s response to toxicity encountered through the practice of cosplaying is a reflection of her anxiety; but rather than a pathology, disengaging with specific comments or individuals on social media is a preventative tactic to maintain her personal space and her identity as a fan. It is only when such tactics fail that full discontinuation and withdrawal from fandom would occur. Instead, it is the underlying causes of toxic behaviour, which are

particularly evident in social media and the online environments afforded by ICTs (e.g., Kilvington, 2021; Massanari, 2017), that should be regarded as pathological. Rhamiel's and Amriel's concerns represent an important area for future researchers to explore information avoidance in circumstances and contexts that are missing in prior scholarship. Toxicity in fandom, including Rhamiel's examples of marginalisation, are discussed in greater detail in Section 4.3.3.

Amriel's concern for how she presents herself in the guise of a chosen character and her discomfort at the thought of portraying a character she does not know well highlights one side of the social element inherent in the play/performance of cosplay. Even if a cosplayer is not actively playing the role and merely exhibiting a costume design inspired by media (for instance, by sharing photos of the costume design), the social environments of fandom (conventions and live fan events as well as online social platforms like Tumblr, Reddit, Twitter, and Facebook) still invite comment about the reference. The positive expression of this occurs through the dialogue and camaraderie that emerges from the exchange of referential information that is mutually understood. Tabrith described the exhilarating experience of encountering another fan in a non-fan context, specifically the workplace. She made "nerdy references", that is, talking about her cosplay, and the other person responded positively with their own nerdy reference, a signal to her that they were also a fan and cosplayer. "Like, yeah, you get it!" She said, explaining the feeling of making that connection with another person. "And then, friendship." This positive expression, the basic human connection at the heart of media fan community, is in fact a key motivation for cosplaying. Cosplaying can be a bonding experience that forms a foundation for new friendships. Rhamiel described her first and only experience with a cosplay competition, which she found terrifying but led to strong relationships with other fans.

I have a group of friends... Like, we're friends now, but we specifically all met because we did—the one time I competed in a cosplay, it was a group cosplay that we did. We did a skit, so I met them through a bunch of, someone organized a bunch of different cosplayers to all do this together. And then we've become friends and now we always meet up and we're making new plans for new cosplays together, or comic book hunting.

This example further emphasises the social element involved in cosplaying. For Rhamiel, this experience led not only to new friends, but also new fannish activities she could share with others (i.e., “comic book hunting”). Cosplaying, in this sense, is a way for fans to engage with each other through the embodiment of characters and the inhabitation of a storyworld that can lead to the development of a tribal or group identity.

Kerra described a time when she cosplayed as a character from the television series *Riverdale* for a local promotional event. To promote the launch of the second season on Netflix Canada, diner restaurants in eight locations across Canada were selected to host a Pop’s Chock’lit Shoppe pop-up, transforming the location into the iconic malt shop from the show and comics (Mertz, 2017). Fans were invited to buy tickets and line up for an authentic *Riverdale* experience to enjoy a milkshake and photo op inside. The event happened on October 17, which was a seasonably chilly -3° Celsius. Despite the cold, fans turned up in droves wearing miniskirts, letterman jackets, and Jughead beanies.

KERRA: We all went out in the freezing cold and we did
that at *Route 99* [diner].

ERIC: I spent 3 hours in that line.

KERRA: Yep me too, actually I think we were there for more than
that! We did get in eventually. It was awesome. It was very
dorky and awesome but we loved it, even though it was like,
it was not what I was expecting given how much the US
counterparts had done for it. But it was very fun, I mean we
all still had a good time.

Sharing the experience with her friends and commiserating with the other fans that were dressed up as characters from the show and were waiting in line was, for Kerra, a fun way to inhabit the narrative of *Riverdale*. Cosplaying as Cheryl Blossom, Kerra and her friends were able to get a photo in a diner booth with the “Pop’s Chock’lit Shoppe” sign, making it feel like they were actually in *Riverdale*. Once again, cosplaying becomes an exercise in embodiment and inhabiting the storyworld of the character.

In Kerra's example, however, we observe how de Certeau's (1984) metaphor of habitation as a tactic of everyday life plays out in the social context of a friend group set within a larger local community of fans, which is itself a part of a larger, global media fandom. Goffman's (1959) presentation of the self in everyday life is a critical touchstone for exploring how cosplay is enacted and embodied. For instance, Amriel's curated cosplayer persona that she presents onlife (through social media and live at conventions), discussed in the previous section (*Making Cosplay*), is an example of "front stage" persona (Goffman, 1959, p. 22). Goffman's (1959) observation of individuals working together in teams to perform collective identity extends the concept of front stage as a conscious process of self-presentation and identity formation (pp. 77-105). Kerra and her friends enacted a collective identification with the world of Riverdale, with reference to its iconic characters, and among a community of others that were also participating in the front stage practice. Dozens of Archies, Bettys, Jugheads, and Veronicas standing in line for a photo and a chocolate milkshake is evidence of how fan identity is negotiated not only in the mind of the individual, but by the collective.

It is important to note, however, the difference between the method actors in Goffman's (1959) sociological observations, Amriel's carefully curated persona, and the cosplaying of Kerra and the other Pop's Chock'lit Shoppe pop-up participants. For cosplayers, the boundaries between front stage (the face or persona presented to a public) and back stage (what an individual perceives internally about themselves) can blur. For Kerra and her friends, cosplaying represents a "pleasurable escape from what they see as a stable self" (Masi de Casanova, Brenner-Levoy, & Weirich, 2020, p. 17). While they may not commit to the role in the same way as actors, or to an established persona that presents a face which can put on different roles like masks, the pop-up participants demonstrate the construction of new identities from the outside in, learning to embody the characteristics of the narrative representations they are playing with. This has the effect of forging a stronger connection with the storyworld and with other fans within the fandom. Seeing the visual representation of themselves in a photo that situates them together in the fictional world of their fandom is another onlife way that embodied practice increases fan engagement. The perspectives of Amriel, Tabrith, Rhamiel, and Kerra offer important insight into the area of collective identity formation and embodied transformations that result from cosplaying (Masi de Casanova, Brenner-Levoy, & Weirich, 2020; Turk, 2019).

The performative aspect of cosplay is very similar to that seen in tabletop role-playing games (TRPGs) or the #FakeWesteros Twitter role-play community discussed in the next chapter. Indeed, for Tabrith, the friends that she cosplays with are also the friends that she meets to play *Dungeons & Dragons* with every week. They attend cons together in cosplay costumes each person chooses according to their individual fandoms instead of doing a group cosplay: “We’re just kind of this rag tag group of persons moving around.” As is discussed in the subsection *Playing TRPGs*, this approach to cosplaying allows individuals a freedom of choice that mimics the creative act of selecting the traits that define the character you want to play in a TRPG. This level of freedom seems more fluid than the Wonder Women group cosplay enacted by Rhamiel and her friends, or even the blurred boundaries of cosplaying *Riverdale* demonstrated by Kerra and her friends, but still embraces the hedonic spectacle of the con environment and of fans interacting with fans. Tabrith refers to her social approach to cosplaying and fandom as “letting her nerd flag fly”. For a fan like Kerra, dressing up like Sansa Stark from *Game of Thrones* or Cheryl Blossom from *Riverdale* made her feel closer to the character, closer to the story that moved her, and closer to the actor that inspired her. Taking on the role of Sansa virtually as a part of the #FakeWesteros Twitter community is just one other way that Kerra was able to inhabit the character and interact with the storyworld.

While this study did not include any participants involved in live action role play (LARPing), cosplay is certainly a close cousin of that fan practice, as well. Both are examples of localised, community-based meaning-making where fans inhabit the characters and settings of a storyworld (Thon, 2015, p. 45). Uilleand found joy in the absurdity of her cosplaying; she described dressing up as Pam Poovey from *Archer*, complete with a dolphin hand-puppet, for a con. Uilleand explained that when she does cosplay, she goes “all out”. The “pleasurable escape” of cosplaying is evident in her example (Masi de Casanova, Brenner-Levoy, & Weirich, 2020, p. 17). For Emphyrean, cosplaying is less about playing a role and more about symbolically inhabiting the storyworld setting. “I have two costumes. I have a *Voyager* red top costume and a *First Contact* grey top costume. So, I switch between those two. (laugh)” His costumes let him associate with specific narratives and timelines within the *Star Trek* universe, without signalling an identification with a particular character from television or film. In this sense, he is performing himself as a Starfleet officer. Not unlike Kerra and her friends at the Chock’lit

Shoppe, Empyrean and his friends are able to briefly inhabit the narrative by donning their costumes for the shared experience of a con or event. Amriel, Rhamiel, Tabrith, Kerra, and Empyrean's examples illustrate multiple levels of "play": playing the character as a role, playing with friends who are also in costume, and playing with the audience of fans and the broader, more global communities of onlife fandom (i.e., convention-goers and online audiences of digital cosplay) that a cosplayer encounters. These encounters take place at cons, at events like Pop's Chock'lit Shoppe pop-up, and online through social media. In terms of everyday onlife, cosplaying is not limited to encounters at live events or cons; it includes the use of social media to share photos, such as Kerra's Chock'lit Shoppe photo and Amriel's more professional pin-up photos. "Instagram is certainly my biggest driver of traffic," Amriel stated about the social media accounts related to her cosplayer persona. "I have about 17 and a half thousand [followers] on there. Facebook and then Twitter are probably next."

IBs related to cosplaying can also include searching the internet for photos of cosplay. While not a cosplayer himself, Razael described seeking photos of professional cosplayers online and of pricing out the cost of acquiring prints. Tabrith described browsing on Facebook and clicking the "like" button (i.e., liking) for photos of costumes or designs she was interested in reproducing herself. While serious leisure/professional cosplayers like Amriel also use websites like DeviantArt.com, Patreon, and Only Fans to generate an online following and income from their work, casual cosplayers like Rhamiel, Tabrith, and Kerra use Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to share photos with friends and family, to like photos of costumes, and to find out what the coolest cosplay designs were at a particular con. This more casual behaviour associated with cosplaying is again suggestive of the blurred boundaries between front stage and back stage in the process of self-presentation and identity construction. Fan identity is discussed in more detail in Section 4.3. Moreover, participants' experiences illustrate a different kind of blurring between the meanings of serious and casual, in the context of leisure practices. Onlife environments that include the social media platforms just mentioned are central to the engagement of all cosplaying participants, and are used in similar yet diverse ways, that indicate a form of leisure that is situated somewhere between casual and serious leisure (Stebbins, 2007/2015). As such, the examples discussed in this section are representative of a distinct *fan-based leisure*.

As an extension of the discussion of distinctions between serious, casual, and fan-based leisure, there was another set of examples related to cosplaying that emerged from interviews. None of the seven participants indicated that they currently participated in cosplay competitions, which have become increasingly popular at cons (Masi De Casanova, Brenner-Levoy, & Weirich, 2020). Competitions allow cosplayers to have their costume designs and cosplaying performance judged in front of an audience. Amriel indicated that she had served as a judge for cosplay competitions but has never competed herself. As noted earlier in this section, Rhamiel competed once and said it was “terrifying”. More research is required to determine the significance of cosplay competitions from an information behaviour and onlife perspective. Competitions represent a shift in cosplaying from a casual fan practice to a more serious activity. Amriel, despite not being a competitor, demonstrated through her examples a more serious, professional commitment to cosplay. In contrast, examples from Rhamiel, Tabrith, Uilleand, Emyrean, and Kerra portrayed more casual, playful engagements. Their examples suggest that cosplaying is most commonly a “fun” practice than a serious one. Rhamiel made the following observation:

I remember when I first saw cosplay... and, cosplay was more niche, and I don't think it was so popular. And now it's so popular—which isn't a bad thing. But it's very commercialized, unfortunately. I don't like that part of it. That's why I always say to people, “Oh you cosplay?” “For fun, for fun!”

“Closet cosplay” refers to everyday fashions that signal a fan's media fandoms (Smith, Stannar, & Kuttruff, 2020). It is a way for cosplayers to continue playing in their day-to-day lives, outside the context of cons. Kerra exemplified this way of playing:

I have probably the majority of the Hot Topic *Riverdale* line, I wear it everyday. Every other day basically. Yeah, so I'm super happy to drape myself all over in clothing or, just be really, really geeky in my day-to-day apparel just to point it out because, I mean, people will be like, “hey, that's a really cool Jughead hat!” or like, “that's a great, you know, great *Supernatural* shirt!” or “I really like your ring”...

Closet cosplay is a way of playing with media engagement that is more subtle than the examples of cosplaying discussed so far. In the spirit of inclusivity, it expands the definition of cosplaying to everyday fashion choices; Jael did not consider his closet full of *Mass Effect* jackets as cosplaying, or even as a collection (as we shall see in Section 4.2.3), and yet he donned them daily and proudly. He distinguished the cosplaying he had done at cons in the past from the casual wearing of these jackets. Razael almost exclusively wore the wrestling t-shirts he purchased at WWE events. Asteraoth sported stylish skirts and tops that identified her as a *Dr. Who* and *Harry Potter* fan. Stores like *Hot Topic* market these fashions online to fans. For participants who are less comfortable with the performative aspect of cosplaying, closet cosplay can also be a way for fans to participate in fandom without feeling stigmatised. These further examples from the study's participants, as well as the earlier discussion about stigmatisation, contributes useful insight into closet cosplay as a practice related to cosplaying.

Fanfiction: Reading and writing as play. When considering fanfic as a way of *playing*, I focus on the activities that flow from the initial creative urge to write fic. These are fic-related activities that fall within the hobbyist context, such as community knowledge sharing through participation and games (e.g., “fic wars”, “reclisting”), beta reading, commenting, tagging, searching, reading, and re-reading for pleasure. Avid fic *players* identified in interview participants included Rhamiel, Isthi, Malakh, Uilleand, and Aziraphale. The latter four of these participants were previously identified and discussed under Section 4.2.1 as fic writers. The current section explores how they extend their engagement with fic in other ways. Table 4.2.10 describes the information behaviours associated with fic-based play that emerged from their experiences.

Table 4.2.10. Information behaviour associated with reading and playing fanfic.

Examples	Information behaviour	Theories and Concepts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading fic (Rhamiel) • Beta reading and editing (Malakh) • Fic wars (Isthi) • RPin (Uilleand and Malakh) • Collaboration (Isthi, Uilleand) • Other bibliographic practices (reclisting, tagging) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building search queries and saving searches on multi-fandom archives • Checking for updates on WIPs and re-reading favourite fics • Providing feedback to other fic writers through comments • Participating in community events, like “fic wars”: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Writing and sharing fic related to the theme/goal ◦ Planning and/or moderating the event ◦ Editing content and posting it online (e.g., <i>rvbficwars</i>) ◦ Exchanging messages/communicating with collaborators • Role-playing online with other users by posting creative content on an RP forum or message board. • Collaborative fic writing through chat (e.g., Discord), email, text, or other communication with friends • Contributing tags for fics on multi-fandom archives • Sharing lists of recommendations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Para-active engagement (Evans, 2016) • Play-community (Huizinga, 1949) and communities of play (Pearce & Artemesia, 2009)

Engagement through fanfiction occurs on two levels: reading and writing. However, between these two practices is a wide spectrum of participatory activities that could be described as play. For example, while Rhamiel did not write fanfic, she read it avidly. She considered reading fanfic a kind of litmus test: “That’s how I know I’m really devoted to it, is if I start reading fanfiction.” Checking for updates to her favourite fics and saved searches on AO3 was part of her nightly routine. “...I have it saved in my bookmarks, specifically the search properties that I want.” She described specific searches she had for *Sailor Moon* fics. She had also bookmarked a specific fic set in a *Pride and Prejudice* alternate universe that she often re-read. Since fics represent fan-created paratexts that extend the narrative of a source text, as discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.4, the information behaviours of searching, bookmarking, and re-reading fic all represent engagement with paratextual content. These behaviours represent basic parts of Rhamiel’s everyday fan activities. Malakh, whose work-life commitments had limited her ability to write, turned to reading and reviewing as a participatory activity. “There was definitely a

transition point,” Malakh said, “where I started off being a pretty heavy creator and then I switched to being, like, a supporter for other creators. So, I would Beta and edit like nobody’s business.” A beta reader, or “beta”, is someone who reads a story before the author posts it publicly, and provides editorial feedback related to spelling, grammar, cohesiveness, flow, plot, characterization, and continuity with source texts. Malakh’s beta reading is an information behaviour that can be understood in the context of Evans (2016) concept of para-active engagement, which represents the activities that take place *around* and *beyond* the narrative source text in the near limitless paratextual space (Genette, 1987/1997). Malakh’s para-active engagement with her fandoms through beta reading of fic also demonstrates the economy of fandom that exists in fanfiction reading and writing practice. Beta reading, providing feedback in comments, or kudos to other writers can be a way of paying it forward, and of encouraging the proliferation of fan works in the community. Malakh explained how online environments that host fanfic (such as the multi-fandom archive, AO3, discussed in Section 4.2.1) make this possible:

I think that any medium that is online in a way that makes it immediately able to comment or share, or [that] in any way facilitates engagement faster, really promotes it being a *people-based activity*. Even something as simple as giving kudos to a fanfiction or something like, it promotes engagement with this person. [emphasis is my own]

Fiske’s (1992) “economy of fandom” introduced notions of exchange in pre-internet fan subcultures. Rhamiel and Malakh’s activities represent how reading fic is an active and dynamic social process that is influenced by the onlife environments afforded by the internet and ICTs. Price’s (2017) model of fan IB makes use of Fiske’s (1992) ideas by incorporating his theory of semiotic production to describe the enunciative and textual outputs of fans in online spaces. Malakh and Rhamiel’s fic reading practices provide concrete examples of semiotic production that is onlife, and support several of Price’s (2017) key findings (see Section 2.4 for details). The most evident of these is the finding that “fan information behaviour is generous” (Price, 2017, p. 320). Rhamiel and Malakh’s accounts are especially valuable, however, in highlighting a gap in how textual and enunciative productions are distinguished in Price’s (2017) model. Rhamiel’s

bookmarking behaviour, for example, represents a form of production that contributes to the creation, acquisition, organisation, preservation, and understanding of paratextual information, but it is neither enunciative (i.e., discursively contributing through “fan talk”) nor is it precisely textual. On the other hand, Malakh’s beta reading and editing *is* enunciative, but it is *also* textual in the way that engages with fic narratives as fan texts. Both examples suggest that there are additional categories of information behaviour to explore that constitute semiotic production, particularly within the context of play. From the perspective of the maker, Aziraphale greatly valued the comments she received when she posted her fic on The Kitten Board (thekittenboard.net): “You’d throw up a chapter and then the next 30 posts would be people, you know, asking things, commenting things, you answering back.” The idea of fanfic as a people-based activity highlights the social and participatory contexts that surround the practice of writing and sharing fic online. Just as cosplaying was a fundamentally social activity for the study’ participants, so too was reading and enjoying fic in the digitally mediated spaces of onlife.

All five participants were involved in some form of interaction online, from simply providing kudos (Rhamiel, Isthi), to commenting on posted fics and forums (Aziraphale, Uilleand), to more deeply engaged beta reading and editing (Malakh). However, both Isthi and Rhamiel indicated a reluctance to interact with others online in the context of fic. For Rhamiel, the reason for this reluctance is tied to the anxiety that she expressed when discussing toxic social media posts related to cosplaying (as discussed in the previous subsection, *Cosplaying and Play/Performance*). Isthi perceived fic as a mostly solitary creative activity. “I’m also that bad person,” she admitted, “who doesn’t comment on fic, because I just, part of me is just like, I don’t think anyone cares what I think.” She explains that, for her, writing is about making sense of narrative information rather than a social process.

ISTHI: I write because... there’s something interesting here and I don’t know what it is and I need to process it, here’s where my processing went.

ERIC: So that’s your own internal processes.

ISTHI: Yeah yeah.

ERIC: It’s kind of like an experimentation.

ISTHI: Almost, yeah yeah.

ERIC: ...You would describe it as more solitary?

ISTHI: Yeah.

ERIC: Not a social activity?

ISTHI: Yeah, not as much.

Yet, despite Isthi's perception of her fic writing as solitary, she described group writing competitions and collaborations, called "fic rushes" or "fic wars", that she regularly participated in. "Rvbficwars" was a series of participatory fanfiction-based events for *Red vs. Blue* fans hosted on Tumblr (<https://rvbficwars.tumblr.com/>). Out of the variety of events, Isthi explained that "bangs" (a large fan community event where groups of fan producers come together, pairing a fic with accompanying artwork), "bingo wars" (a challenge in which story prompts are provided as bingo cards, and groups of fan producers compete to complete all prompts), and "rare pair" exchanges (when a group of fan producers exchange fan works about a rare pairing or ship within a given fandom) were the ones she participated in.

A big bang is basically where a bunch of people get together, and they write a fic of a certain length. It tends to be 10K or 20K [words], but that's a more recent sort of limit. [...] It is mostly online—or at least in my experience. ...Basically, the community to which they're submitted will post a bunch of them, it's like a huge spam. That's why it's called a "big bang", it's because there's a proliferation of works that stem out of that one event. But then there's also, like, events such as like, any exchanges... Usually I do rare pair exchanges, 'cause I am always in rare pair hell, like, I am that girl! (Laugh) I have too many ships. And then, this might just be specific to RvB, but we did this thing called a "bingo war" where basically we got into our teams, like "Red" or "Blue" or Team Medic for those of us who are too neutral to choose a side. And we had bingo cards and we had... you know, like, a bingo card prompt... and you had to fill your card, and whichever team had the most fills, wins.

When asked if these bangs are collaborative, Isthi said:

Yes and no. So, the writing itself is more individual. But then everyone submits the writing to the mods, and then there are claims where artists will claim the fic and do art for it. And so that's where the collaboration comes in. And then a "reverse bang" is the opposite of that. So someone will create art, and then a writer will come in and write something based on it. ...So, it's kind of part collaboration, but also part...similar to a zine, in that you have a bunch of works coming out at once.

While the content that Isthi produces during rvbfcwars can be viewed as ways of making, the interactive and participatory aspects of these different events are more appropriately categorised as play.

Rules and goals of rvbfcwars' bangs and exchanges demonstrate the characteristics of games described by Caillois (1961). Moreover, the social interactions taking place in digital space are consistent with Huizinga's (1949) concept of play-community, the society and agreed-upon conventions that form around a particular type of play. Pearce & Artemesia (2009) have examined the cultures of play in virtual worlds through the lens of communities of play, which extends the theory of communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) into non-work and leisure contexts. Pearce & Artemesia (2009) problematise Caillois' and Huizinga's definitions of play and game. They illustrate how the magic circle of play, particularly in the context of virtual worlds, is highly porous, so that in practice it is a liminal construct through which various elements in the player's mediated experiences outside the game filter through its boundaries and influence their play (Pearce & Artemesia, 2009, pp. 25-26). This is consistent with the concept of onlife environments as overlapping spheres of personal experience that are both virtual and physical (Floridi, 2014). Pearce & Artemesia (2009) also challenge the notion that play is unproductive (Caillois, 1961, p. 43; Pearce & Artemesia, 2009, p. 26); as the practices Isthi described related to rvbfcwars demonstrate, virtual and onlife communities of play can be extremely productive and, in fact, develop new modes of production through collaborative experimentation (such as bangs, bingo wars, and rare pairs).

Pearce & Artemesia (2009) define the term *ludisphere* as the “totality of networked games and virtual worlds on the Internet” (p. 57), to demarcate the world system in which modern players exist and play. This concept is analogous to Floridi’s (2014) infosphere, the information environments through which people experience everyday life through ICTs, except that it is focused on the context of play. Isthi’s productive and collaborative fanfic games, as well as the other examples in this section on fan play, contribute valuable insight into a conceptualisation of the ludisphere from the perspective of fandom.

Only Isthi indicated that she participated in fic rushes, fic wars, and bangs. Meanwhile, a similar set of information behaviours and similar type of play-community emerged in accounts from Malakh and Uilleand. Both discuss *RPing*, which is text-based role-playing as a group writing activity. Malakh explains:

...So, I kind of stopped creating a lot of my own material, although I did start participating in Tumblr RP fanfictions where you write it as, like, you write a paragraph in reply to someone and then they reply to that, so you’re effectively writing the fanfiction together but through role-play. And I kind of put myself forward as I’m a safe person to do your first attempt at role-playing and I’ll let you know if you’re out-of-character or if, you know, ways to improve because there were some people who only wanted experienced role-players...

RP, in this context, is done online through microblogging platforms like Tumblr and Twitter, or forums and message boards, including Reddit and Discord. Uilleand’s collaborative RP writing was briefly mentioned under “Making” earlier in this chapter. She describes how she has made close friends that she now writes with exclusively. These relationships were started thanks to RP: “It was a *Star Wars* RP site,” Uilleand says, “it was just bring a character, bring an OC [original character], write stuff...” RP is specific to a fandom or storyworld, as Uilleand’s explanation indicates. RP sites and their participants can also be described as play-communities (Huizinga, 1949), and the practice of collaborative writing is one other method for fans to playfully engage with the narratives and universes that they love.

“Reclisting”, the practice of sharing lists of recommended texts or fics within a fandom or topic area, is another common activity related to fanfic. None of the participants specifically referenced reclisting as a part of their activity. However, Isthi did provide a reclist for *Teen Wolf* fic following the interview by email. Additional research would be required to determine how significant reclisting is and the specific information behaviours related to it in the onlife context. Similarly, “tagging” is not a concept that participants noted specifically in the context of their fic reading, even though from an information perspective tagging, taxonomy, and the folksonomies of fic communities are clearly important for readers like Rhamiel, who relies on her searches to keep her apprised of updates in her fandoms. Tagging is an activity that has been researched comprehensively in the limited context of fan IB and FanLIS (e.g., Bullard, 2016a; Gursioy, 2015; Hart et al., 1999; Hill & Pecoskie, 2017; Price & Robinson, 2021). However, scholarship in this domain is limited when it comes to the affective decision-making of readers/fans that make use of folksonomic tagging for selection. This decision-making represents an important dimension of fan play that emerges as an area for future research based on the examples of the current study’s participants.

Playing tabletop role-playing games (TRPGs). For many fans, *play* is a short form for the concept of *role-play*. Role-playing games (RPGs) are often played as extensions of storyworlds from other media fandoms. As we have seen in other activities described by participants, such as cosplaying and text RPing (i.e., PBP RPGs, as discussed in Section 4.2.1, *Writing and sharing fanfic*), role-playing is a fundamental feature of fannish ways of doing. For example, Asteraoth recalled how she engaged with *The Babysitters Club* books she read when she was younger, which represented one of her first fandoms: “I would often think how cool Mary Anne seemed and I’d try to role-play in my head how it’d be to, like, *be* certain characters.” Tabletop (sometimes called “pen-and-paper”) RPGs (or TRPGs) are normally played in-person with a group of people. Each person creates a character they role-play through different scenarios set within a particular storyworld. Often, the storyworld is directly inspired by media; for example, you can play TRPGs set in the *Star Wars* universe. Players track their progress using a character sheet. Multiple sessions make up a game, adventure, or “campaign” (White, et al., 2018). A campaign is a narrative arc that players experience through multiple gaming sessions before reaching its conclusion. The player characters gain new abilities and

skills as they progress through the campaign and earn experience points, and as encounters become increasingly more challenging. In the past, character sheets, campaigns, rules, and source books were normally in physical print, hence the “pen-and-paper” moniker. However, increasingly, a Frankenstein-like “hodgepodge” of digital alternatives that employ computers, laptops, and mobile devices, and make use of online resources are becoming part of standard tabletop gameplay, galvanising media presumed to be dead with the “electricity of the digital age” (White, et al., 2018, p. 83). In the information age, the word *tabletop* in this context is really an anachronism.

Six participants discussed the ways that they played *Dungeons and Dragons (D&D)* and TRPGs (Uilleand, Tabrith, Jael, Codec, Eriner, and Dagiel). Uilleand talked about her playing as an early introduction to fandom when she was a teenager, and as further extension of the creative RP collaborations she now explored with her online friends. Jael and Eriner were both dungeon masters that devoted much of their time to researching and facilitating the best narrative gaming experiences they could generate. Jael’s playing was in-person while Eriner’s was virtual, using a combination of digital platforms that included Roll20 and Discord, as discussed earlier in Section 4.2.1, *Making Websites*. Tabrith and Codec have participated as players in campaigns for years. Dagiel no longer found the time to play himself but reminisced about past gaming sessions. *D&D* is the original, or “prototype” TRPG (White, et al., 2018), and remains popular enough that the name is used as a byword by this study’s participants to refer to TRPGs in general. As such, “*D&D*” is used in the following section to refer to the game system itself, published by Wizards of the Coast, and to similar game systems by other publishers including *Pathfinder*, *Shadowrun*, *Call of Cthulhu*, *Vampire: The Masquerade*, *Firefly*, and *Star Wars Roleplaying*. Table 4.2.11 summarises IB for playing *D&D*.

Table 4.2.11. Information behaviour associated with playing tabletop role-playing games

Examples	Information behaviour	Theories and Concepts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Players – Co-constructing of narrative (Uilleand, Tabrith, Jael, Codec, Eriner, and Dagiel) • Game Masters (GMs) – world-building and facilitating (Eriner and Jael) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing a shared knowledge of the game mechanics and narrative that facilitates communication with other players • Performing a chosen character within the context of the game • Reading source books, learning rules, and researching using wikis and other online resources • Documenting a character on paper or electronic character sheet • Using laptops or mobile devices to facilitate in-person gameplay • Using digital methods (Google Hangouts, Skype, Roll20) to play when players cannot be physically present • Using social media and online chat (e.g., Discord) to share ideas and thoughts with other players outside of game sessions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subculture (Fine, 1983) • Performative text (using Goffman’s frame analysis) (MacKay, 2001)

All six participants were initiated into *D&D* as a media fandom from a young age. As with many of the fan practices discussed so far, playing *D&D* demands a high degree of specialised knowledge from source books, community information sharing, and practice. Rather than learning-by-doing, for these participants, becoming experts in TRPGs was an exercise in learning-by-*playing*. This is a valuable insight that offers a unique context for information creation beyond maker practices (Gorichanaz, 2019; Huvila, et al., 2020). Not all lessons were positive, nor was knowledge easy to come by. Uilleand described her introduction to TRPGs as a teenager:

You always run into the gatekeepers. Especially because I started playing *Dungeons and Dragons* as a teenager and again, you know, “oh gawd, it’s gonna be the girlfriend of this guy coming in!” and I’m like, “shut up or I’m going to shoot you in the face, right?” Like, come on. I’m a

narrative, story driven person and RPGs for me were heaven... and so you know, my boyfriend in high school, I met him because we played *D&D* together and we, you know, we were together for 4 years and our evenings and weekends were *D&D*-athons. I was such a party animal! But yeah, everyone who's like, "oh gawd, who brought the girl?"

Gatekeeping is a problem encountered by other participants, as we have seen in examples in *Cosplaying and Play/Performance*. In addition to the mechanics of the game, Uilleand had to learn to negotiate the gender-based social dynamics of playing *D&D* with other, predominantly male, fans. Her passion for the narrative performance of role-play helped her past the gatekeepers. Tabrith was introduced to *D&D* by her father as a child. Eriner first started playing TRPGs at 15. Jael started playing around the same time, not long after he first watched and fell in love with *Star Wars*. Dagiel explained he was 9 or 10 years old when he started going to a local comics store that ran a game for customers on the weekends.

There was a 30-year-old guy who ran second edition *D&D* campaigns, and there was a 40-year-old guy that would kind of alternate. So, there was a bunch of us that would go in. We'd go every Saturday. And spend the whole day there, playing.

Later, when Dagiel and his friends acquired their own set of core rule books to play the game, they continued playing on their own. Dagiel said he would obsessively buy the supplementary reference books and read them. This was in the 1990s, at a time before his family had a computer with the internet, and so for information he could not find in the books, he and his friends used other means of information seeking. "We would call the guys at the store (laugh) 'Hey, we're arguing about this, how does this thing work?'" In contrast, Eriner's present-day *D&D* campaigns (previously mentioned in Section 4.2.1, *Making Websites*) relied on digital technologies in numerous ways for information and to capture the excitement and spirit of play Dagiel recalled nostalgically on those weekends at the comic store. These examples demonstrate first how TRPG fandom is embedded in the fabric of social lives and the "totality" of everyday (Ocepek, 2018), and more importantly how ICTs have transformed everyday experience into mediated onlife experience (Floridi, 2014). Eriner created a virtual desktop so that her group of

friends could continue playing when one of them moved away. Before creating a virtual tabletop on the Roll20 platform and moving their game sessions completely online, they tried a seemingly less disruptive approach:

We did do a mix for a while where we just digitally brought J--- in, be it Skype or Hangouts more often... and that went awful. Just absolutely awful. ...you've got a group of people who are all in the same space with each other and can read each other's body language fluidly. And then you've got somebody who is on a 3-second time delay, has a microphone in one section of the room, and only has a very limited view of what's actually going on at the table. It. Did. Not. Go. Well.

Going completely online with the virtual tabletop helped resolve this by ensuring that everyone accessed the game in the same way and that communication was uniform for all players. To substitute the in-person interactions, Eriner and her friends created Discord channels. “Roll20 software is, yeah, kind of the facilitator of most of the game experience,” she explained. “Like, the mechanics, the combat, that kind of thing. Discord facilitates the interpersonal interactions. The discussions, descriptions, the roleplaying scenes, be they by text or by voice.” She described how the ability to separate interactions into different channels had benefited the group in new ways. First, the private chat function in Discord was useful for interactions that involved only one or two characters, or information they might otherwise want to keep secret from some of the players.

ERINER: In this particular case, we got a couple characters who do “investigations” into things... The Soulmark campaign has an undead paladin who doesn’t remember who the hell he is. So, they [the players, role-playing in-character] hired an investigation firm...

ERIC: ...is the DM [dungeon master / game master] the one who is sort of generating all of this?

ERINER: A lot of it, yeah. He’s usually overseeing a lot of these, and kind of guiding them. So, he’s always involved in these backend chats. So, we've got our public channels and our subchannels, and basically

it's—as opposed to [Google] Hangouts—it's allowed us to be a little bit more specific about what information goes to what people.

Being able to share and control the flow of information in the digital environment seamlessly kept the players engaged in the game, rather than introducing noise or causing distractions that broke immersion. Discord also created an environment for Eriner and her friends to socialise as fans: “We have a channel specifically for memes and funny posts that are about *D&D* but not related to our specific campaign.” This use of the platform highlights how *D&D* and TRPGs can be understood as media fandoms. Fine (1983) explores TRPG players as subcultures at a time before FS existed as a field, making observations about the play communities of TRPG fans that first-wave and second-wave FS scholarship would later make about media fans. The media engagement of TRPG players in the predigital age in which Fine (1983) conducted his ethnography, and in today’s information age can both be characterised as media fans, as suggested in Chapter 1, Section 1.4 in which fans were introduced as “players”. More importantly, Eriner’s account illustrates how digital practices of media fans, such as the creation and sharing of funny GIFs (Booth, 2015), are equally a part of TRPG player cultures. Uilleand also played *D&D* virtually using Roll20 with her friends in the United States. “We have a lot of shared fandoms,” she said. “*Mass Effect*, *Star Wars*, *Dungeons and Dragons*. We play role-playing games on Roll20, between all of us through Skype and you know, just bond over general nerdiness.” For Uilleand, all of the fan activity related to *D&D*, video games (*Mass Effect*), films and fanfic/RPing (*Star Wars*) falls under the category of “general nerdiness”. The social aspect of fandom is, ultimately, what motivated her in these pursuits: “My husband looks at me and is like, ‘how do you go online and out of millions and millions of people, find people exactly like you?’ It’s what I do, it’s my talent. They’re my tribe.” This aspect of Uilleand’s identification as a fan is explored in 4.3 as a fundamental part of her fan identity.

Jael, Tabrith, Dagiel, and Codec played in-person, but also benefited from digital, mobile, and network technologies to enhance gameplay. Devices were used to play music and ambient sounds to set mood. Character sheets were sometimes maintained electronically in a PDF or through online tools like those available through *D&D Beyond* (*dndbeyond.com*). Electronic versions of source books and campaign modules eliminated the need to carry heavy books. Also, featured supplementary content from publishers like Wizards of the Coast was often only

available in electronic format to subscribers, which encouraged digital engagement. As GMs, Jael and Eriner also used print and digital resources before gameplay to research and prepare. Eriner's story particularly highlighted how access to online and offline sources of information influenced ways of playing. He walked me through her first experience as GM. The previous GM for his group of friends offered him recommendations for a new adventure that could connect to their previous campaign set in the fantasy world *Forgotten Realms*. He was provided with a printed book (also known as a module) which included a set of published adventures for new characters with instructions on how to present it to a group of players in ongoing campaigns.

I chose the first one in the module, known as "The Sunless Citadel"¹⁴. So, for the purposes of this information, it comes pre-packaged as, like, a canon source. But this particular book had a little fun thing down the side: technically you could fit this into any of these four campaign settings. So, the way this works is the company running this has, you know, kind of their own version of canon, but obviously there's some flexibility around that.

He wanted his campaign to be compliant with *Forgotten Realms*, matching authorised depictions and documented history of the fantasy world, and the book provided a point of entry for that: "It starts [by] saying, you know, 'for the purposes of placing this in the Forgotten Realms, where this previous game that had just ended exists, it would be located in this spot'..." *Forgotten Realms* is an example of a transmedia storyworld. It has been used as an official *D&D* campaign setting since 1987, generating dozens of publications and magazine articles for role-playing, but it is also a world that has been richly explored for decades through many novels and video games (e.g., *Baldur's Gate*, *Neverwinter Nights*), and that has generated iconic characters in media fandom (e.g., Drizzt Do'Urden) that inspire collectible merchandise, fan films, fic, and cosplay. As such, there is a risk of information overload or information fatigue (Bawden & Robinson, 2009) for any newcomer wanting to learn more about the world as a setting for play.

¹⁴ *The Sunless Citadel* (2000) is a 32-page adventure module for Dungeons & Dragons 3rd edition written by Bruce Cordell. It is intended for 1st-level characters. It was reprinted in *Tales from the Yawning Portal* (2017), which adapted seven "classic" adventures to Dungeons & Dragons 5th edition.

Modules provide prospective GMs pathfinders for acquiring the knowledge they need to run a campaign. Eriner's book suggested a potential site for the campaign that is canonically represented in *Forgotten Realms* but did not provide specifics, which allowed a GM to creatively fill in the gaps. "This is where I actually started the information hunting. ...Where the hell is *this* place? Step one: find a map." Eriner soon discovered that many players and fans had shared their experiences of playing "The Sunless Citadel" online. Searching the web, he found fan-created maps for the specific locations described in the book, and explanations for precisely where they would be situated in the larger context of the storyworld. Eriner explained the value of this first piece of fan-generated information: "I can [now] look at any zoomed-out map that's not made especially for this purpose and have at least a frame of reference." Having situated the adventure, he then looked at the plot points within the module to better flesh out the backstory for his players and create continuity with their previous adventures in this world. "There's a lot of really vague things going on there [in the module descriptions]," he said, "Well, I kind of need the answers to that." The module was written in such a way that he could reinterpret the events by calling on iconic narrative elements and characters in *Forgotten Realms*. "But in order to do that, you really need to reach out to a bunch of sources to figure out what is happening in this world", he said.

And this means bridging across several different versions of the stories.

So, I went on a giant goose hunt. So, this goose hunt involved going through Reddit, this involved going through fan wikis, this involved going through, like, basically, play stories. People, you know, going back to the internet being like, "Oh my god, you're not going to believe what my players did." And I did this fun thing where I linked it up to that. So, while chasing around for all these hints from different sources, I was able to kind of bring together something of a narrative.

Eriner's account makes it clear that onlife play experiences are inherently linked to information seeking behaviours. In it, we can observe not only Eriner's own journey for understanding, but also catch glimpses of how the community of *D&D* players and fans generate new information and resources based on their own ways of playing. Eriner traversed a network of personal recommendations, commercially published, authorised materials, and fan-created

content to find the answers she sought, switching between offline and online modes with ease. Lee, Ocepek, and Makri's (2022) investigations of naturalistic information acquisition and information behaviour patterns (as discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.1) are useful for understanding the information journey that Eriner undertook in preparing himself to facilitate the *D&D* campaign. His account also provides a unique context where different behaviours (i.e., browsing, monitoring, seeking) occur in relation to each other, that contributes to the study of information acquisition.

Rather than actively seeking information for a specific campaign like Eriner, Jael encountered *D&D* content as part of his daily media consumption. He listened to podcasts about role-playing that gave him ideas for running games with his friends and taught him to be a better GM.

Critical Role [video podcast] is a live play *D&D* that they record and put out, they're really good because they also are very good at explaining rules. ...I'll study the way the DM [GM] on there tells a story, the detail he puts in, the details he keeps out, how he gets his characters to stay involved, I take those ideas and kind of work them into my own.

Critical Role and similar podcasts and livestreams that record gaming sessions are informative for players who want to learn more about gameplay, but also make for entertaining and engaging viewing. This is fan-made content made for fans. For Jael, *D&D* is a creative pursuit akin to writing fanfic:

[*D&D*] allows me to tell stories that I have in my head. I use it as this system that I can then take these, these ideas and situations and characters and show them to the players and see how those players react to them.

Podcasts like *Critical Role* offered information to improve Jael's GMing and playing as a creative form. Moreover, Jael's media consumption and engagement with fandoms that were not typically associated with TRPGs also fed his ideas for the play.

...not just Dungeon and Dragons, but I've also done, the *Star Wars* ones, um, there's a *Mass Effect* one that I want to play, there's one

based in the anime *Naruto*, there's *Pokémon* ones, there's kind of systems for almost everything and I want to try them all.

Jael's tabletop role-playing was akin to writing fanfic because it represented a way of expanding narratives from popular media fandoms. TRPGs that are based on other media narratives are not uncommon. "We ran a *Firefly* [-based adventure] as a *D&D* campaign a couple years ago," Tabrith said. She clarified that the game adapted *D&D* fourth edition rules, and not the Cortex game system used by the official *Firefly* RPG and publisher Margaret Weis Productions. "...like space cowboys essentially, like a *D&D* style campaign. So, we ran it very, *Firefly/Serenity*-esque when we did it, cause we're all fairly big *Firefly* junkies..." This kind of adaptation by fans that already play *D&D* is common, since learning a whole new set of rules for a different game system is a daunting task. This can be a tactic for managing too much information, similar to the way Rhamiel disengaged from toxic discourse online was a tactic that employed information avoidance (as discussed earlier under *Cosplaying and Play/Performance*; cf. Bawden & Robinson, 2009). On the other hand, the development of games tailored to a particular fandom is often encouraged and even financially supported by fans, as Uilleand pointed out:

Kickstarters that I've supported in my life are roleplaying games, right?
So, *Dungeons and Dragons*, I'm trying to remember the last one. It was
like a Hong Kong cinema-style RPG, which I'm a massive fan of Hong
Kong cinema. So I'm like YES! I would love to play this!

These examples from Jael, Tabrith, and Uilleand suggest that *D&D* also becomes a transmedia foil, where fans can play out their extensions of cult narratives.

4.2.3. *Collecting*

...the pure object, devoid of any function or completely abstracted from its use, takes on a strictly subjective status: it becomes part of a collection.

(Baudrillard, 1996, p. 86)

The urge to collect was present in all participants' accounts, in one form or another. Some participants did not think of their object fixation as collecting, like Jael who wore *Mass Effect* branded clothing and realised only as we spoke that by actively seeking out and treasuring *Mass Effect* merchandise that he purchased, he was building a collection. Others, like Uilleand, Malakh, Rhamiel, and Tabrith, acknowledged that collecting objects like merchandise, Funko Pops, artwork, DVDs, and comic books was simply part of the everyday fan experience. And finally, for a select few including Aziraphale, Agnephi, Asteraoth, and Empyrean, collecting played a conscious and substantial part of their fan activities. It is for this last group that collecting constitutes not just fan practice, but hobbyist pursuit. There are three distinct aspects of collecting that emerged from their perspectives: hunting, speculating, and enjoying the collection.

Collecting is the practice of gathering “a number of items that are connected to a particular theme” (Duffett, 2013, p. 179). It is a “creative act” that allows fans to control, organise, and curate their cultural worlds (Hills, 2009). The practice of collecting is not limited to media fandom. “Collectors” represent a category of hobbyists within serious leisure (Stebbins, 2007/2015). Hobbyist collecting has also been explored in the information behaviour context, for example, in Lee and Trace's (2009) study of toy rubber duck collectors. Geraghty (2014) points out that many collectors “simply collect for the joy of collecting”, whether that happens to be artwork, books, comics, records, DVDs, CDs, videos, games, clothing, posters, movie props, autographs, badges, pins, models, toys, dolls and yes, even rubber ducks (p. 1). But not all collectors are fans, and not all fans are collectors. Where these identities overlap, we find fans that seek to extend their “fascination and dedication” to a fan object by collecting its mimetic and symbolic traces (Duffett, 2013, p. 179-180).

Seeking and hunting: The case of Faith’s knife. Most participants sought items related to their fandom in one way or another. Some described this seeking as “collecting” and others considered it simply part of their everyday engagement with fandom. Several, like Aziraphale, Agnephi, Asteraoth, and Empyrean, named themselves “collectors” because of their commitment to seeking objects related to their fandoms. Whether participants considered themselves collectors or not, seeking activities took place online and offline. Seeking to collect was a common element of their fan activity, from routine visits to the comics or games store; searching fan and pop culture conventions where premium merchandise is sold; scouring local classifieds, marketplaces, and ads for garage sales; participating in online gift exchanges; trawling auction websites like Ebay; and through recommendations, dialogue, and information sharing with friends and other fans. From an information behaviour perspective, this type of activity aligns with everyday life information seeking (Lee & Trace, 2009). In fans’ quest to acquire and possess, they are actively searching for information about the fan object, in such ways that it is “impossible to extricate information needs from object needs” (Lee & Trace, 2009, p. 633). Collecting, in this sense, fits neatly into existing models of information behaviour (e.g., Agarwal, 2015; Kuhlthau, 1991; Savolainen, 1995; Wilson, 1999). Table 4.2.12 provides a summary of the seeking and hunting IB and examples from the findings.

Table 4.2.12. Information behaviour associated with fan practice seeking and hunting.

Examples	Information behaviour	Theories and Concepts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i> Buffyverse</i> “Faith” knife (Aziraphale) • <i> Transformers</i> action figures (Agnephi) • Martha Jones’ jacket (Asteraoth) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Querying online search engines (Google), auction websites (eBay, eBlueJay) and social media sites (Reddit, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter) • Learning tags and developing custom searches • Researching products, prices • Connecting with vendors and other collectors (social media, e-mail/phone, in-person) • Evaluating items to include in collection • Associating a physical object to a personal experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The concept of “aura” (Benjamin, 2002)

Collecting as an activity manifests in a variety of ways: some fans are completists, seeking the most comprehensive collection of items associated with a particular fan object,

storyworld, or fandom (Woo, 2018, p. 75). Others are more selective, seeking items that evoke the greatest affective response or that are most personally significant for them (Duffett, 2014, p. 180). Some collect only a particular medium, like comic books, or a particular type of item, like t-shirts, cards, handcrafts, or Funko Pops. These different ways of collecting share one thing in common: they all start with seeking.

For participants that identified as fan collectors, *seeking* is not a strong enough word. Aziraphale used the word “hunting” to refer to her own search for collectables. As a *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) fan, she collected books, comic books, video games, models and miniatures, merchandise, and props from the television show over many years (see Figures 4.2.1 and 4.2.2). As a completist, she took pride in having sought out obscure items to add to her



Figure 4.2.1 Photo of Aziraphale's collection (shared with permission)

collection, such as comics panels printed in *Previews* magazine in 1998 that have never been reprinted and are hard to acquire today. In the past “when there were more things to buy, more things to find”, “hunting” these items was a significant part of her engagement. Hunting took various forms, but certainly involved a great deal of information seeking online and offline. Just like Lee and Trace’s (2009) rubber duck collectors, Aziraphale’s hunting led her through a jungle-like “social system with complex interactions” (p. 634), in spaces both physical (conventions, comics shop) and virtual (message boards and social media, online marketplaces, and auction websites). Navigating these information spaces was “time-consuming”, she said, representing a significant commitment, but also “a lot of fun”. In other words, the hunt—complex, goal-based information seeking (Lee, Ocepek, & Makri, 2022) taking place onlife (Floridi, 2014)—was a fulfilling end in itself.

When it came to books and comic books, having the most complete collection possible was her ultimate end-goal. But for other objects, Aziraphale’s goal was to acquire a meaningful piece of the *Buffyverse*:

Do you remember the knife that Faith has in Season 3, the one she gets from the mayor? [...] I looked up what that was and then tracked one down, and so that was a three-week investment that ended up costing me more than I probably want to admit. And then I took it and got it signed by [Eliza Dushku/Faith] at a convention. That's sitting up in a glass container upstairs now.

For Aziraphale, Faith's knife was a memorabile, or "souvenir", of particular scenes that played out in season three of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Duffett, 2013, pp. 180-181) (see Figure 4.2). Embedded within the object was Aziraphale's subjective experience of those scenes and of the character Faith and her relationships in the storyworld. It was also imbued with the personal and social experiences related to seeking information and hunting down the knife, having it signed by the actor, and ultimately displayed in a glass case. Thus, the knife became a surrogate for affective information, the real-life narrative of Aziraphale's hunt overlaying Faith's narrative arc from the series.



Figure 4.2.2. Photo of Aziraphale's collection, featuring Faith's knife (shared with permission)

"Hunting" is also how collecting is characterised in popular media, such as the reality television series *Toy Hunter* (2012-2014). In programmes like *Toy Hunter*, pieces of pop culture and memorabilia are "portrayed as authentic objects of historical significance – worthy of the hunt" (Geraghty, 2014, p. 45). Geraghty (2014) playfully compares the description of a fan collector in one episode to Indiana Jones risking life and limb for the preservation of precious artifacts. These reality TV examples embrace popular stereotypes for effect, but their portrayal of fan collectors also effectively captures the affective engagement and motivation of fans involved in the "hunt". Agneph, Empyrean, and Asteroth were fan collectors that, like Aziraphale, had invested a great deal of time into their hunt for items that authentically represent their respective fandoms. For them, hunting was about acquiring and possessing items that are original, pristine, and significant to them.

Benjamin's (2002) concept of *aura* as the measure of the authenticity of an object is about how close it is to being original, with the least separation from the original's "here and now" (p. 103). In the media fan context, and particularly from our contemporary postdigital perspective, the concept of *aura* evokes Baudrillard's (1981) simulacra: what *is* original, when simulation is indistinguishable from the real? Agnephi's hunt for action figures offers a possible answer to this question. His IB, like Aziraphale's, paralleled that of Lee and Trace's (2009) rubber duck enthusiasts, in that he actively sought *Transformers* for his collection through a complex network of social interactions online and offline. More so than Aziraphale, Agnephi was part of a community of collectors devoted to the toys that manifested from the Saturday morning cartoon franchises of the 1980s. Through Instagram, saved alerts on the online Canadian marketplace *eBlueJay*, and the occasional raid of garage sale and basement lots that are locally advertised or shared by word-of-mouth, Agnephi identified, acquired, and evaluated toys to determine whether to include them in his collection. He was motivated by, in his own words, "the appeal of the hunt". It was most often about having the dynamic, removable parts that pair with a toy, he explained, that determined whether he kept it or resold it. Condition and completeness were both factors in his evaluation. But the toy also needed to evoke the feelings that he felt, as a child, when he watched the cartoons and played with the toys himself. Those movable and removable parts were intrinsic to his remembrance of his childhood enjoyment. In this, we see the importance of memory and nostalgia in measuring the significance of an object (Geraghty, 2014). For Agnephi, the authenticity of the toy was wrapped up in how his own history was symbolised and was relived through it. The "here and now" that determines the originality of the toy is less relevant than the "here and now" of the individual living history through the toy. For fan collectors, *aura* is less about the originality of the physical thing than the meaningful simulation of lived experience. In this sense, collections are "open-ended historical documents" about the collector's identity (Duffett, 2013, p. 180), as much as the "narrative worlds which frame them" (Hills, 2009), and the physical properties of the objects are only significant in how well they serve as both.

As ways of *doing*, seeking and hunting items related to media fandom is intimately tied to ICTs. For participants, as seen with the examples of Aziraphale and Agnephi, information seeking spans physical and virtual spaces, taking place online. It is important to point out,

however, that in some cases hunting is not possible without digital technologies. For Asteraoth, obtaining the items she wants for her collection is only made possible thanks to the internet. She explained that the *Doctor Who* merchandise available in Canada is very different than the merchandise that is available in the UK, due to licensing agreements between the BBC and North American subsidiaries. The cost can also vary greatly and represent a barrier for the avid collector. One way that Asteraoth has overcome the financial challenge is to take part in Reddit gift exchanges. Not only is she able to get to know fans from around the world via the social media website, but she receives unique gifts to add to her collection that she would not otherwise encounter at home. “If it wasn’t for the internet,” she said, “would you even know this stuff existed?” One item she was seeking at the time of the interview is a Martha Jones jacket. Companion to the Tenth Doctor, Martha Jones is seen in the show wearing a stylish red leather jacket. Asteraoth explained that the iconic clothing worn by the female characters in the show are hard to come by, and the jacket is harder than most since the character’s most recent appearance in *Doctor Who* was in 2010. Seeking and purchasing online, then, offers her an opportunity to acquire the jacket and other hard-to-come-by items that she would otherwise be unable to access. In terms of information behaviour, “the Internet becomes the first port of call for fans who want an item to start or complete that all-important collection” (Geraghty, 2014, p. 2), the resource and the space that is most essential to fan collectors today.

Speculating: More than meets the eye. The “speculator” is a rarer type of fan collector that collects “with an eye to return on investment” (Woo, 2018, p. 75). Woo’s (2018) study of fans only found evidence of speculation within the comic-book community among the fan cultures studied. Lee and Trace’s (2009) study found that serious rubber duck collectors researched pricing to buy and sell ducks using online social resources like Duckplanet and Ebay, but that casual collectors rarely engaged in speculation.

Interview participants that collected were more like the casual rubber duck collectors, sometimes demonstrating a passing interest in the commercial value of items (as when Aziraphale notes his rare copies of Previews magazine now sell for upwards of €300 on Ebay), but hardly ever actively engaged in reselling items to other collectors. However, speculation did emerge in one notable instance. Agnephil offers an example of a fan speculator in the context of toy collecting. His abiding interest in the *Transformers* franchise, and specifically with the toys,

has transformed into an online business. Table 4.2.13 provides the IB associated with Agnephi's example of speculating.

Table 4.2.13. Information behaviour associated with speculating.

Examples	Information behaviour	Theories and Concepts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Instagram</i> storefront for action figures (Agnephi) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing information about buying and selling with local collector community • Researching products, prices and product guides • Connecting with vendors and other collectors (social media, e-mail/phone, in-person) • Posting new lots on <i>Instagram</i> (photos and video) to sell to the extended collector community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) • Communities of play (Pearce & Artemesia, 2009)

As a child in the 1980s, he acquired many of the toys that inspired and made popular the original cartoon series and comics about robots in disguise. When he got older, they were stored in his parents' basement, and that is where they stayed until he reclaimed them as an adult with children of his own. Agnephi pointed out that the arid environment in the Midwest is especially conducive to maintaining pristine old toys. When he re-acquired his childhood toys, he felt the urge to resume collecting. Along with a group of friends, he regularly emptied out basements and sold the toys "for pretty good money"—those toys, that is, that he did not retain for his personal collection (see Figure 4.2.3). Agnephi's storefront was virtual, using the social media site *Instagram*.

Agnephi's rediscovery of the *Transformers* fandom led him to a new hobby: that of buying and selling vintage toys. The community of collectors he has joined in this hobby has resulted in what Lave and Wenger (1991) refer to as “situated learning”: the social process of mastering knowledge and skills to become a practitioner. He and his friends, local collectors that also sell toys, represent a community of practice, sharing information to negotiate meanings, values, and objectives related to speculation (Savolainen, 2007). Agnephi's information behaviour as it relates to speculating is

fixed within the context of this participatory social network. He seeks, shares, and applies information related to the practice of buying and selling these toys with his friends. Some of these interactions take place online via email, Twitter, and, most commonly, Instagram, but these digital encounters are embedded in broader, typically in-person practices: participating in the annual Pop Culture Fair, for example, meeting and chatting with his community members at such events and arranging purchases and sharing of large lots that include “emptying out basements”.



Figure 4.2.3. Photo from Agnephi's Instagram account, indicating the end of sale of InHumanoids action figures (shared with permission)



Figure 4.2.4. Photo of Agnephi's collection (shared with permission)

Agnephi sold his lots to a wider community of collectors that included non-speculators by posting photos on Instagram and asking interested buyers to direct message him through the social media application (see Figure 4.2.4). The seamless integration of web-based IB in Agnephi's example demonstrates how fan collector speculating can also be a onlife practice. His speculating practice also suggests a unique context for Pearce & Artemesia's (2009) proposed ludisphere (p. 57, previously discussed in Section 4.2.2). But rather than demarcating the networked and virtual space where players play, it refers to the onlife environment of Agnephi's collector community: a community of practice

that is also a community of play. His practice demonstrates how play crosses over from physical environments (basements, pop culture fairs) and objects (the toys themselves) to online environments (Instagram), and vice-versa. This is a unique expansion of Pearce & Artemesia's (2009) original concept that corresponds to Floridi's (2014) perspective of onlife experience.

Sharing with others, solitary enjoyment and what we do with our collections:

“You don’t even know!” Agnephí’s speculator behaviour was still, ultimately, motivated by his desire to grow and improve his personal collection. What fan collectors do with their collections is an important question, in itself. Lee and Trace’s (2009) rubber duck collectors shared photos of their collections on Duckplanet, a rubber duck fan community website (http://www.duckplanet.com/submissions_main.html). Ross (1999), Kofmel (1997), and Serantes (2011) provide evidence of what fan collectors of text-based items (readers of comics and books) do in terms of information behaviour. Collections, for these fans, are “mimetic traces”, that is, copies of the fan object itself in the form of the texts they enjoy (Duffett, 2013, p. 180). Enjoyment is the operative term, whether it is perceived as a solitary activity or a social one. Readers enjoy their books not just by reading them, but by learning from them, talking about them, and sharing them with others (Ross, 1999). In the same way, fan collectors enjoy their collections not just by acquiring and possessing items, but by arranging and displaying them for others to see, by talking about them, and by sharing the knowledge they have acquired through collecting. As Duffett (2013) points out, “items and information that fans accumulate *almost always* get used in a social sense” (p. 183, emphasis in original). Table 4.2.14 represents the IB associated with enjoying collections and sharing them with others.

Table 4.2.14. Information behaviour associated with enjoying and sharing collections.

Examples	Information behaviour	Theories and Concepts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Star Trek</i> memorabilia (Empyrean) • <i>Buffyverse</i> collection (Aziraphale) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arranging items on display • Displaying items as a means of sharing information • Sharing stories with others about an object or collection • Routinely reading, consulting, and admiring items on display 	<p>Social positioning theory (Van Langenhove & Harré, 1994)</p>

For the collection of mimetic items, particularly books, DVDs, and recordings, part of the intended use is to re-experience the performance; all interview participants collected such extensions of their fan object, even if they did not characterise it as “collecting”, since accessing such items is tantamount to enjoying the fan object / storyworld / fandom itself. Enjoyment and use, in these cases, was sometimes solitary (like when Uilleand read her collection of *Honorverse* novels), but is often social, such as when Razael re-watched *Star Trek* episodes with his father. The collection of merchandise and memorabilia was also quite common among participants. For Jael, who collected t-shirts of his favourite DC comics properties and *Mass Effect* jackets, and Asteraoth’s *Doctor Who* inspired fashions, use and enjoyment of the collection came from wearing it (see also Section 4.2.2, *Cosplaying and play/performance*, for discussion of “closet cosplay”, Smith, Stannar, & Kuttruff, 2020). The act of wearing fannish fashion is a way of signalling allegiance to a particular fandom, regardless of whether it demonstrates the productive individualising of fandom’s material cultures (Cherry, 2016) or the far less positive “domestication of fandom” (Stanfill, 2011, p. 78). When asked if his collection of *Star Trek* memorabilia and artwork constituted more than a hobby or less than a hobby, Empyrean said:

I spend lots of disposable income on this stuff, so... (laugh) It’s more than a hobby! Right? [...] People look at my collection, when they come in my computer room, that’s where I have most of the stuff displayed—although there is stuff throughout the house—but most of it is there. When they come in there, they look at the walls and they look around and go “Wo-o-ow, you’ve got a lot of stuff!” And I go, “This isn’t even the

half of it, man! You don't even know!" (laugh) So, I like that feeling though. I want people to be wowed when they see my stuff.

For Empyrean, being able to share his *Star Trek* "stuff" with others was part of the fun of collecting. This also earned him a degree of cultural capital, as he showed off the size of his collection. Displaying, then, can be understood broadly as IB related to what fans *do* with their collections; in other words, displaying is a way of communicating information about one's fandom and their knowledge of that fandom.

One way to understand the social ways that fans enjoy their collections is through positioning theory. As discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.3, social positioning is a theory that has been used to study power, trust, and cognitive authority in IB research (Case & Given, 2016; e.g., Genuis, 2012; McKenzie & Carey, 2013). While such studies have focused on developing models for decision-making based on the ways that individuals seek, access and value information, positioning theory is also useful for exploring how fan collectors use their collections to construct their fan identities. For example, Empyrean proudly displayed his collection to his friends to establish his identity as a Trekkie. Displaying was an invitation to "geek out" about *Star Trek*, and to challenge him on his knowledge of the esoterica of Trek. Similarly, Agnephi's Instagram posts of photos of his collection was a way to signal his identity as a collector and to engage with the community of *Transformers* collectors. To a lesser extent, Jael and Asteraoth's fashion choices can also be viewed as discursive, presenting an aspect of their identities as fans.

Solitary enjoyment of the collection is more challenging to pinpoint in participants' accounts. In a photo shared on Instagram of his collection, Agnephi wrote: "I'm sure there will be a time when this display fails to make me anything less than super happy, but today is not that day." This message—ironically, shared on social media—indicates that there is an aesthetically pleasing quality to the display that operates on a personal level. Aziraphale noted that, besides her partner, no one else got to see her treasured Faith knife or the rest of her *Buffy* collection: "I don't know if I would trust some of those [items] with anybody else because you can't get them anymore." Instead, the intrinsic aesthetic value and the pleasure derived from having the collection was more personal. Aziraphale said that she passed her collection and paused a few

minutes each day to admire it. This kind of personal enjoyment touches on the essence of collecting, and the concept of aura that was discussed earlier. Collecting can be understood as the reframing of objects according to context, and that the items and ephemera that make up a fan's collection are transformed (Geraghty, 2014, pp. 48-49). The significance of the object changes through the eyes of the fan collector, so that it becomes "a symbol of personal or collective identity" in the new context of the collection (Woo, 2018, p. 75). A fan's knowledge, therefore, is represented in the object: *information-as-thing* (Buckland, 1991). Collecting is made up of many IBs, but perhaps the most significant one is how the fan collector invests each physical object in their collection with symbolic value.

The IB described contribute an alternative perspective of collecting as a fan practice that is creative, productive, and transformational. Geraghty (2014), Hills (2009), and Woo (2018) have highlighted the problematic treatment of collector culture in fan studies research. In much the same way that Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) diminished the "fan" by limiting them to "lone consumption" (Geraghty, 2014, p. 18), historically fan studies has relegated the "collector" to the same forsaken corner. Both are instances of an ontological contradiction—a category error. Fan studies have avoided and marginalised collectors because collecting practices have traditionally been perceived as passive consumption. "Real" fans must be "producers, makers, and doers", therefore collectors—as passive consumers—cannot be "real" fans (Geraghty, 2014, p. 180). As Woo (2018) states, collecting framed as passive consumption is the epitome of the "bad" affirmational fan, whose uncritical support directly translates into profit for media companies (p. 78). Collecting appears to embrace neoliberal commercialization (Booth, 2015, p. 8). Most importantly, this problematic characterisation of the collector embodies stereotypes of the "obsessive" fan that scholars have long sought to debunk (Jenkins, 2017). This characterisation is the embodiment of hyperconsumerism, advertising all the deleterious qualities of Walter Benjamin's ironic portrait of the collector; that is, motivated by "dangerous though domesticated passions" (1978, p. 241) and the "chaos of memories" (1968, p. 60), a person for whom "ownership is the most intimate relationship one can have with objects" (p. 67). The study of fan collectors through the lens of IB provides a different perspective that is grounded in the lived experiences of onlife fans like these participants. Collecting is not passive consumption but rather an active and vibrant process of identity construction within which collectors are able to

assert themselves as fans and “inhabit” the texts, storyworlds, and fan objects that their collections represent (de Certeau, 1984, p. xxi).

4.3. Fan Identities: Ways of Being

*[Being a fan] is everything. It's everything I am, it's every piece of me.
...it's part of everything I do. There's not a single thing that's not part of
it.*

(Kerra, interview participant)

Being a fan can mean many things. Outside the subcultures of fandom, popular mainstream sources have constructed media fans as zealots and religious devotees (Jewett & Lawrence, 1977), as psychopathic, unbalanced, obsessive, and pathological (Burchell, 1986; Jenson, 1991), and as “geeks” and “nerds” that represent the “remainder purged from hegemonic masculinity” (Woo, 2018, p. 10). These portrayals imply that fans “are drawn inward toward a rich and varied realm of personal fantasy that substitutes for the decisive action they fail to display in their everyday lives” (Jenkins, 1992/2013, p. 14). Many of these stereotypes persist today. The popular sitcom *The Big Bang Theory* (2007-2019) embraced fan stereotypes rather than dispelled them. Even though its main protagonists are fans, their fannish behaviours were self-deprecatingly played for laughs by showing how different, how *other*, they are from the mainstream viewer. This had the questionable benefit of providing positive representations of “geeks” (Woo, 2018, p. 3) that normalise a particular flavour of fandom, while at the same time painting the whole of fan culture as a harmless, divergent curiosity.

From within fan subcultures, there is a far more complex view of fan identity. As described in Chapter 1 (Section 1.3), fans are readers, viewers, players, and producers; but, within these different contextual spheres, individuals construct and present their fan selves in dynamic ways. Section 4.1.1 introduced the chapter with a quote from Malakh that indicated, if a person practices fandom, then it is not *just* a hobby; it is an identity. The discourse around connotations of hobby and identity in fandom pre-exists FS scholarship by decades.

The dichotomous abbreviations FIJAGH (Fandom is Just a Goddamned Hobby) and FIAWOL (Fandom is a Way of Life) originated in the science fiction fandoms of the early-to-mid 20th century (Axler, 1977; Eney, 1959, p. 62; fanlore, n.d.). The use of these phrases within

science fiction fan subcultures “proudly, disgustedly, apologetically, or how you will” (Eney, 1959, p. 62) illustrates how the internal experience of fandom is socially constructed, and how individual fans define their fan identities in different ways and in different contexts. This holds just as true today, in the onlife experiences of interview participants. Some fans are proud of their commitment to a storyworld or fandom. Some are apologetic or self-deprecating. Some appear to be disgusted at how much of their lives are centred around fandom, at how they perceive themselves as fitting one descriptive term or the other, and at how others model one term or the other. Malakh’s words help us understand that there are multiple internal and external processes that contribute to identification as a fan. The external aspect is what Malakh referred to as “hobby”: the easily observable and visible actions of participants (i.e., what one *does* as a fan).

The preceding sections of this chapter capture this aspect of the onlife practice of fandom. Identity, which can move fluidly between self-perceptions of fan engagement as a hobbyist or the more profound engagement suggested by the phrase “way of life”, is internalised and harder to discern than actions. Distinguishing the underlying internal life of the fan requires a deeper exploration of how participants positioned themselves as fans in interviews. This is the focus of the current section. The initial affective response to the experience of media that incites a deeper interest, the personal connections and reasons perceived for that affective response, and the sustained, ongoing engagement with the fan object together shape a history (or “self-narrative”, Williams, 2015, pp. 20-24) of self-as-fan. The following sections explore participants’ self-construction and self-presentation as *ways of being*.

To provide context for the discussion of results that follows, it is important to consider Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical analysis of interaction in everyday life. He proposed that people perform social identities as if from behind a mask, or “front”: a combination of the props, presence, expressions, and attitudes employed by a person that together present a particular self-image (Fine & Manning, 2009, p. 46). This should not be considered as fundamentally inauthentic or deceptive, but rather the relevant expression of one’s own, internally constructed self to a given scenario, context, and audience. As a sensitising concept then, masks are *facets* of one’s identity that are perceived and interpreted by others. The ways of being explored in this section examine the different facets of fan identity that emerged from interviews.

A second sensitising concept is Goffman's (1974) frame analysis, which was introduced in Chapter 2 (Section 2.5). Frames are used throughout the results to refer to a person's social orientation, or context. Just as a facet is that aspect of an identity that is presented and perceived, a frame is the context in which it is presented. Onlife fan identities that emerged from interviews are considered from three distinct frames that explore facets of the fan: *fan-becoming*, *casual/serious fans*, and *compassionate/toxic fans*.

4.3.1. Core Identities: Fan-becoming

It is probably no mere historical accident that the word person, in its first meaning, is a mask. It is rather a recognition of the fact that everyone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role... it is in these roles that we know each other; it is in these roles that we know ourselves.

(Park, 1950, as cited in Goffman, 1959, p. 19)

Each interview started with a conversation about the origins and points of entry to fandom, where the participant described how they became fans of a particular character, storyworld, or fan object. For example, Jael recalled watching the original trilogy of *Star Wars* films for the first time with his mother, and immediately feeling a connection to the world and its characters: "She had them on VHS, one of the first things I remember sitting down and watching was them." Similarly, Empyrean linked his Trekkie identity back to childhood, when his uncle babysat him and together, they would watch episodes of *Star Trek*: "As soon as I saw, I was enthralled. I wanted to know more about this starship and wow! This is so cool; they get to go and explore things! Yeah, that was the spark!" Kerra, whose father owned a comic book store, recalled learning about comics, artists, and fandoms as a child growing up among the racks and stacks of comic books: "I was a first born so it was something we could do together, you know. I remember watching the cartoons...reading... they would kind of teach me things at the store and show me these panels, or these artists, or whatever." Her fan interest in the X-Men and the Marvel universe started there, in those shared moments in the store with her father. Her identity as a fan, therefore, like Jael's and Empyrean's, was generationally inherited. Agnephie described, with relish, the Saturday morning cartoons of his 1980s childhood that shaped his fantasy worlds

and later led to his adult interests as a collector of toys and action figures. These formative experiences with narrative, art, and fantasy have influenced his path towards becoming an artist and cartoonist himself. Agnephil reflected on how his own experiences represent that initial spark that inspired many fans later in life in their hobbyist activities and professional pursuits:

I grew up in a small town with two channels. And you would get up at 6:25 every Saturday morning, and you'd put the thing on, you'd listen to the TV heat up before it turned on, and then you'd look at the head with the Indian chief on it in black and white for five minutes, and then *Pee Wee's Play House* would come on. That was just what you would be doing until golf came on at 12:30. The funny thing is, a lot of those shows I don't even remember. I must have watched twelve of those shows a day, but I can't... thinking of it, but I can't remember most of them. But the ones that did stick with me, those are the ones that stuck and become a persistent thing throughout my life. ...You see the results of that sort of thing with people our own age who have gone into comics or gone into video games, have gone into...animation. A lot of people get to work on rebooted versions of these franchises as well. The great thing about that is that they're able to take that sense of wonder and energy that you have when you're twelve and you're too dumb to understand what narrative is, or what character is... Those people are actually able to turn that into something satisfying. And that's something I try to bring to my own work. That same sense of, ah, of thrill, the wildness of it all, that you have when you're a kid.

Isolating the moments when participants first recognise themselves as fans, and then recognise themselves as fans among a larger community of fans, helps us to understand how the construction of self occurs in the mediated space. This is *fan-becoming*, where initial media experiences are internalised, and fan identity is constructed.

One key observation from all participants' experiences is that moments of fan-becoming are inextricably linked to media consumption. Being a consumer is a precondition of being a fan; not all consumers may identify themselves as fans, but all fans are, by definition, consumers in the ways they read, watch/view, play, and otherwise engage (as described in Chapter 1, Sections 1.3 and 1.4). As Sandvoss (2005) explains,

[i]t has become impossible to discuss popular consumption without reference to fandom and fan theory, just as it has become next to impossible to find realms of public life which are unaffected by fandom – from the intermingling of show business, sports and politics to the everyday life talk about one's favourite music, television show or film.
(p. 3)

In this sense, behind every facet of fan identity is a pre-existing consumer identity. This also indicates that all fan identities are consumer identities, making the results of this study likewise valuable for those studying consumers and consumer practices. All participants in this study exhibited elements of several facets of fan identity (Table 4.3.1). The examples outlined here are representative of the different *ways of being* of media fans.

Table 4.3.1 Different facets of fan-becoming and related examples of onlife experience.

Facet	Definition	Examples
Nostalgic fan (Esme, Agnephi)	A person that is motivated to relive an initial affective response to media.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subscribing to podcasts and entertainment news websites. • Connecting with other fans via social media. • Hunting down and sharing fan collectibles using websites and social media.
Maker fan	A person that is inspired to creatively extend their interaction with media through production.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designing, making, and displaying cosplay costumes. • Writing and posting fanfiction on Archive of Our Own.
Social fan	A person whose engagement in fandom is motivated by a desire to share their affective response to media with others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consuming media (watching, reading, playing) with family and friends. • Meeting and making friends with other fans online via fan websites and social media. • Planning and participating in in-person meet-ups.
Curatorial fan	A person whose identity is defined by the activities of collecting the information, texts, and material objects of fandom.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acquiring and collecting traces of a fan object. • Making traces accessible to others by sharing photos or information online, lending copies of texts, or reselling collectibles. • Researching sources to develop esoteric knowledge related to the fan object.

Nostalgia can be understood as a yearning to relive a past feeling (Geraghty, 2014). It reaches back to that fixed moment in a fan’s memory when they first encountered a fan object and were moved by it. In this sense, nostalgia is a powerful emotion, because it motivates the ongoing pursuit to relive that elusive initial affective response to media. To be motivated in this way is to be a **nostalgic fan**. Esme’s origin story follows the familiar generational pattern observed previously with other participants like Jael, Empyrean, and Kerra. “This all started ever since I was really young. My uncle introduced me to WWE [World Wrestling Entertainment], and we would watch it on a regular basis.” She explained that she became invested in professional wrestlers’ personas, like The Undertaker and Stone Cold Steve Austin, from watching them on television while growing up in the Philippines (“I really watched during the Attitude Era... I stopped watching sometime in the early 2000s...”). She does not remember why exactly she stopped watching, but her childhood engagement with the program was broken when

she got older and moved away from home. Later, as an adult living in Canada, she returned to WWE and wrestling fandom with a more sophisticated understanding of the sport and a critical eye for the story that unfolds on the mat. “As an adult, you know that it’s scripted. And you’re also watching their moves and stuff, you’re seeing that there’s sort of a technical aspect that you can appreciate.” She sought out podcasts and entertainment news sites that cover wrestling to stay informed and interacted with other fans on Twitter and through the mobile game *WWE SuperCards*. Her fan activities as an adult were much more elaborate than they were as a child, when her engagement was limited to watching events on television and hearing her uncle talk about them. The various methods of her onlife engagement are explored in more detail in section 4.3.2.

Despite the transformation in her engagement brought on by the accumulation of experience, maturity, and technological change, the way Esme described herself and her fan identity remained fixed in nostalgia. Her interest in the fan object is rooted in memory and recapturing how she felt when she first witnessed the raw physical struggle between faces and heels¹⁵, when the dramatic conflict playing out in the ring felt most real and authentic. Esme explained:

[I] started watching again about 3 or 4 years ago and I just remembered how it felt, you know, to watch something like that. And I don’t even remember the time that I found out it was scripted or fake or whatever, I think it’s just kind of like a Santa Claus thing. I don’t really remember how I found out that he [The Undertaker] was not real! But maybe that kind of... maybe that kind of affected me, and that’s why I kind of stopped watching.

From this characterisation of the authenticity and performance of wrestling as “a Santa Claus thing”, it becomes clear how Esme romanticised her childhood experiences around wrestling, and how wrestling resonated for her even after returning to it as an adult years later. Geraghty

¹⁵Professional wrestling is bound by narrative that dictates who the audience should cheer for between opponents that face off in the ring. A wrestler in any appearance is cast either as a hero (“babyface” or “face”) or villain (“heel”) (Hill, 2015).

(2014) notes that nostalgia “is not so much about loss but a romance of the self and a celebration of historical texts that no longer disappear thanks to new media technologies and the spaces of fan interaction.” (p. 4) Notions of nostalgia and memory, as discussed previously in Section 4.2.3, are as much about the creation of contemporary fan identity as the recreation of the past. Esme constructed her identity as a wrestling fan around the idealised memory of her youth, but that fan identity played out in real and authentic ways in the present through her ongoing onlife engagement with the fandom. From an information perspective, we can reflect on how the meaning of information changes over time because of engagement and through an internal process of identity construction. Waugh’s (2017) teen nerdfighters, for example, encountered the Vlogbrothers on YouTube or through the novel *The Fault in Our Stars* (as discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.3), but the information creation and sharing practices that developed once they became part of the community altered the significance of their original encounters with source texts. Esme’s example contributes to this understanding of how the meaning of information can change through sustained engagement and memory making.

Agnephi marked a similar trajectory as a nostalgic fan. He compared the differences between media consumption as a child and as an adult:

...We all have that sort of evolution as children. There’s stuff that you’re into, and you’re really into it for a while. And sometimes it sticks, but it doesn’t really become a part of your identity when you’re young. ‘Cause when you’re a kid, you’ll try a little bit of everything. Every kid’s a poet, every kid’s a dancer, every kid’s an artist, until they decide they’re no good at it, or someone tells them that it’s not that great, or they have a friend that’s way better at it than them and they decide that they can’t compete. It was just a consistent, I just liked different things, up until a certain point. And then the magical 30-year nostalgia cycle hit.

For Agnephi, becoming a fan is an internal process that takes years. The characters and stories that stuck with him as a child are what he recalled and was drawn to 30 years later. The ability to access much of that original content through the internet, to hunt down and share collectibles through social media, and to connect with other fans and collectors thanks to ICTs contributed to

Agnephi's adult engagement in onlife ways (as seen in Sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.3), driven by his sense of nostalgia.

A **maker fan** is someone inspired to creatively extend their interaction with media through production. As discussed in detail in Section 4.2.1, *Making Cosplay*, Amriel first encountered the fan activity of cosplay by happenstance, while covering a fan convention for her online magazine. When she saw how other fans used cosplay as a creative outlet for engaging with their fandoms by making costumes and playing their favourite characters, it suddenly evoked a hidden passion. "Cosplay and streaming, that is my life." Amriel was a fan before discovering cosplay as a form of fan production; she read comics and books, watched television shows and movies, played and streamed video games on Twitch, wrote articles about fandom, and engaged with other fans in-person and online. However, the practice of making cosplay costumes with her own spin on the characters they represent, and playing the role she had co-created, sparked a new aspect of her identity as a fan. "I haven't stopped since," she said, and now that creative spark evoked by cosplay had become an indelible part of her fan identity.

Isthi was similarly inspired to write fanfiction when she discovered the online multi-fandom archives Archive of Our Own (AO3) and FanFiction.Net (FFN) (see Section 4.2.1, *Writing and Sharing Fanfic*, for details). Isthi's initial encounters with fic allowed her to develop her own identity as a young adult by exploring queer readings of her favourite narratives. Her creative engagement through writing and sharing fic was now how she defined herself as a fan ("I'm primarily a content creator and consumer, in terms of fan works"). Aziraphale, Rhamiel, and Kerra also exemplified qualities of the maker fan, through the examples discussed in Section 4.2.1. From an information perspective, the construction of a maker identity demonstrates an engagement with information creation (Huvila, et al., 2020; Huvila, 2022). In the context of IB, underlying material making (whether the product is a text, a costume, a video, a graphic, an artwork, or something else) is information making, the creation and dissemination of a) information that is related to the production (i.e., observable processes, techniques, and skills for creating an object) and b) semantic information invested in the production (i.e., information which contributes new content and new interpretations related to a character or storyworld). This means that fans like Amriel, whose "discerning eye" sparks creative ideas for new maker

projects (described in Section 4.2.1, *Making Cosplay*), are also positioning themselves socially as fans who can synthesise narrative information to contribute something new to the fandom.

Makers may think of themselves as transformational, in the sense of the word used by obsession_inc (2009; cf. Booth, 2015, pp. 12-13), meaning that they are taking the original source text and changing it according to their desires. Amriel's gender-bending Khal Drogo cosplay, and gender-bending cosplay in general (Turk, 2019), is an example of a transformational maker identity. But it can also be affirmational, encyclopaedic, and celebrational (Booth, 2015; Price, 2017); Rhamiel's Wonder Woman cosplay and Sailor Moon fanvids (as discussed in Section 4.2.1) are not intended to be transformational. Instead, her making is intended to celebrate the source texts of her fandoms. Similarly, Kerra's website making is encyclopaedic (Price, 2017, p. 292, p. 318) and *archontic* (Derecho, 2006; see also Chapter 2, Section 2.4), in the sense that she aggregated content specific to a television program or celebrity, with the purpose of sharing it with fans. Nevertheless, her making constitutes a synthesis of information sources to produce something new that fans can engage with paratextually. These observations indicate that maker identity is complex and fundamentally information based.

A **social fan** is someone whose engagement in fandom is motivated by a desire to share their affective response to media with others. Uilleand admitted she had a knack for making fast friends in online fandom: "It's what I do, it's my talent, they're my tribe. ...what I tend to do is bounce between site to site to site and then just collect the people I like." "Finding your tribe" is a recurring theme encountered in most interviews and strikes at the heart of what it means to belong to a fan subculture. Pearce and Artemesia (2009) explores fan subcultures through the concept of communities of play (as discussed previously in Section 4.2.2) and in the context of virtual worlds. Uilleand's onlife interactions with her RP collaborators and with other fans she encountered in forums represent the social context of communities of play.

While not all participants defined their fan identities in relation to their interactions with other fans (for example, Aziraphale's collecting of *Buffy* memorabilia, as discussed in Section 4.2.3, is a solitary activity), most participants associated their personal media engagement with social engagement. For instance, Rhamiel associated her fannish enthusiasm for *Supernatural*

with time that she shared with her younger brother watching and discussing the television series. Out of all the participants, Uilleand most strongly identified as a social fan. With eclectic interests, including *Star Wars*, *Mass Effect* and *So You Think You Can Dance?* (SYTYCD), Uilleand made many friends over the years through her engagement with other fans online on web forums and social media. She adopted what she called an “aggressively friendly” approach to communicating with people on fan websites. Uilleand viewed her socialisation as a kind of mission and an antidote to toxic behaviours and attitudes in online fan communities.

Just look at the *Star Wars* fandom. On the surface you’d be, like, I am not going near that sludge pit, right? Like, some of it is deeply, deeply toxic, deeply misogynistic... but you slide your way in there and you find the gems. And I’m like, nope, you’re coming with me. Someday, someday I’ll collect enough that we’ll all be... aggressively positive, aggressively friendly fans of various things.

Uilleand shared several different stories of meeting other fans online and drawing them into her “tribe”, most notably her experiences with other SYTYCD fans. In 2007, she joined a fan website that supported the show contestant Mark Kanemura, where she discussed the show, Mark, and dancing, and got to know many of these other fans as friends. These digital relationships spilled over into analogue life in different ways. In one instance, she planned a meet-up at a live event on the SYTYCD tour (which follows the airing of each season of the televised reality dance competition) with five other fans. In another, the community had a quilt made and gifted it to Mark at a meet-and-greet after a show:

Everybody sent digital images for this girl to print out in Nebraska and she printed them out and she sewed a silk quilt that was like 8 feet by 8 feet...and each one of the squares was from all these different people all over the world.

Uilleand explained that Mark’s mother, Nora, joined their community on the fan website as well, to support her son in the show and on tour and experience his success vicariously through his fans. Uilleand emailed everyone on the site for donations to arrange a flight and hotel room for

Nora to attend the final show of the tour in Tampa, Florida. She and two dozen other fans from the community also converged on the live event in Tampa:

...Nora got to see her son perform live in this huge performance. She got us backstage passes, every single one of us, so we got to go back to talk with all the dancers and we loved them all and we got to present to him [Mark] this certificate for, like, I think it ended up being \$1,100 to donate to his dance studio and to a program at his dance studio.

This experience demonstrates what being a social fan in onlife practice means. Uilleand's identity as a fan is constructed around her ongoing quest to find "her tribe", which plays out across the analogue, the digital, and the mediated spheres of her daily life. From an information perspective, a fan's social identity is characterised by the qualities of media fan IB that are "generous" and "participatory and collaborative" (Price, 2017, p. 320).

A **curatorial fan** is someone whose identity is defined by the activities of collecting the information, texts, and material objects of fandom. At the start of our interview, Emphyrean explained:

What makes *me* a fan is my interest in the subject, whether it be comic books or *Star Trek*. It's just a very great interest in the subject itself and usually the peripheral things. So, it's not just watching the show or reading the comic book, but collecting something from...that. And that is like, WAY wide open. (laugh)

A curatorial fan prides themselves on the expert knowledge they have developed through the sustained activity of collecting. In the sense that archives, like storyworlds and fandoms, are perpetually open and ever expanding, curatorial fans are like archivists. They are preoccupied with "unifying", "identifying", "classifying", and "consigning" information to their own personal collections that they can reference and enjoy in solitude, share with other fans, and use as social currency within fan communities (Derrida, 1995, p. 3). As mentioned in the context of the maker fan and discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.4, other fan researchers have used the term archontic to refer to this facet of fan identity (De Kosnik, 2016; Derecho, 2006). In my conversation with

Empyrean, I mentioned spotting a pristine copy of Bjo Trimble's (1977) *Star Trek Concordance* at a yard sale and asked if he was familiar with the book. His reaction was immediate:

Oh! That is the coolest thing! It is the very first book written by Bjo Trimble. ...It [the *Concordance*] was like the very first *Star Trek* book I ever bought when I was like... I'm pretty sure I was eleven. And I had to save up my five dollars to go to Coles bookstore and buy it!

This exchange explains the role the *Concordance* and acquisition of it played in Empyrean's formation as a fan. It demonstrates how the collecting of traces was central to his *Star Trek* fandom from a young age. An important observation about onlife experience from Empyrean's interview, however, was when he admitted that, if he had encountered *Star Trek* later in life, he would not have the extensive library of physical texts he has now. Instead, he would consume all that textual content related to the television series electronically by computer and ereader. As a participant whose fan engagement began and developed in a predigital world, Empyrean represents an important cross-section of the interview sample that permits the comparison of ways of being and doing before and after the start of the information age that Floridi (2014) loosely associates with the start of the 21st century. Empyrean's comment demonstrates that the archontic practices of curatorial fans are not stymied by ICTs, but rather are transformed in the virtual environments of onlife, where digital texts are perceived as more accessible and useful than physical ones.

The curatorial facet of fan-becoming emerged in other ways, besides an initial focus on acquisition. As discussed in Section 4.2.3, Aziraphale and Agnephie also exhibited this facet of fan-becoming in characteristic ways. Agnephie played with the action figures of his favourite Saturday morning cartoons when he was child, and later as an adult rediscovered his fandom as a speculator buying, selling, and displaying action figures from his collection on Instagram and at pop culture fairs. Aziraphale's curated collection of Willow/Tara and Buffy/Faith media and memorabilia is for her own enjoyment and not something she shares with others. Her desire for completeness, to facilitate her solitary immersion in the relationships of the *Buffyverse* storyworld (for more details, refer to Section 4.2.3, *Seeking and Hunting*), provides evidence of how this collecting activity has contributed to her fan identity.

Curation can also take on other forms, besides the collecting of material objects. As mentioned previously, Kerra curated photos and information about her favourite performers and television programs and shared them online in websites that she created and managed (see also Section 4.2.1, *Making Websites*). Kerra's many fan websites are, in essence, the archives of her fandoms. As previously noted in the description for the social fan, Uilleand collected "gems": friends that she made online through her encounters with other fans. This constitutes a unique form of collection, based on the curation of relationships, rather than objects, texts, or information. Uilleand also collected knowledge, in the form of esoterica, which she employed in her RP and fanfiction. For example, she learned to speak the fictional Mandalorian language "Mandolatty" through various online sources to write dialogue for her original characters. The curatorial facet of fan-becoming is particularly useful because it is where we can most clearly witness the knowledge-based politics of fan identity start to play out, as it encapsulates any definition of fan that is based on possessing sufficient knowledge about a fan object. Knowledge represents power: the power to establish and defend a fan's claim to fandom. Asserting fan identity is one powerful motivator for the IB of participants discussed in Section 4.2.

The four facets described in this section (the nostalgic fan, the maker fan, the social fan, and the curatorial fan) represent the core identities observed in participants' perspectives. Each participant exhibited aspects of the different facets, to one degree or another, through their own self-narrative. This means that these facets are not mutually exclusive, but rather inform the construction and presentation of fan's identity in different ways and in different contexts. Some participants, like Amriel and Isthi, define their fan-selves as makers through their commitment to maker projects and content creation. For them, the maker fan facet is the most visible mask or persona that they perform. Similarly, for Esme the facet that is most evident is nostalgic, for Uilleand it is social, and for Empyrean it is curatorial. For some participants, like Agnephi, Aziraphale, Kerra, and Rhamiel, multiple facets were manifested in interviews depending on the context of the story.

All of these represent different ways of *being*, which complement the practices, or ways of doing, that were the subject previously of Section 4.2. For example, the making practices and specific information behaviours described by Amriel and Isthi in Section 4.2.1 inform the specific ways they identify themselves as maker fans. From an IB perspective, ways of being are

significant for understanding how information is internalised and used in social construction and positioning (Given, 2002). Beyond fan-becoming, the moment in which participants situated the first manifestations of their fan identity, interviews also offered glimpses of other facets that are more challenging to isolate. The following sections further explore these more challenging aspects related to the social construction of fan identity through the concepts of engagement, impact, and intentionality.

4.3.2. *Spectra of Engagement: Casual/Serious Fans*

To define fan is a fraught activity, but generally, a fan is taken to be someone who engages within a subculture organized around a specific object of study, be it Star Trek, science fiction literature, Sherlock Holmes, anime, comics, gaming, or sports. Fans engage in a range of activities related to their passion: they write derivative literature called fan fiction, they create artworks, they write what's known as meta (analyses of fandom itself, or analysis of analysis), they play role-playing games, they blog, they make fan vids, and they organize and attend conventions. Not least, they create and pass along a culture, with its attendant rules of behaviour and acceptability.

(Hellekson, 2009, p. 5)

Commonly accepted definitions of *fan* emphasise active, participatory, and productive practices (Fiske, 1992; Hellekson, 2009; Jenkins, 2002; Sandvoss, 2005, p. 8-9); in this way, fans are distinguished from other consumers. The practices described by the participants were often active, participatory, and productive, so they could be objectively labelled as fans according to historical definitions. This analysis, however, examines how participants perceived themselves to be fans, within the broader context and discourse of fandom, and moreover how that perception played out online through the media and technologies of their engagement.

The following two sections (on casual, serious, compassionate, and toxic identities) explore the most challenging facets of fan identity that emerged from the interviews. In the case of serious fans and casual fans, the challenge was that each participant tacitly classified themselves as one or the other in various fannish contexts based on their self-construction, but

they had difficulty justifying why that was the case. The vagueness of both words, which are commonly used to describe media engagement and fandom, contribute to this challenge. *Serious* implies a greater (or extraordinary) engagement in fandom and resulting authenticity when asserting fan identities, to the exclusion of more casual engagement (i.e., just as “serious leisure” seekers are distinguished from “casual leisure” seekers, Stebbins, 2007/2015). Being described, or describing oneself, as a *casual fan* implies that you are less of a fan than someone that is serious. In short, being casual denotes ordinary engagement and being serious denotes extraordinary engagement with fandom.

Both terms, however, are highly subjective and easily employed as surrogates for various identity politics at play in fan cultures. For instance, as is described in greater detail below in her own words, Isthi experienced a dissonance between how she perceived herself and how she felt or expected to be perceived by others. At times, she did not think of herself as “hardcore” (i.e., serious), but would then encounter instances where she could clearly compare herself to other fans and see herself as such. This dissonance related to fan identification is a topic of interest in FS scholarship that has been taken up elsewhere, such as in the discourse of the “fake geek girl” (Scott, 2019). What emerged most clearly from interviews was that, while *serious* and *casual* are commonly perceived as dichotomous, they manifested as overlapping facets similar to the core identities discussed previously in Section 4.3.1. Participants’ experiences revealed that the facets of the serious and casual fan could be worn at different times, based on personal contexts and whether they wished to present their engagement as either ordinary or extraordinary (see Table 4.3.2).

Table 4.3.2 Facets of the serious fan and the casual fan.

Facet	Definition
Serious fan	<p>A subjective measure of how engaged a person is as a fan compared to an ideal that they have constructed through their interactions with other fans. The following are indices of extraordinary engagement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A person that invests a significant amount of resources (time, money, effort) to fan activities. • A person for whom fandom represents “more than a hobby” and “a way of life”. • A person that possesses expert knowledge about the fan object and storyworld.
Casual fan	<p>A subjective measure of how engaged a person is as a fan compared to an ideal that they have constructed through their interactions with other fans. The following are indices of ordinary engagement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A person that considers their investment of resources (time, money, effort) in fan activities to be insignificant. • A person for whom fandom represents “just a hobby”. • A person that possesses limited knowledge about the fan object and storyworld.

Questioning how each participant perceived themselves to be a fan revealed that the ways people employ labels like “serious”, “real”, “hardcore”, “hyper”, and “super” to describe fan engagement obscure the more complicated politics at play. The stereotypes associated with the labels “serious” and “casual” in fandom offer an opportunity for participants to question their usage and to dig more deeply into the complexity of fan identity. The perception observed in the participants’ accounts is that serious fans are more authentically fans because they demonstrate a deeper engagement with the fan object through participatory activities, while more casual fans are less engaged in fandom and fan activities that extend beyond ordinary media consumption. The results suggest that the facets, or masks, of the serious fan and the casual fan are instead more accurately represented as a spectrum of attitudes, where one mask can be discarded and replaced with the other depending on the context. In other words, all participants demonstrated ways in which they were being “serious” and ways they were being “casual” in their fan engagement.

From the outset, these facets of fan identity are challenging because the meanings of “serious” and “casual” are fluid. Each participant’s perspective revealed a closely held subjective ideal for what being a fan means—what Woo (2019) refers to as the exemplary fan (p. 10).

Participants defined “serious” variously as:

- someone that invests significant resources (time, money, effort) into their engagement;
- someone that considers their engagement to be “more than a hobby”, not unlike the difference between serious and casual leisure described by Stebbins (2007/2015);
- and someone that possesses expert knowledge about the fan object.

These characterisations of seriousness represent engagement in fandom that surpasses ordinary consumption practices; serious fandom means extraordinary engagement. I consider these to be indices for the subjective measure of seriousness (as indicated previously in Table 4.3.2). In contrast, casual fandom is all manner of engagement that fails to meet the threshold for seriousness: it is ordinary engagement. This generalisation and typology of fans contributes to the politics of exclusion, or *othering* (Duffett, 2014; Rohleder, 2014). They fuel stereotypes, such as that of the “fake geek girl”, to justify gatekeeping and more toxic behaviours (discussed in the next Section, 4.3.3) (Scott, 2019; Woo, 2018, pp. 184-186). Interpretations of both serious and casual descriptions of fandom are defined in the mind of the individual in relation to others. The spectrum of serious/casual fans, then, represents a subjective measure of how engaged a person is as a fan compared to an ideal that they have constructed through their interactions with other fans.

Perspectives on seriousness. Interview results suggest that levels of engagement and self-presentation vary significantly based on an individual’s context in relation to others. For example, because Dagiél measured himself against others to shape his personal ideal of the fan, he considered the limited hours he devoted to his fandoms to be insufficient and therefore labelled himself as casual. Nevertheless, the hours he spent came at a personal cost that indicated his engagement with fan objects was significant. Undervaluing one’s own engagement because it does not match a subjective ideal was a common occurrence in interviews with Asteraoth, Rhamiel, Tabrith, Jael, Codec, Eriner, and Dagiél. These participants were less confident in describing themselves as serious fans. Meanwhile, participants like Aziraphale, Esme, Empyrean, Uilleand, and Razael cast themselves confidently in that role. Malakh, Kerra, Amriel,

Isthi, and Agnephi presented more balanced perspectives, acknowledging activities and practices that were more significant to them while recognising how fandom is often perceived as either too extreme or not extreme enough by others. From the analysis of these self-presentations, participants' accounts offer a more nuanced perspective of casual and serious as facets of fan identity.

Rhamiel, whose fic reading, DIY projects, and artistic endeavours were discussed earlier in the context of *Making* (Section 4.2.1), hesitated before asserting that she was a serious fan. "I don't want to say yes... but I think so, because I'm kind of going over anyone I know... If you're really, really into it, you just want more constantly." Her response indicated that she was hedging, unsure of whether to present herself within the context of the interview as serious or not. By comparison, Isthi reflected on the possible definitions of serious fandom and how they might apply in her context:

...to me it could mean two things: either a "serious fan" is someone who's very hardcore into it, or "serious" could be someone who takes fandom seriously. I guess I would consider myself both in certain ways... I'm not one of the people who, you know, contributes to the Wikia page or updates the Wikipedia entry... But then I talk to my friends and I'm just like, oh, no I'm definitely, I'm definitely that hardcore fan who knows what that episode was titled and when it aired... (laughs) And then in terms of taking fandom seriously, I mean, I think that's a large part of my project, both academically and as a writer, a content creator, is taking fandom seriously both as a social institution and as a literary tradition and artistic tradition, and by valuing that, we are sort of valuing women's labour, and queer labour, and sort of low brow content creation as opposed to the relative elitism of film and TV and publishing.

Isthi explained that, when she is involved in solitary engagement, such as watching a television program, video, or reading a book or fanfiction, she does not feel like she is "hardcore". It is only through conversations with other fans that she realises she is serious in that particular sense of the word. This definition links seriousness with specialised knowledge and is

therefore analogous to Duffett's (2014) "knowing field" as the basis of fandom (as introduced in Chapter 1, Section 1.4). Isthi distinguishes this aspect of seriousness from the notion of "taking fandom seriously", that is, treating it as not "just a hobby", to use Malakh's words (i.e., a mere diversion), but as a source of personal fulfillment.

This distinction is analogous to Stebbins' (2007/2015) use of the word in his serious leisure perspective. Despite the thoughtful deconstruction of the label of *serious*, Isthi's musing betrayed an uncertainty in using it that is similar to Rhamiel's hedging response. Esme and Empyrean were much more self-assured in assuming the label of serious fan. "Totally," Empyrean said. "Yeah, you're not gonna trip me up on *Star Trek* stuff. Put me in *Jeopardy!*, I will win." And, "to me, it's not just a story line," Esme said about her wrestling fandom. "It *is* a form of entertainment, for sure, but at the same time it's like something I'm really passionate about. If I wasn't 4'10"...I'd probably be wrestling!" Empyrean considered his expert knowledge of *Star Trek* trivia as a sign of high engagement, not unlike how Isthi characterised a "hardcore fan" that can demonstrate their knowledge to their peers. Esme interpreted "serious" in the same way that scholars like Stebbins (2007/2015) and Hartel, Cox and Griffin (2016) use it for "serious leisure". Her wrestling fandom was not just about engaging with media for entertainment but was a labour-intensive undertaking that she took seriously. Much like Isthi's career aspiration as a content creator that can elevate fan works, Esme indicated that, if not for her physical limitation, she would be a wrestler.

Other participants reflected on their fan identities in ways that problematised a binary between facets of the serious fan and the casual fan. Some of their activities, particularly more forms of consumption they perceived as ordinary or requiring a lower threshold of engagement, were characterised as casual, in the sense that they may not be social enough, laborious enough, productive enough, or extreme enough to fit a subjective ideal. For example, Dagiel described stealing brief moments at night to play *Civilization V*, a video game and franchise he loved, when his children are asleep. It is the only time he could find to play, and he believed that a more serious fan would invest more time to play, mod, or otherwise engage with the game. Asteraoth found much enjoyment in playing the mobile game *Pokémon Go*, which also helped keep her fit. She considered herself a serious Pokémon fan but worried that because her primary form of engagement was through a mobile game, other Pokémon fans might disagree. Both Esme and

Empyrean also enjoyed playing mobile games that are extensions of their fandoms (*WWE SuperCards* and *Star Trek: Timelines*), which are ostensibly a less intense form of fannish participation and engagement. Isthi perceived herself as less “hardcore” because she did not have occasion to regularly exhibit expert knowledge in social group contexts. In her more solitary, focused immersion, viewing television programs and searching and reading fanfiction, she felt like she lacked knowledge about the storyworld when compared to other fans.

Yet, in each of these examples, the bigger picture of participants’ onlife experiences captured in interviews belied the perception that their engagement is inadequate. Dagiel proved he was deeply engaged in the experience of a fan object by sacrificing what few hours of sleep he had available to play out the epic procedural narratives he enjoyed on his computer. Asteroth spent focused time throughout the day catching virtual critters through her iPhone and the Pokémon Go Plus Bluetooth accessory, not just to reach her fitness goals, but because she genuinely wanted to unlock and access new digital content as soon as it was available and maximise her achievements in the game. As she had no one locally that shared her interest in wrestling, Esme used *WWE SuperCards* to meet and play with other fans online. Some of these interactions transformed into friendships that extended beyond the game and into the virtual realm of social media. These relationships helped sustain her interest and allowed her to get and share information about her wrestling fandom. For Empyrean, *Star Trek: Timelines* was an additional layer of engagement with the *Star Trek* universe that he could play while he watched the show or alongside more mundane everyday tasks, like doing the laundry. In the game, he was the leader of his fleet, which was made up of multiple squadrons of other players. Empyrean’s engagement with this casual game, as it turned out, was anything but casual even though it was embedded in his everyday practice.

Fan identity as a spectrum between ordinary and extraordinary engagement.

The interview results also reveal that the facets of casual/serious are not mutually exclusive. As the interview excerpts demonstrate, participants were *both* casual and serious in the ways they engage with their fandoms. Participants tended to associate what they perceived as ordinary fan engagements with casual fandom, and what they perceive as extraordinary fan engagements as serious fandom. These categories of ordinary and extraordinary are subjective and can shift based on context. Based on this observation and the various examples from interviews, a

participant's interactions with a fan object can be mapped to a *spectrum of engagement*, that measures it according to their expectations of a particular context (e.g., chatting with friends, interacting with other fans of the same fan object on Facebook, posing a question to a panel at a fan convention, or being interviewed for a study on media fandom).

This notion of spectra of engagement is consistent with Goffman's (1974) frame analysis: the information a participant shares about themselves in the context of the interview, for instance, is framed differently than how they might share it with someone else in a different context. Therefore, a person's spectrum is changeable, inherently linked to a particular frame (i.e., context). If we think of a spectrum of engagement as a person's frame for situating their different fan-based engagements in relation with one another, each participant can have *multiple* spectra of engagement based on who they are interacting with, when, and where the interactions take place, as well as how they choose to present their fan identities. For example, Esme might describe some of her engagements with wrestling fandom as extraordinary to me, as someone that is not a member of that fandom (Figure 4.3.1, *A*), but would characterise the same activities as ordinary to someone she perceived to be regularly engaged in fannish wrestling activities (Figure 4.3.1, *B*).

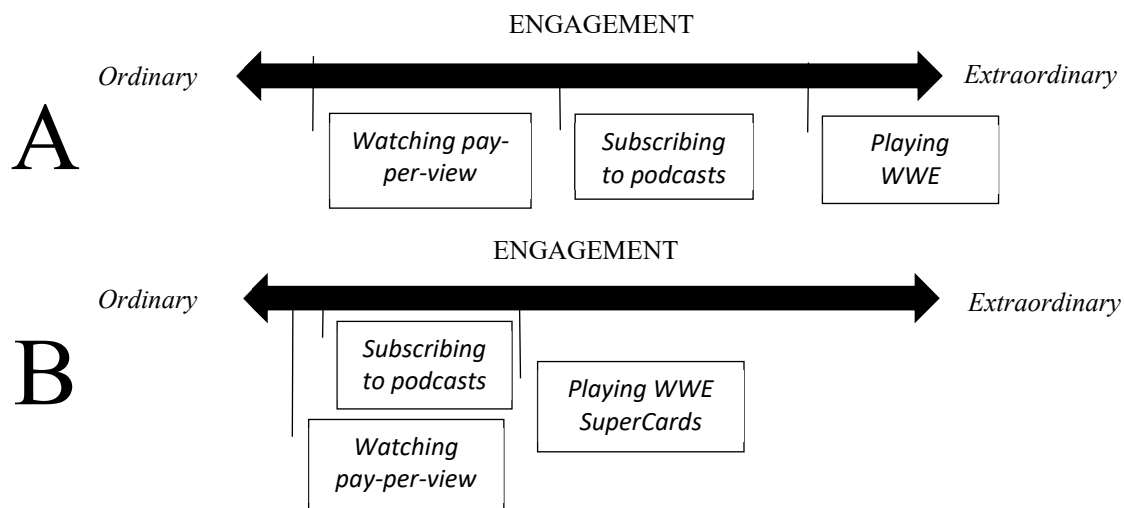


Figure 4.3.1 Esme's spectra of engagement with WWE.

A: Forms of engagement characterised by Esme to someone who is not a WWE fan (e.g., in the context of the interview)

B: Forms of engagement characterised by Esme when speaking with other fans engaging in the same activities

The contextual framing that occurs when Esme labels her fan identity as *serious* in the interview, based on her engagement with the fandom, represents “self and other positioning”; that is, the

discursive practice evident in the way each of the participants in a conversation “positions the other while simultaneously positioning themselves” (Given, 2002, p. 133; cf. Van Langenhove & Harré, 1999). This understanding of discursive identity construction explains the ambivalent and tentative responses from participants (like those of Rhamiel, Isthi, and Dagiel discussed earlier), as they reflected on their own sense of self-as-fan and negotiated their position within the frame of the interview. My own status as fan or non-fan in the different contexts discussed in interviews also potentially influenced participants’ responses. For example, in my interview with Esme, I presented myself as someone that is not involved in the *WWE* fandom, which gave her the opportunity to frame her practices in ways she might not with people involved in her fandom. However, with participants like Kerra and Amriel, it was clear through my prompting that I personally identified as a fan of *Game of Thrones*, and they responded to that identification by presenting their own fan identities in ways they could not have with a non-fan. The interview, thus, represents a specific context where identity (that of the participant and my own) was socially co-constructed. The subjective definition of casual/serious and of what constitutes an ordinary or extraordinary engagement is therefore a discursive act that builds upon a fan’s self-narrative.

Engagement is a useful lens for developing our understanding of casual/serious fan identities. As discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.5, Evans’ (2019) definition of engagement distinguishes between textual, paratextual, receptive, and interactive types. When someone engages with a fan object in a way that is both paratextual and interactive, it is “para-active” (Evans, 2016, p. 13; 2019, pp. 35-36). For Esme, para-active engagement included the textual/receptive viewing of regular pay-per-view television events like Monday Night RAW and WrestleMania, and subsequent engagement with related paratexts like review websites, social media content (i.e., Twitter), podcasts, and *WWE SuperCards*, where she interacted with other fans. Para-active engagement is consistent with the active, participatory, and productive practices associated with fans (Fiske, 1992; Hellekson, 2009; Jenkins, 2002; Sandvoss, 2005, p. 8-9). Para-active engagements tend to populate the extraordinary end of the spectrum, while textual and receptive engagements tend toward the ordinary. And while it is important to emphasise that spectra of engagement are individualised (i.e., specific to a person) and context-specific (i.e., specific to a frame), this means that what we understand as ordinary and extraordinary varies

based on the circumstances. The participants' examples discussed in this section support this conclusion.

Meanwhile, even if para-active engagement is characterised as extraordinary, it can still be typical. In Chapter 5, I closely examine the live role-playing practices of the #FakeWesteros fan community on Twitter. The community's practices constituted extraordinary engagement for Kerra as a member of the community, but they were also typical behaviours for her and her fellow fans within the community. This is an example of how fans transform the marvellous into the mundane, as indicated in Chapter 1, Section 1.2 (Jenkins, 2006b, p. 42). Ultimately, the observation that participants like Esme employ multiple spectra of engagement when sharing their fan identities with others provides valuable insight into how serious and casual fan identities overlap.

In most participants' accounts, the simple consumption of content, required as a basic threshold for engagement, is perceived as ordinary while more laborious production practices are perceived as extraordinary. However, as noted in Chapter 1 Section 1.6, from an information perspective, consumption and production cannot be divorced. Consumption is the process of accessing and interpreting semantic information (knowledge gathering) required for production, and production is a process of information use and information sharing (knowledge creation). Together, consumption and production are interwoven processes that make up a cycle of IB. Nowhere is this more evident than in Isthi's musings on the meaning of serious earlier in this section, where she characterised her engagement. The knowledge she obtained through her sustained, fannish consumption of television programs and fanfiction provided fuel for her own content creation.

Results suggest that serious, casual, ordinary, and extraordinary can be understood as distinct yet complementary ways that fan identity is perceived and performed. This conclusion has implications beyond the self-construction of fans in online environments. Serious leisure, as discussed in Chapter 2 (Section 2.2.2) and referenced in conclusions earlier in this chapter (Section 4.2), is an area of research concerned with the study of leisure activities (Stebbins, 2007/2015) and has been employed for the study of the information behaviour of media fans (Price, 2017) and information users more generally (Hartel, Cox & Griffin, 2016). Lee and Trace

(2009) point out that the emphasis on seriousness is in fact problematic in the way that it limits the scope of inquiry: “What is unfortunate about the defensive armor of seriousness is that it posits itself against a vague other—a straw man of frivolity—that is unworthy of study” (p. 622). In repositioning definitions of serious and casual as individualised and context-specific spectra of engagement, the results from interviews offer a new perspective on activities that serious leisure dismisses as casual (Stebbins, 2007/2015, p. 8), demonstrating how they can be equally profound and worth studying (Lee & Trace, 2009, p. 622; cf. Kari & Hartel, 2007).

4.3.3. Impact and Intentionality: Compassionate/Toxic Fans

Crucially, it is fundamental that victims’ experiences of online abuse, hate and discrimination are empirically captured, explored and understood. Once we understand the impact of this behaviour, we are in a stronger position to challenge it. The virtual world, in truth, is certainly not a wedding. But with greater research, education and action, it is hoped that the virtual stages of hate can become the virtual stages of inclusion and respect.

(Kilvington, 2021, p. 269)

Like the facets of serious and casual fan identities, the facet of the compassionate fan is difficult to isolate. Being compassionate, defined as a conscious ethical, or principled, engagement with competing power structures and players related to the fan object, emerged as a common theme. Compassion as a defining characteristic of fan identity was exhibited by participants Asteraoth, Aziraphale, Uilleand, Kerra, Malakh, Isthi, and Codec. Uilleand’s story about Mark Kanemura and SYTYCD fandom, described in Section 4.3.1 as an illustration of the facet of the social fan, is also an example of how compassionate engagement takes place. In that example, Uilleand’s engagement involved the principled support of a performer that represented her fandom. Compassionate engagement can play out in very different ways, depending on who or what fans perceive as the object of their support, whether that is original creators or performers that are the focus of celebrity fandom, or fan producers.

In contrast, the toxic fan emerged in interviews as a chimera for all that is negative about fandom. Toxicity in the fan context was a common theme identified in 11 interviews (Asteraoth,

Esme, Aziraphale, Uilleand, Kerra, Rhamiel Amriel, Jael, Razael, Isthi, and Codec). However, no participants characterised their own behaviours as toxic or negative; rather, they described toxicity in others. The results suggest that, as a facet of fan identity, toxicity is even more challenging to isolate than compassion, because negative behaviours are *othered* (Rohleder, 2014). Instead, participants shared their reflections on instances where they encountered toxicity, either as the recipient/victim of toxic behaviour or when they witnessed it directed toward others.

Toxic behaviours were discussed previously in Section 4.2.2, in discussion of *Cosplaying and play/performance*. Rhamiel's account of being marginalised by other fans when cosplaying as Wonder Woman because she was Asian demonstrates how toxic behaviours are a problematic aspect of fan identity. The facet of the toxic fan is especially relevant to our present moment, when incidents of racism, prejudice, exclusion, misogyny, and abuse in media fandom abound, enabled by onlife environments like Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, Tumblr, and other platforms that make up the social media landscape (Kilvington, 2021). #MeToo, a movement intrinsically linked to media entertainment, #BlackLivesMatter, and the rise of cancel culture have increased social awareness as a potential antidote to toxic behaviours, many of which are enacted in the mediated spaces of onlife.

This is a particular area of concern in FS scholarship (Proctor & Kies, 2018). Toxic behaviours, particularly in the fan context, are rooted in a process of othering, where fans that do not fit a particular shared perception are excluded, marginalised, and hated (Rohleder, 2014). For example, in 2014 female gamers and reviewers were targeted online by toxic male gamers in particularly vicious and misogynistic ways that included rape and death threats, in what is referred to as #GamerGate (Massanari, 2017). Ostensibly a reaction to a perceived lack of ethics in video game journalism, the movement became a convenient pretext to engage in harassment and marginalisation (p. 334). Similarly, #blackstormtrooper was a racist backlash on Twitter to the casting of actor John Boyega in *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (2014) (Rozsa, 2014). Sad Puppies was an anti-diversity voting campaign that ran from 2013 to 2017, intended to sway the outcome of the annual Hugo Awards for science-fiction and fantasy works (Sandifer, 2017). Each of these cases represent what Kilvington (2021) refers to as cyber hate in the context of fandom. The analysis of interviews revealed that, in a way that was similar to notions of the serious and casual fan, the facets of compassion and toxicity were linked thematically (see Table

4.3.3). Whereas the presentation of seriousness varied according to a context-based spectrum of engagement, identification with compassionate traits and the perception of toxicity in others became more evident when considered along axes of positive or negative intentions and impacts. The following section discusses the facets of the compassionate fan and the toxic fan through the twin lenses of intentionality and impact.

Table 4.3.3 Facets of the compassionate fan and the toxic fan.

Facet	Definition	Examples
Compassionate fan	A person whose engagement with fandom is helpful, inclusionary, and generous.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting performers and creators through expert labour (Kerra) • Supporting creators via crowdfunding (Malakh, Asteraoth, Kerra, Uilleand) • Mentoring and supporting other fan writers and fan makers (Malakh) • Writing fic that is canon-compliant (Isthi) • Being “aggressively friendly” in online interactions with other fans (Uilleand)
Toxic fan	A person whose engagement with fandom is hurtful to others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hate groups (white supremacists, incels, ISIS) • Othering or excluding individuals or groups based on perceived differences (#GamerGate, #blackstormtrooper, Sad Puppies)

Compassionate fan. Based on participants’ examples, a compassionate fan is someone whose engagement with fandom is helpful, inclusionary, and generous. These can be understood as compassionate traits. These traits are also represented in Price’s (2017) findings on fan IB (see Chapter 2, Section 2.4 for details). Seven participants (Asteraoth, Aziraphale, Uilleand, Kerra, Malakh, Isthi, and Codec) provided examples of being a compassionate fan in describing their experiences, while several others (Rhamiel Jael, Razael, Agnephi, and Dagiel)

identified traits they admired or aspired to associated with this facet of fan identity. Kerra thought of her work building and managing fan websites for actors and television series as a kind of service to creators (see Section 4.2.1, *Making websites*). Her example represented helpfulness and generosity through volunteer support of professionals in the media industry; she supported creators through the contribution of her expert labour as a content creator. Kerra followed a process for selecting who she wanted to support that considered more than just what shows and actors she liked. She judged if a television series “really deserves to have a fan base”, or “an actor that maybe is just starting out and could use a professional voice that’s not going to be...haunting them down the line.” Over time, she had cultivated relationships with network and studio representatives as someone that could connect with fans and help build a fan base by sharing exclusive authorised content in a grassroots way. Kerra positioned herself as someone with positive intentions who perceived a need and filled it: she was a compassionate fan intent on championing the authors of her favourite media content. This example indicates how intentionality is a qualitative measure that can be used in the study of social positioning (Van Langenhove & Harré, 1999; see also Section 2.2.3 for details).

Being a compassionate fan is also demonstrated in the ways that one behaves around and toward other fans. Malakh believed in supporting less-established creators through the crowdfund website Kickstarter. This was a trait of generosity that was common to other participants as well, like Asteraoth, Kerra, and Uilleand, who all signalled their support of creators through crowdfunding. But Malakh’s compassionate role in fandom was most evident in her RP writing community: “I put myself forward as I’m a safe person to do your first attempt at roleplaying and I’ll let you know if you’re out-of-character or if, you know, ways to improve...” In this way, Malakh demonstrated an inclusionary attitude. She was happy to help new fans learn the community’s practices and improve their writing in the RP environment. This trait is also represented in Price’s (2017) study, which observed the encouragement of mentorship and peer learning as a central characteristic of fan IB. Isthi, as an avid fanfiction writer, insisted on writing fic that was canon-compliant, meaning that her writing followed the plot, conflicts, and characterisation already established in the source text. She did this not just for the challenge of writing within constraints, and not just to hyperdiegetically explore the gaps left in the narrative, but as a way of respecting the source material that inspired it. This is an example of maker fan

identity that is truly celebrational (Booth, 2015, pp. 12-13; obsession_inc, 2009) because it demonstrates transformative making that is mindful of the labour of original creators. In this sense, fanfiction writers like Isthi are not “poaching”, exactly—to lean on the less savory connotation of Jenkins’ (1992/2013) usage—but rather are elevating the source text as something that can be generative, inspiring, and greater than the sum of its parts. Isthi set an example for other fans who were writing fanfiction to be respectful of the canonical or source material. In this we can observe both positive intention and positive impact.

Impact represents the influence that actions have on others and the world, regardless of intention. Uilleand’s “aggressive friendliness” in her online communities, described earlier in the context of her core identity as a social fan (see Section 4.3.1) can also be understood as compassionate. Her part in getting Nora to her son’s final live show in SYTYCD and the community-made quilt demonstrated this facet. Her examples, like Isthi’s role modelling and Malakh’s mentorship, indicate both positive intentions and positive impact, where others benefited from her engagement and participation as a fan. Similarly, the Twitter community of #FakeWesteros, which is the topic of Chapter 5, Section 5.3, is an example of an intentionally compassionate fan community that also, ostensibly, has a positive impact on the fandom by producing content that promoted the television series *Game of Thrones*. The community functioned as a booster for the show by engaging with other fans while also contributing paratextually to the narrative with their own live production practice on social media. The perception of intentionality and impact, as factors in identity construction and self-presentation, are demonstrated in these examples. Kerra, Malakh, Isthi, and Uilleand present themselves as compassionate by describing the helpful, inclusionary, and generous intentions behind their fan engagements where they also benefit (i.e., positively impact) others within the fandom. Being consciously ethical is an important part of their fan identities.

Toxic fan. A toxic fan is someone whose engagement with fandom is intentionally hurtful or exclusionary, or whose selfish behaviours hurt others (Proctor & Kies, 2018). A first example that illustrates the facet of toxic fan is described by Uilleand. She reflected on her ability to “find her tribe”, and how the internet afforded the same access to people that may not have compassionate intention:

I find my people right? But the other problem is that it happens the other way, as well. The white supremacists find their people, the incels find their people, the ISIS people find their people, and you, again, get the distillation of the pure essence of whoever's involved...

Uilleand's observation is important in highlighting how the same affordances that benefited her social fandom, manifested by the online environments in which her engagement and interactions with other fans take place, are equally accessible to others with less positive intentions. The groups of people she lists in the quotation represent notable hate groups and, therefore, examples of toxic culture at its most extreme.

Kilvington's (2021) examination of cyber hate suggests how online spaces, such as Twitter and other social media sites, also become stages for virtual hate. Hate and prejudice occur when people that are perceived as different are othered (Rohleder, 2014). When confronted with hate speech, Uilleand demonstrated the natural tendency to separate herself from such behaviours, *othering* bad behaviours. Just as, in the first case, othering at its most extreme leads to hate, Uilleand's othering generalises toxic culture and assigns it to segments of people within fandom. Toxicity was not something that any other interview participants perceived or expressed about their own fan identities, but rather how they perceived other fans and structures they experienced within fandom. Participants helped shape the facet of the toxic fan by describing how they perceived the performance of fandom in others. However, the psychological process of othering involves projective identification; we project the bad behaviours that we disavow within ourselves onto others, so that others come to represent that which we fear in ourselves (Rohleder, 2014). This perception of others is understood in the context of impact, as opposed to intentionality, meaning that, regardless of what a person intends, the results of their actions lead others to perceive and fear them as toxic. For example, Uilleand did not intend for her aggressive friendliness to be exclusionary (quite the opposite); however, in delineating her "tribe", she excluded other fans, which might be potentially hurtful to those individuals and therefore viewed as toxic in a way that is quite different from the mainstream hate groups that she aligns with toxic Star Wars fans. One problem with generalising toxic culture in this way is that any behaviour that is relatively hurtful, offensive, provocative, or partisan can be conflated with extremism. Participants' descriptions made it possible to pinpoint how toxic behaviours are

sometimes performed inadvertently or might be perceived in participants' own self-presentation. Their descriptions also provided valuable insight into how online experience and the infosphere (as defined in Chapter 2, Section 2.7) influence good and bad behaviours in fandom.

Matrix of intentionality and impact. Two different axes emerged from interviews that measure intentionality (how a person perceives their own actions) and impact (how others perceive a person's actions) (see Figure 4.3.2). These axes span the distance between the facets of the **compassionate fan** and the **toxic fan**. Each axis represents a qualitative scale that is like the spectra of engagement discussed in Section 4.3.2. As a measure of intentionality (i.e., for individuals who engage with mostly helpful (i.e., compassionate) or hurtful (i.e., toxic) intentions), both ends of the axes represent someone who recognises the different power structures at play in the production and sharing of media content and who acts with purpose. Strongly defined intention, like the traits of generosity, inclusivity, and helpfulness (e.g., as embodied by Kerra, Malakh, Isthi, and Uilleand's experiences) represent self-identification and social positioning. When intention becomes more difficult to discern, or where a person is unreflexively self-serving, without being either purposefully helpful or hurtful, intentionality sits towards the centre of the axes. In this instance, the facets of compassionate and toxic fan do not apply. An example of behaviour lacking either compassionate or toxic intention is when Aziraphale sought the Faith knife to complete her collection (as discussed in Section 4.2.3). As a measure of impact, that is, how others perceive an individual engaged in fandom, each end of the axis indicates a perception of helpfulness (i.e., positive impact) or hurtfulness (i.e., negative impact). When impact is neither perceived as helpful or hurtful, it tends to the centre of the axis, indicating that it does not influence perception of a person as either being compassionate or toxic. This method for positioning compassionate and toxic fan identities is conceptualised visually in a matrix of intentionality and impact (Figure 4.3.2).

	<i>Negative Impact</i>	<i>Positive Impact</i>
<i>Helpful intention</i>	Helpful intention and negative impact	<u>COMPASSIONATE FAN</u> Helpful intention and positive impact
<i>Hurtful intention</i>	<u>TOXIC FAN</u> Hurtful intention and negative impact	Hurtful intention and positive impact

Figure 4.3.2 Matrix of intentionality and impact

Figure 4.3.2 illustrates how five distinct social positions emerge related to compassionate and toxic fan engagement:

- *When a person's behaviour indicates helpful intention but has a negative impact.* An example is Uilleand's "aggressive friendliness", as mentioned earlier in this section, which inevitably results in the exclusion of others from her tribe. Such instances demonstrate unintended consequences when others perceive compassionate behaviour as toxic. This social position illustrates how a person adopts the facet of a compassionate fan, even if the results of their actions do not fully align with their self-presentation.
- *When a person's behaviour indicates hurtful intention but has a positive impact.* It represents unintended consequences when others perceive hurtful intention as helpful. As a social position, it illustrates how a person constructs their identity as overtly toxic (i.e., a "troll", Phillips, 2015), but still succeeds in positively impacting others around them through their actions. Rhamiel's response to toxicity encountered through the practice of cosplaying, as

discussed in Section 4.2.2, in which she disassociates herself from hurtful comments, is an example of when hurtful intention can have a positive impact. Rhamiel's response demonstrates the evolution of a preventative tactic that disarms the overtly toxic discourse of the troll and empowers her to set boundaries on her personal space.

- *When a person's behaviour indicates helpful intention and has a helpful impact.* An example would be Malakh's mentorship of other fic writers, within her community of play (Pearce & Artemesia, 2009). Such instances demonstrate how intention and impact align. This social position represents a fully realised identity of the *compassionate fan*.
- *When a person's behaviour indicates hurtful intention but has a negative impact.* An example would be the fans that responded with racist comments to Rhamiel's Wonder Woman cosplay (as discussed in Section 4.2.2). Online hate (Kilvington, 2021) and specific hateful movements within media fandom like #blackstormtrooper and #GamerGate (Massanari, 2017; Rambukkana, 2015; Rosza, 2014) are other examples which illustrate how hurtful intention and negative impact align. This social position represents a fully realised identity of the *toxic fan*.
- *When a person's behaviour has a neutral intention and no impact outside of their personal engagement.* This is represented as the center of the matrix and indicates that there is no meaningful measurement of either impact or intentionality. Aziraphale's hunting practices are an example of a neutral social position, in which the facets of the compassionate and toxic fan identity are not in evidence.

4.4. Summary

Chapter 4 examined the ways of doing and ways of being of interview participants in their everyday life as media fans. Figure 4.4.1 illustrates how ways of doing and being are interconnected and how both take place within onlife environments, using the original visual representations of living onlife that were introduced in Chapter 1, Figure 1.1.1.

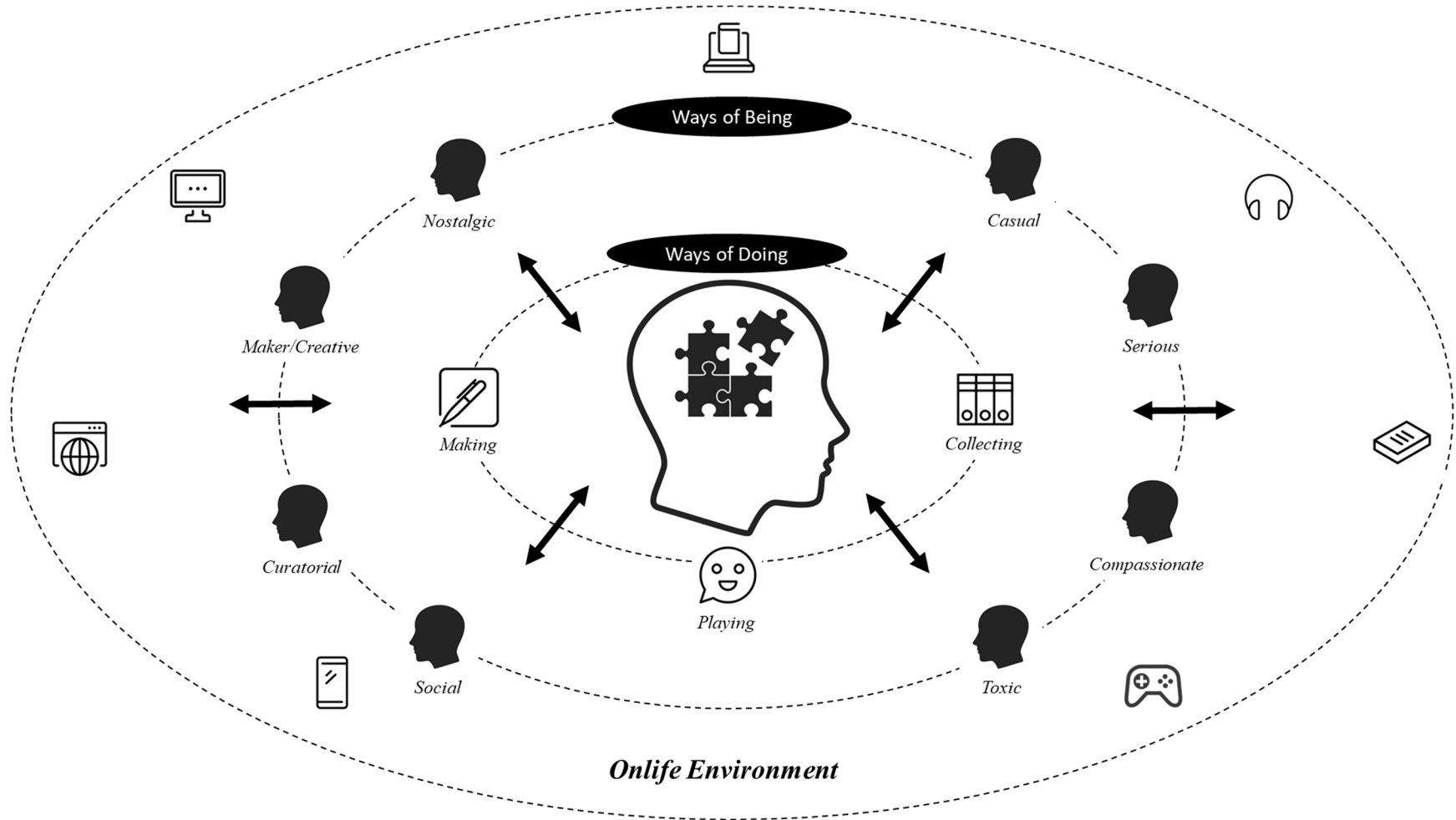


Figure 4.4.1. Onlife ways of doing and being of interview participants.

The participants' experiences of engaging with media fandom and storyworlds were described first in terms of fan practices and IB in the hobbyist context (inner circle of Figure 4.4.1, i.e., ways of doing). Ways of making, playing, and collecting in Section 4.2 demonstrated how participants practiced fandom in everyday ways that were influenced by ICTs. In Section 4.3, the different facets of fan identity derived from the perspectives shared by participants reflected how participants performed and constructed themselves in the contexts of fandom (middle circle of Figure 4.4.1, i.e., ways of being). In this way, the participants offered a glimpse into what it means to be an onlife fan. The outer circle represents the mediated and mediating environments within which the participants' ways of being and doing took place, always influencing their practices and social constructions (i.e., onlife environment or infosphere). The next chapter explores ways of being and doing from the perspectives of two online fan communities. These communities provide further insights into the IB of media fans and the role of engagement in onlife experiences.

5. Onlife Fan Communities: Case Studies from the *Game of Thrones* Fandom

5.1. Introduction

What unites people? Armies? Gold? Flags? Stories. There's nothing in the world more powerful than a good story.

(Tyrion Lannister in “The Iron Throne”,
Game of Thrones, 2019)

In the previous chapter, interview results demonstrated the ways of doing and ways of being of media fans through the onlife experiences of individual interview participants. In this chapter, I expand on these results by exploring how onlife information behaviours (IB) and “ways of operating” (Certeau, 1984, p. xix) are manifested at the group level. To better understand the community context of onlife fans, I undertook two case studies of the *Game of Thrones* (GOT) fandom. The chapter describes the results from each case study and identifies key findings that emerged from community-generated data.

First, the chapter examines fan engagement with the episode “The Rains of Castamere” on the website *AV Club* (avclub.com). This examination reviewed comments posted online, as a specific IB, which reacted to the major plot event known as the “Red Wedding” depicted in the episode. It compares responses from fans who read the books (from which the episode and series were adapted) to those of fans who were not familiar with the source material. Analyses of the online community’s responses reveal four different forms of response related to the interpretation of narrative information.

Next, the chapter explores a different community of GOT fans on Twitter known as *#FakeWesteros*, and their sustained engagement online with the final season of the television series. This case illustrates specific categories of digitally originating behaviours that constitute the community’s onlife practice. It also examines these categories of behaviour and underlying forms of response in the context of post-object fandom (Williams, 2015) and the construction of

collective fan identity, as the community was at risk of closure with the conclusion of the television series.

Finally, the chapter examines the different responses and behaviours identified in each of the case studies, together, to develop an understanding of para-active engagement in the onlife context. By breaking down examples from the case studies into initial and successive moments of engagement, the analysis outlines a process of behaviour and response that characterises how media fans engage with related texts and paratexts. This process demonstrates how information that is encountered through moments of engagement is synthesised and incorporated into a fan's contextual frame for narrative and fandom.

The data analysed in each case study is situated in the norms, values, and contexts of the communities that generated the content. However, it is critical to understand that what constitutes acceptable and normal behaviour within these community contexts may be challenging or difficult for outsiders to encounter. Some examples of posts and comments quoted in the following sections include graphic descriptions and evocative language; this content may be potentially offensive or triggering to readers. For details on the data collection, sampling, and analytic methods, refer to Chapter 3, Section 3.5.2.

5.2. Re(a)d Wedding: GOT fans on *AV Club*

Hahaha!! Check out the look on you newbs' faces! Ha .. ha

curls up in fetal position and bawls

(felonius, "Expert" *AV Club* fan)

The world of HBO's *Game of Thrones* is set in the epic fantasy genre, and it is, first and foremost, an adaptation of an ongoing narrative published in the book series *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 (King in the North), his pregnant wife Talisa, his mother Catelyn, and most of his family, retainers, and soldiers are betrayed and murdered horrifically at the hands of their proclaimed allies, the Freys and the Boltons. The graphic scene in which Talisa is stabbed in the abdomen, specifically, evoked a

powerful response from viewers (e.g., Concha, 2013; Blake, 2013). While readers familiar with the novels had long anticipated (and dreaded) the events of the so-called “Red Wedding”, fans that had not read the books were unprepared for the ultra-violent outcome of that pivotal episode. As previously noted in Chapter 3, staff writers at *AV Club* published two reviews for each episode targeted to different subsets of *Game of Thrones* fans. Viewers familiar with the books were encouraged to read the “Experts” review (VanDerWerff, 2013) and viewers unfamiliar with the books and averse to spoilers were encouraged to read the “Newbies” review (Sims, 2013). Distinct communities of “expert” and “newbie” fans formed on the website because of this editorial decision since, 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 were presumably aware of what the episode had in store and one thread where the fans (who avoided spoilers) had no warning at all.

5.2.1. *Forms of Response*

Four key themes emerged in the coding process of analysis that established categories for comments as distinct forms of response to “The Rains of Castamere”:

- **Emotional:** responses that indicate an emotional engagement with information from the episode. For example, responses that described how specific scenes made someone feel and dramatic enactments of reactions.
- **Rational:** responses that indicate a rational or cognitive engagement with information from the episode. For example, discussing the implications of events and plot points and predicting future outcomes in the narrative.
- **Humorous:** responses that express levity through jokes, puns, parody, and other humorous devices to engage with information from the episode. For example, making a pun to describe an emotional state that also describes the physical depiction on-screen.
- **Analogic:** responses that engage with information from the episode through analogy or intertextual reference. For example, referencing a role that an actor has played in a different program or citing information from a wiki.

These different forms of response can overlap, so that a single comment might provide examples from two, three, or all four categories (Figure 5.2.1).

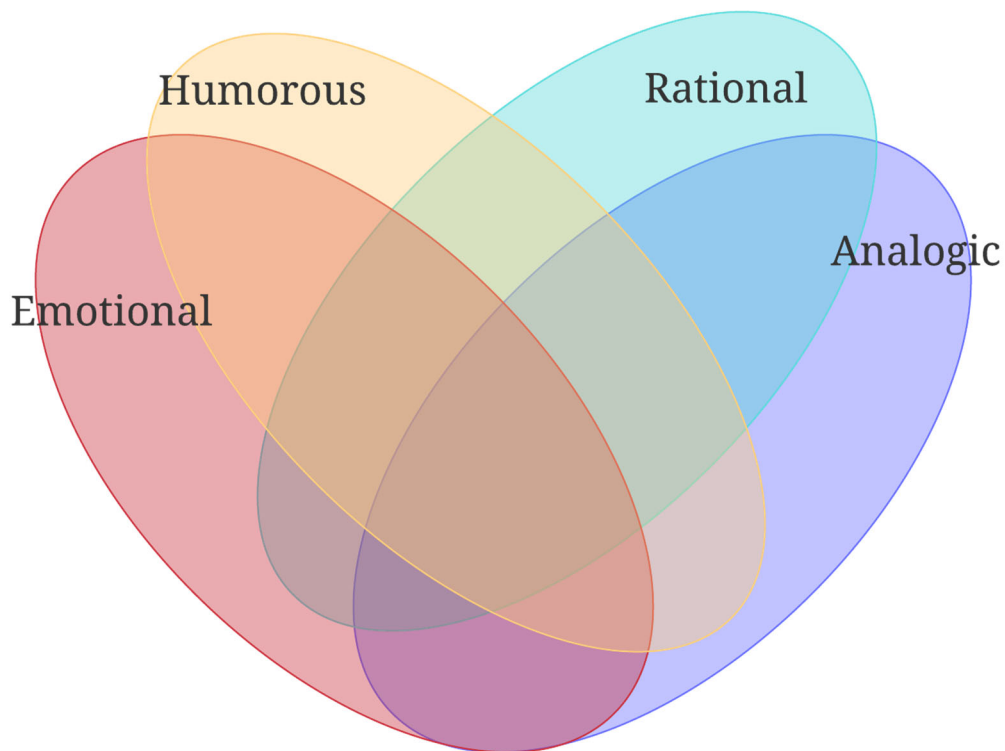


Figure 5.2.1 *Forms of response*

Each comment examined in the following sections represents a moment of engagement with *GOT* fandom and the *AV Club* online community in relation to “The Rains of Castamere” (episode). Evans’ (2019) engagement model (as discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.5) includes forms of response as a component of audience engagement. Evans (2019) describes forms of response as “the adjective that would be attached to the verb” (p. 36). *AV Club* commenters are commenting *emotionally*, *humorously*, *rationally*, and *analogically*. These are aspects of IB that demonstrably occur onlife, where the fan’s experience with media engagement shifts from the television screen to the computer screen. The forms of response identified in the analysis of comments build upon Evans’ (2019) own findings and delve more deeply into the onlife fan’s experience of engagement.

While emotional responses are an explicit expression of the commenter's emotional state, as noted in the previous section, all forms of response can be regarded as affective. Affect is the "collective term for describing *feeling states*" (emphasis in original), and any fan engagement with media is therefore reflective of affect (Niven, 2013, p. 49). Even the rational responses explored in the following sections represent the underlying affective experience of the narrative. In psycholinguistics, the concept of *hot cognition* refers to the way feelings are linked to embodied understanding (Sanford & Emmott, 2012, p. 191; p. 132). Hot cognition is central to the process of contextual framing discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.5, because it represents the discursive expression of affective responses to narrative (i.e., posting online) that help readers and viewers interpret and draw significance from narrative information. Hot cognition is also useful because it distinguishes affective responses like online comments, which demonstrate a conscious cognitive behaviour by translating thoughts and feelings into a text, from affective responses that occur initially when affect is physiologically aroused (Niven & Miles, 2013, p. 50). The following sections explore examples for each form of response in comments from the "Experts" and "Newbies" threads on *AV Club*.

Emotional responses. Posts that represented emotional responses purposefully shared how the episode made the commenter feel. *AV Club* commenters had overtly emotional responses to "The Rains of Castamere". Several commenters communicated their emotions with expressions that used different textual approaches for dramatic emphasis (e.g., use of capitalisation, punctuation such as exclamation marks, descriptions of actions similar to stage direction, and cursing). The following examples of this form of response are also the first comments posted on the "Experts" review and the "Newbies" review:

Lux Lisbon (*Screams*)
(*Experts*)

dcp FUCK THIS SHOW! FUCK THIS SHOW IN ITS COLD
(*Newbies*) BLACK ABSCESS OF A HEART! At this point, I'm only
waiting for our Dragon Overlords to BURN THE ENTIRE
FUCKING CONTINENT TO THE GROUND!

These reactions are performative representations of the commenters' immediate reactions to the events of the episode. They are suggestive of the physical reactions (i.e., screaming) and

violent emotional outbursts of these commenters. Each post is part of the commenter’s self-presentation and aims to communicate that this was their initial visceral reaction to the episode. That they were the first comments on each thread indicates their extreme engagement with both the episode content and the *AV Club* reviews and online community. In other cases, rather than describing their own reactions to the episode, some commenters described the reactions of those around them at the time of the viewing, and how it made them feel. This approach illustrated more complex feelings indirectly caused by the content of the episode. For example:

<i>ganondorf</i>	She [Talisa] doesn't just die, oh no, she gets stabbed in the fucking babymaker. I mean even GRRM [George R. R. Martin]—he of the Reek storyline—didn't go there. 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.
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ganondorf's comment was demonstrative of various discursive norms within the community (e.g., use of hyperbole, sarcasm, exaggerated language). A close interpretation suggests that *ganondorf* was emotionally affected, not necessarily by the content of the episode, but by the reaction of another (i.e., *ganondorf*'s wife) to the episode in their everyday life context. The comment also indicates how describing the reaction of a co-viewer serves as a foil for one's own emotions, particularly when one is emotionally conflicted (i.e., mourning the loss of the characters, feeling that the dramatic depictions are objectively distasteful, and yet deriving enjoyment from them and appreciation for the entertainment). The content of the post demonstrated the impact the viewing experience had in *ganondorf*'s personal life. It expressed *ganondorf*'s fear that their relationship was negatively affected by the episode and that their ongoing appreciation for the narrative makes them seem like a “monster”. In a manner that reads as hyperbolic and tongue-in-cheek (discussed later in Section 5.2.1 under the subsection *Humorous responses*), *ganondorf* blamed the producers (i.e., HBO) for the “horrible” depiction of Talisa’s death, because it was not in the books. However, *ganondorf* did not indicate a desire to stop watching the show as a result of the episode or that they would cease identifying as a fan.

Notably, out of both threads (~5,500 comments), only one commenter indicated a desire to stop watching the show.

This quality of the television series to evoke challenging or painful emotions, even when comments suggest objectively negative outcomes, reflected positively on the episode for most commenters. Take for instance the following comment by *velocityknown* on the Newbies thread, that expressed the sense of desolation they felt following the episode:

velocityknown I guess I should dump my girlfriend and quit my job now. Nothing else matters after you see Catelyn Stark slit an innocent teenage girl's throat only as a way to welcome death followed by 30 seconds of the most chilling fucking credits sequence ever. And now I will cry myself to sleep listening to the suicidal stylings of Matt Berninger.

This comment illustrated how the different elements from the episode conveyed information that deeply affected *velocityknown*. The tragedy that plays out on the screen, the comment implied, seems more significant than the commenter's real life as represented by their relationships and their job. The power of media and narrative to affect individuals in very real, everyday ways is apparent in this example, even if intended as tongue-in-cheek (which is discussed further, below, as this comment is also an example of humorous response).

Other fans commiserated with each other about a particular scene or moment in the episode that made them feel a certain way. The structure and functionality of the comments platform on the *AV Club* encouraged this kind of dialogue by nesting replies under a comment. Successive layers of nesting indicate a dialogue between multiple members of the community. The following is an excerpt of an exchange on the Experts thread, for example, nested under the comment by *Lux Lisbon* that started the thread:

Lux Lisbon (Screams)

↳ *Jimmy Chitwood*

God, it was awful. Maybe the most viscerally awful violence ever on Game of Thrones.

Media Enthusiast Yeah, that wasn't easy to watch, particularly since the killing started with her [Talisa] and it was just so visceral. Overall, Talisa's death seems like an addition explicitly designed to shut down all fan theories about Jeyne Westerling in the books...

Loose Stool Media E., I agree. It was a real, "Fuck you, I'm tired of reading this shit all the time so now shut up" type of thing.

Sharing how the episode affected them was cathartic for some fans. From an information perspective, this suggests that disclosure, which affords the opportunity to put into words complex emotions and to normalise the experience of media engagement, is a method for making sense of information. For some commenters, like *Media Enthusiast* above, disclosure of their emotional state allowed them to continue engaging in more rational ways by deconstructing their experience and the episode content. In this sense, the comment is the locus for a synthesis of narrative information and personal information. *Media Enthusiast* turned the dialogue from primarily expressing emotional responses to rationalising the narrative decisions the episode takes. Disclosure as information sharing is also a way for the commenter to confirm that they are not alone in feeling the way they do, enhancing the sense of community with other fans.

Sometimes this collective sharing plays out in questionable ways. For example, much as the exchange above on the Experts thread shifts from emotion to rationalisation, *dcp*'s initial comment which started the Newbies thread (noted earlier in this section) prompted a volatile discourse. This dialogue moved from the initial emotional reaction to the experience of the episode, to a shared revenge fantasy that further stokes the emotional engagement of these fans. The following selection of comments are taken from 34 replies nested under the comment from *Heisenburg*.

Heisenburg The Boltons, The Freys, The Lannisters...
...they will all pay.
The A.V. Club Remembers.

- ↳ *olivececile* I can't decide what I want to happen to Frey. What would wipe that smirk off his face?
- ↳ ↳ *Nathan Rabins Non-Union Mexica* Don't end him. End his line. His sons, dead. His grandsons, dead. His great-grandsons, dead. Every single Frey, male and female, dead. No Frey blood in Westeros unless it is dripping off the point of a knife.
- Then cut his balls off and deliver every single head to him in a sack. So much for your house and your family and your social climbing, Frey. It ends with you.
- askyermom* Killing his sons in front of him would do, but he doesn't have any. I think I might just have quit watching this show. Ugh.

The selection above takes comments in chronological order of posting. *Heisenberg* and *olivececile* solicit responses to explore the idea of revenge on the villain (Walder Frey) who masterminded the murders witnessed in the episode. In this way, the thread becomes a space where fans can channel their anguish into a hypothetical scenario. Each new torture the commenters imagine for the character builds upon the last, becoming increasingly specific. These responses are examples of how deeply invested the commenters are in the narrative of the “Red Wedding” and of the *GOT* storyworld. The exchange above includes the one comment out of both threads that expressed the desire to cease being a *GOT* fan (by *askyermom*), mentioned earlier. However, the commenter’s aversion in this context seems to stem, not directly from the content of the episode, but from the realisation that the villain in the story may not be adequately punished for his crime. This is information they acquire through their interaction with the comments on *AV Club*, paratextually, rather than from episode itself.

The paratext, as the content or semantic information that “binds” a text (Genette, 1982/1997, p. 3), is the textual artifact that represents the interpretative labour of readers. Chapter 2, Section 2.5 introduced Genette’s (1979/1992; 1982/1997; 1987/1997) concept of “paratext” and offered an understanding of epitextual information as information that is

generated outside the source text, circulating freely “in a virtually limitless physical and social space” (1987/1997, p. 344). This information represents cues that facilitate interpretation for a fan after the moment of engagement with the source text. Specifically, *AV Club* reviews and comment threads are paratexts that contain epitextual information, meaning they represent information that is sought or encountered and then shared outside of the source text. This first set of examples from *AV Club* responses offers insight into how the commenters sought to extend their engagement with the episode paratextually. Moreover, our understanding of epitextual information as something generated in a social space outside the source text and, indeed, without the original author, means that the definition of a paratext can be extended to include fan-generated content. Applied in the onlife context to all forms of narrative media that fans encounter and engage with every day (books, comic books, films, television shows, video games, fanfic, streaming video, web forums, social media sites, social content sites, transmedia productions, and networks of transtexts), paratexts are content that gradually grow epitextually to surround fan objects over time as more and more people encounter it, and as narratives are interpreted and reinterpreted.

The responses of *GOT* fans, posted as comments on *AV Club*, are paratexts. Users like *Lex Lisbon*, *ganondorf*, and *velocityknown* shared their initial emotional reactions to the episode, and that information became fan-generated paratexts for the episode (see Figure 5.2.2).

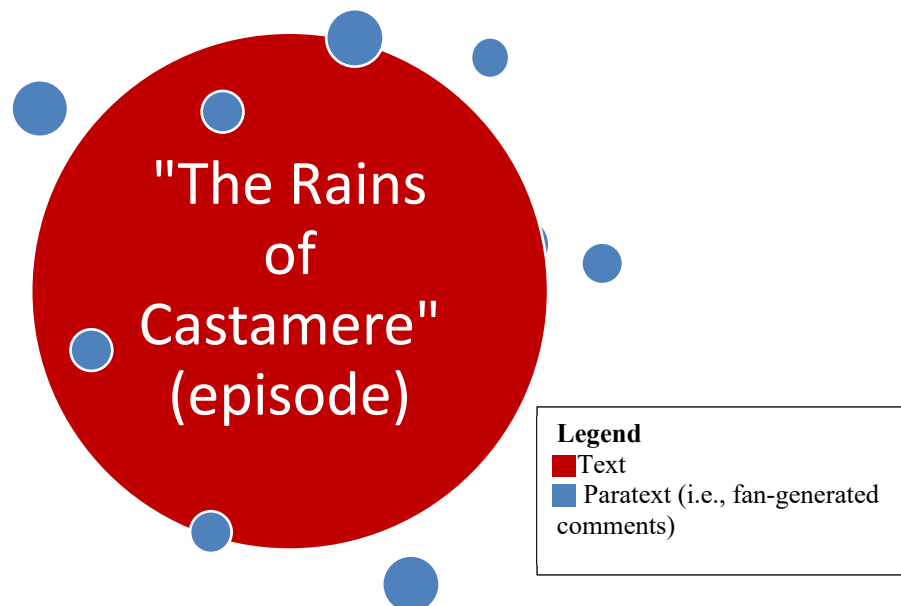


Figure 5.2.2 Text and Paratext – “The Rains of Castamere” in relation to AV Club fan comments.

When users like *Media Enthusiast* and *askyermom* participated in dialogues through comments with other fans, they were encountering epitextual information that extended their engagement with the *GOT* narrative. They were also generating additional paratextual content, information that others like them could consume and with which they could interact. As paratexts, comments impact interpretation of the episode for any reader that encounters them. These paratexts, facilitated by the digital space, co-exist within a network of relationships that connect them to the television show, the books, the storyworld, the *GOT* fandom, and each other. The concept of paratext is useful for understanding how individualised thresholds for interpretation can emerge through a fan’s experience. Take, for instance, *ganondorf*’s description of their wife’s reaction to the episode. Their wife’s actual reaction can be understood as a paratext as well, that *ganondorf* layered into their own experience of the episode content. Response-as-paratext impacted *ganondorf*’s contextual frame for the story and coloured their own affective response to it; they felt conflicted, as if by identifying as a *GOT* fan, they had been aligned with the villain and were personally responsible for the violence witnessed on screen. *ganondorf* chose to work through these emotions in an onlife way: by sharing their thoughts and feelings with their community digitally, on the *AV Club* website.

Emotional responses were the most common responses observed in comments. This is consistent with previous findings from this study, considering how fan identity and ways of being in the context of interview participants discussed in Chapter 4, Section 4.3, were also driven by emotion and affect (i.e., how media make a fan *feel* and how that feeling is first internalised and then expressed externally through self-presentation and social positioning). The intense conflict portrayed in “The Rains of Castamere” increases the likelihood of emotional responses. Emotion is also one of three forms of response that Evans (2019) identifies in her framework for engagement, and these results further support that framework. However, emotion is merely the most evident form of response observed in comments; the examples below continue to explore how fans engaged para-actively (Evans, 2016) in the *AV Club* threads and demonstrate the different ways in which alternate forms of response overlap.

Humorous responses. Two people responded to *ganondorf*'s comment about his wife's reaction (discussed in the previous subsection, *Emotional responses*):

<i>DTH</i>	Game of Thrones: No longer content to ruin the night you decided to stay in and do some light reading, now we're going to go to work on your relationships.
<i>andrew ryans caddy</i>	It ain't a <i>GOT</i> episode if it doesn't end with somebody thinking you're a monster.

These comments illustrated humorous responses in the ways that they expressed levity through jokes, puns, parody, and other humorous devices to engage with information from the episode. *DTH*'s comment imagined a satirical tag line for *GOT* fandom by signalling the ways that the book and television narratives negatively impacted fans' lives. In doing so, *DTH* highlighted the problematic, yet compelling, content found in the narratives. *andrew ryans caddy* sympathised with *ganondorf*'s plight by opining that the experience of feeling monstrous was common for all *GOT* fans. Both *DTH* and *andrew ryans caddy* helped to mitigate the vulnerability and emotion originally expressed by *ganondorf*. *ganondorf*'s original comment can also be read hyperbolically, that is, in a way that interprets his response to be exaggerated for effect (i.e., overstatement). The purpose of exaggeration was to enhance the emotional force of the episode's content. Whereas *DTH* and *Andrew ryans caddy* use humour to neutralise emotion, *ganondorf* used it to increase the emotions he connected with the episode and expressed discursively. Humour is a powerful tool that was frequently used in the *AV Club* community to modulate or mask: it served as a filter to neutralise or enhance drama, share an unpopular opinion, highlight or problematise an issue, and express challenging emotions.

The use of comedic devices in staff reviews and user comments is a convention of writing on *AV Club*. Hyperbole, understatement, puns, sarcasm, irony, parody/caricature, and pastiche/imitation are liberally employed and in ways intended to entertain. This explains why many of the comments in both threads were identified as humorous in analysis, including *ganondorf*'s comment. Humour is a way that commenters connect socially and integrate within the Experts and Newbies groups on *AV Club*. At the heart of these comments is the facet of social fandom discussed in Chapter 4 (Section 4.3.1), that is, someone whose engagement is

motivated by the desire to share their affective response to media with others (as exemplified by Uilleand and her ongoing quest to find “her tribe”). Thus, the concepts of self-presentation (Goffman, 1959) and fan identity discussed in Chapter 4 also played a part in the responses observed in comments, because each comment represented a facet (or facets) of the commenter’s fan identity that they were putting forward for others to see. Humorous responses, in particular, illustrate the facet of the social fan, because of how they interact playfully with an intended audience and invite participation.

Neutralising the expression of emotion emerged in other ways. Controversial themes from the episode were treated humorously, filtering feelings of grief at the death of characters or shock at troublingly violent depictions so that they could be shared in more palatable ways. For example, Talisa’s explicit death in the episode, as previously described in *ganondorf*’s example, and humourless comments from other commenters that expressed genuine emotion at the scene, generated the following series of puns. These examples represent just a selection from the Experts thread, but it is worth noting that similar puns and jokes were posted throughout both threads.

<i>Real Irwin</i>	That was probably the most brutal moment of the wedding. Seeing her [Talisa] get stabbed repeatedly in the stomach certainly left an impression.
<i>Pervy Obit</i>	Seeing everyone die was harrowing, but her death was particularly gutting.
<i>The Archmage of the Aether</i>	couldn't stomach it, eh?
<i>Robert Paulson</i>	I’ve had a bellyful of these puns.
<i>Heisenburg</i>	D.B Weiss and David Benioff really had some guts to kill her off like that... I mean, that scene really cut to the core of me.
<i>Mr. B</i>	Yeah, it was abs-solutely shocking.
<i>oliveeye</i>	Come now, must we make fun of such a gut-wrenching scene? I know it's a difficult time, but let's not lose our heads!

Like *DTH* and *andrew ryans caddy*, these commenters used humour to mitigate or neutralise strong emotions and to modulate the fervour expressed in more serious comments in the thread. These comments also indicated that it is possible for a response to be *only* humorous. For example, *The Archmage of the Aether* responded to *Real Irwin*'s emotional response with a punny joke that does not imply or suggest anything about their own emotional state. Other comments, like those from *Mr. B* and *oliveeye*, may be interpreted as emotional, but could also be comical; in analysis they reside in a grey area.

In some cases, observations about the narrative framed comedically led to more serious predictions and fan theories. For example:

<i>Man o' the Trees</i>	Ahhh Game of Thrones. On what other programme would the audience be rooting for the character willing to burn down an entire continent.
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This comment from the Newbies thread followed the shared revenge fantasy discussed under *Emotional Responses*. It humorously referenced the state of the world of *GOT* following the events of the episode, in which the continent of Westeros is now controlled by the villains who planned the murders. Daenerys is the character referenced by *Man o' the Trees*, who at the same point in the narrative is building an army across an ocean in order to invade Westeros. The comment seemed to praise *GOT* narrative for achieving an unexpected outcome: creating an audience that is aligned with Daenerys as an anti-hero intent on destruction. As such, the comment represented both a humorous and a rational response. What followed *Man o' the Trees* comment was an animated discussion about Daenerys and what fans expected to come after in the narrative. These other comments are rational responses to the episode, which are discussed in the next section.

Irony is another element of humorous response that was used to connect with the emotions others expressed in the threads. In the following example, *felonious*—an Expert—posted on the Newbies thread:

felonious Hahaha!! Check out the look on you newbs' faces!
 Ha .. ha

curls up in fetal position and bawls

In this comment, *felonious* put on their *Expert* fan persona and then purposefully allowed that mask to slip, as a way of showing that they were just as affected by the episode as the Newbies are. In the analysis of responses, the use of irony was especially effective here, because it illustrated how reader and non-reader fans alike shared the same fandom. The comment was humorous, but it also emphasised the profoundly affective experience that all fans shared when they viewed the episode. Like *ganondorf's* comment, *felonius* demonstrated the overlap between emotional and humorous responses.

Instances of imitation and satire in the form of parody and pastiche were also common; however, another attempt at humour relied on analogy or intertextual reference and operated at a level that balanced multiple media engagements by connecting disparate representations. For example, an active member of the community was *Cookie_Monster*, a user who participated in the Experts thread, and took on the characteristic syntax of the eponymous *Sesame Street* puppet. As such, humorous responses like theirs overlapped significantly with analogic responses. The overlap between humorous and analogic responses can be seen in cases that commented specifically on engagement with the episode. An example of this would be *Mytly's* list of revenges on Walder Frey, which was shared as part of the Newbies' revenge fantasy described at the end of the previous section:

olivececile I can't decide what I want to happen to Frey. What would
 wipe that smirk off his face?

↳ *Mytly* Some surefire suggestions:
 *Track mud over his nice clean floors.
 *Release Peeves into his castle.
 *Petrify his cat.

Schmoker Kill Mrs. Norris and skin her before his
 eyes.

As a way to punish Walder Frey's crimes, *Mytly* sought humorous ways to aggravate his counterpart in a completely different storyworld and fandom. The actor that portrays the

character of Walder Frey, David Bradley, is also recognised for his role as Argus Filch in the Harry Potter films. Filch is the curmudgeonly caretaker of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, and known particularly for his pet cat, Mrs. Norris, and butting heads with Peeves the Poltergeist. *Mytly*'s comment juxtaposed the two characters and identified things that would upset the character of Argus Filch. In the context of the revenge fantasy dialogue, this comment has the effect of making the character of Frey seem much less intimidating and much more ridiculous, and of diffusing the more volatile, emotional responses from other commenters (similar examples that intertextually connect episode elements with other characters, texts, or storyworlds are discussed in the subsection *Analogic responses*).

With *Cookie_Monster*, this overlap occurred at two different levels: first, in response to the episode or to another post that was paratextually linked as a response to the episode; and second, at a broader level that was specific to their social identity in the community through their choice of username. All of *Cookie_Monster*'s comments were inherently humorous and analogic, regardless of whether they had to do with *GOT* or not, as a whimsical reference to the media character "Cookie Monster" from *Sesame Street*. There were several other commenters that affected personas for humorous effect by using a particular handle or writing in a particular style, and so this can also be considered a convention of the *AV Club* community. These examples again indicate how the facet of the social fan is enacted by members of the community. These responses also represent examples of parody (satire) and pastiche (imitation). The difference between parody and pastiche, for Booth (2015), is "the key aspect that tends to define fandom: affective appreciation" (p. 19).

Fans are emotional—one might even call it the defining aspect of the fannish experience. And in this sense, pastiche can be interpreted as the most bare-bones reflection of this affection; parody, because of its biting satire, can be seen as more rational and more intellectual than "mere" pastiche. (Booth, 2015, p. 19)

The results from comments suggest that the relationships between affect, parody, and pastiche are more complex than Booth's definition indicates. As is discussed in the next subsection (*Rational responses*), *Cookie_Monster*'s humorous use of imitation and analogy co-occur with

rational meta-theorising about the *GOT* storyworld. The affectation, however, is pastiche and not parody, since none of the comments analysed appear to represent a satirical comment, either on the character of Cookie Monster, *Sesame Street*, or *GOT*. Whereas *Mytly*'s comment was a parody based around the mixing of references to *GOT* and *Harry Potter* fandoms, which is in a closer dialogue with emotional responses to the episode. The comments by others in the same thread, seen alongside *Mytly*'s comment above (such as *Schmoker*'s alarming twist on *Mytly*'s reference), demonstrate how media parody can be used to increase the emotional tension rather than to neutralise it. *Schmoker*'s comment, in contrast to *Mytly*'s, makes the caricature of Frey/Filch and imagined revenges visited upon him less ridiculous and more sinister.

Rational responses. In both the Experts and Newbies threads, a chronological reading of comments revealed that purely or primarily emotional responses gradually gave way to comments that were primarily rational. By rational, I refer to a more objective, logical engagement with information from the episode. Rather than expressions of emotion that are exclamatory, rational responses asked questions, collated information, identified implications, drew conclusions, and otherwise deduced, hypothesised, debated, and developed theories based on shared observations. For example, *ganondorf*'s comment about their wife's response to Talisa's death, which prompted emotional and humorous responses, also spurred rational speculation about the character. Some commenters suggested that Talisa was secretly an agent of the Lannisters to gain an advantage over Robb Stark, and that her death was the tragic result of her misplaced loyalties. Others argued that Talisa could not have been aligned with the Lannisters and that she was an innocent. Some commenters on the Experts thread looked to Talisa's analogue in the books for evidence, a character named Jeyne Westerling who in that source text briefly survived the Red Wedding. One commenter, *Avatar Avatar*, referenced *A Wiki of Ice and Fire* (<https://awoiaf.westeros.org/>), which is a fan-run wiki for the books and the television series. All of these comments are examples of rational responses to the episode. Rational responses were comments that most clearly showed fans reconciling information that they encountered in the episode with their personal contextual frame (i.e., headcanon), a concept discussed in detail in Chapter 2, Section 2.5. *Cookie_Monster*, mentioned in the last subsection about *Humorous responses*, provided a typical rational response from the discourse about Talisa:

Cookie_Monster There no reason to think she [Talisa] working for Lannisters (and even less so in books). Robb just think with dick, and more importantly, Robb not think through any action he take.

Throughout books, [George R.R.] Martin set up idea of who is qualified and deserving to lead. Robert is lousy king; Joffrey is worse one. Mad King Aegon worse still. But he set up most of lead characters to have potential to grab throne, or at least lead in some capacity, and then show us why they not qualified, usually in brutal fashion. Ned too trusting; Robb lack foresight; Tyrion only able to inspire loyalty through money, which can be trumped by more money; only Daenerys and Jon Snow actually learn valuable lessons about not only how to lead, but why to lead, and that leadership is burden and responsibility, not privilege. Me would bet case of Thin Mints that story end with one or both of them on Iron Throne.

Cookie_Monster demonstrated the cognitive process of a rational response, working through deliberate logic that contrasts sharply with the emotional responses examined earlier, or even with the humorous responses that filtered them. *Cookie_Monster* began with a measured response to preceding comments that suggested Talisa fooled Robb, addressing the events of the episode and offering their own interpretation of the significance of Robb Stark's downfall. Finally, *Cookie_Monster* concluded with a prediction for who would ultimately dominate in the *GOT* narrative. Rational responses often lead to predictions or fan theories about the narrative, and this confirms conclusions previously drawn from interview results. Much like Uilleand's immersion into the *Star Wars* storyworld through the eyes of an original RP character, or Aziraphale and Isthi's fanfic writing, commenters like *Cookie_Monster* were seeking to fill gaps left by the narrative by creating new epitextual information. Hyperdiegesis, the urge to reveal and expand on the unspoken or hidden in narratives in fan practice (Hills, 2002, p. 101) is a cognitive process, as discussed in section 4.2.1 (*Writing and sharing fanfic*); it illustrates how new forms of onlife engagement in online community spaces like the *AV Club* website (Dresang and Koh, 2009) facilitate the creation and dissemination of epitextual information.

While some rational responses, like those described above, moved passed initial emotional responses to discuss the narrative hyperdiegetically, other responses were reflections

on why the episode provoked a particular feeling or emotion. For instance, the credit sequence was mentioned repeatedly in both threads as an element of the episode that was especially evocative. The episode cuts to black and, as the credits roll, a rough and quiet voice begins without accompaniment, is then followed by rising, dirge-like strains of instruments, to deliver a rendition of the original song “The Rains of Castamere”. For Expert fans, the words of the song are familiar, as the lyrics are printed in the book and tell an ominous story of the fall of House Castamere that parallels the fall of House Stark, which is the subject of the episode. In the Newbies thread, commenters discussed the credit sequence with relish:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| <i>Porpentine</i> | This episode was a pretty strong demonstration in the emotional function of closing credits music. Without it there's nothing to break the "rocking back and forth clutching your blankie in horror" tension. If you have a blankie. I figured one would be necessary for this episode, and it certainly proved me correct. |
| <i>nuclearhobbit</i> | That was a brilliant choice by the showrunners. I watched this episode with a mix of folks who had read the books and those who hadn't, and you could have heard a pin drop when the episode ended. No one wanted to say a word. |
| <i>I Want To Be THE Queen</i> | I dunno, hearing something as modern and experimental as 4'33" kind of brought me out of the moment |
| <i>Other Guy</i> | That was a very tasteful choice, I found. Even having read the third book I found myself needing time to process what had just happen. |

These comments illustrated how responses could be both emotional and rational at the same time. *Porpentine* and *Other Guy* explicitly refer to how the episode, and the credits sequence in particular, made them feel (i.e., emotional response). *nuclearhobbit* described the affective response of a roomful of reader and non-reader fans that included themselves. *I Want To Be THE Queen* engaged with the other comments paratextually by describing how the credits altered their own affective state at the end of the episode. All are examples of overlapping emotional and rational responses. *I Want To Be THE Queen*'s comment further rationalises their reaction by indicating that the musical composition known as 4'33" (“four minutes, thirty-three seconds”) by

modern composer John Cage, which relies on the use of silence, is anachronistic in the world of *GOT*. This reference makes their response analogic as well.

The examples of rational responses also increase the complexity of paratextual relationships present in *AV Club* comments. Genette's (1987/1997) framework distinguishes the *hypotext*, as an earlier text which serves as the source of a subsequent production, and the *hypertext*, as that subsequent production. Previously, the television episode "The Rains of Castamere" was considered our hypotext, as the source for all of the paratextual content found on the *AV Club* website. But if we consider the importance of the novels by George R.R. Martin (Text A) as the source for the television series (Text B), then the status of the series changes from hypotext to hypertext. Any paratexts, such as the *AV Club* comments, are derived from this relationship. Comments like *Cookie_Monster's*, which addressed the likelihood of a fan theory in both the Text A narrative and the Text B narrative, and in the comments about the credit sequence, where Text B renders the song lyrics from Text A into a musical medium for the first time, acknowledge this relationship between sources (see Figure 5.2.3). Navigating this informational complexity is normal for onlife fans like the *AV Club* commenters.

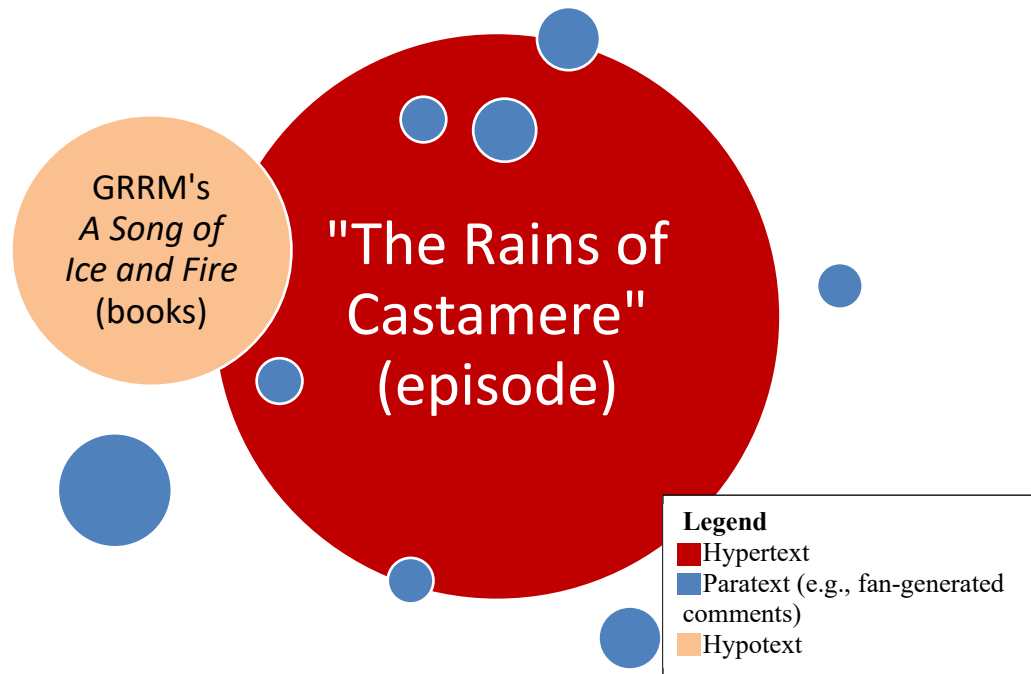


Figure 5.2.3 Hypotext, Hypertext, and Paratext – “The Rains of Castamere” in relation to A Song of Ice and Fire (G. R. R. Martin) and AV Club fan comments.

Evans (2019) also identifies rational, or cognitive, forms of response in her model for engagement (p. 36). The specific examples from *AV Club* build upon her own for a more comprehensive understanding of how fans respond cognitively when engaging with media. In the everyday onlife context, layers of mediation are continually at play in every moment of engagement. A fan may be engaging with episode content through a television, a computer, a smartphone, or a tablet; they may be referencing information available online or in the books that impacts their contextual frame; they may be reading the reviews and comments on websites or social media, or texting, chatting, or even just observing others (like *ganondorf* and *nuclearhobbit*) at a distance; all of this affects their experience of a fan object like *GOT*. This represents a labyrinth of information that needs to be navigated, and rational responses such as those explored above illustrate how fans strive to do that. These examples demonstrate how fans extend their engagement in onlife ways.

Analogic responses. In order to make sense of new narrative information, as discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.5, fans compare the information they encounter to knowledge they already have in order to fit it into their contextual frame for the storyworld. I refer to this as

analogic response. Examples of this were when commenters drew from other sources of information, like *A Wiki of Ice and Fire* (<https://awoiaf.westeros.org/>), as part of their responses to verify their impressions.

ganondorf It's clear now that she [Talisa] was inserted to the story to add to the tragedy of the Red Wedding. Her being a spy was nothing but a mummer's farce.

↳ **Avatar Avatar** Yeah, I actually had to look it up on wiki of fire & ice.

I was sitting there thinking, "Hmmm, I feel like I would've remembered a part about repeated stomach stabbings..."

The reference to other information sources is evidence of how para-active engagement represents a process of information browsing and seeking that is consistent with Lee, Ocepek, and Makri's (2022) study of pattern-based information acquisition (refer to Section 2.2.1 for details).

Responses that reference other sources are, by definition, analogic.

Another different example that illustrates the same comparative approach for making sense of information encountered in the episode, is Mytly's comment, discussed previously under *Humorous Responses*: "Track mud over his [Frey/Filch] nice clean floors. Release Peeves into his castle. Petrify his cat." The comment presented a caricature of Walder Frey superimposed with the *Harry Potter* character Argus Filch. Viewing the episode and associating the actor playing the character of Walder Frey with the *Harry Potter* series, as Mytly did, is an example of an analogic response. It is analogic because it relied on a fan's general knowledge to compare one text (the episode "The Rains of Castamere") to a different, unrelated text. Unlike Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*, the *Harry Potter* films have no narrative relationship with *GOT*. They do not serve as a source of inspiration or adaptation for *GOT* or the character of Walder Frey, so they are not hypotexts, and they are not inspired by *GOT* so they are not hypertexts. *Harry Potter* does not provide additional peritextual or epitextual information that extends *GOT*,

therefore it cannot be described as a paratext of *GOT*¹⁶. Instead, what it could best be described as is *intertext* (Kristeva, 1980): the representation of an otherwise unrelated text that is related only in context (e.g., the same actor performs different characters in both narratives). Context, in this case, is implicitly provided by *Mytly*, when they associate characteristics of Filch to Frey, through subtext that recognises that the same actor performed both roles. This also serves as an example of a language convention and social positioning within the *AV Club* subculture: only readers who are fans of both *Harry Potter* and *GOT* will recognise the reference. As such, *Mytly*'s comment, which was typical of comments on both Experts and Newbies threads, represents a specific discursive practice that emphasises the insider identity for fans and community members that can recognise the reference (see Section 2.2.3 for discussion of social positioning theory). Chapter 4, Section 4.3.2 explored the social positioning of fans in interview results, and this aspect of analogic response further extends the idea that fan identity and ways of being are socially and discursively constructed. In the same way that I signalled my status as a fan or non-fan of a particular character or storyworld to interview participants in a way that potentially shifted how they characterise their engagement, *Mytly* signals his status as a knowledgeable fan of both *GOT* and *Harry Potter*.

Examples of analogic response that overlapped with humorous response (e.g., *Cookie_Monster*, *Mytly*) and with rational response (e.g., *I Want To Be THE Queen*, *Avatar Avatar*) have already been discussed in some detail in the previous sections. Analogic response also overlapped, in some cases, with emotional response. In the section *Emotional Responses*, a comment by *velocityknown* was shared as an example of hyperbolic emotion. As a signal of how the episode made them feel, *velocityknown* references the music of Matt Berninger, who is primarily known as the frontman for the indie rock band The National. The National is the band that performed the musical sequence at end credits of the episode, a haunting rendition of the song "The Rains of Castamere", which only exists in the world of *GOT* and as lyrics printed in the novels by George R.R. Martin.

velocityknown I guess I should dump my girlfriend and quit my job now.
Nothing else matters after you see Catelyn Stark slit an

¹⁶ While the *Harry Potter* films are not paratextually connected to *GOT*, it is possible for fan-generated content to represent a paratext for both media storyworlds. *Mytly*'s comment is an example of a fan-generated paratext of *Harry Potter* and *GOT*.

innocent teenage girl's throat only as a way to welcome death followed by 30 seconds of the most chilling fucking credits sequence ever. And now I will cry myself to sleep listening to the suicidal stylings of Matt Berninger.

Berninger and The National are known for defining a brooding and melancholy style that is idiosyncratic (Rao, 2020). The comment suggests that the different layers of intertextual relationships between media representations deepen *velocityknown*'s emotional engagement with *GOT* and with Berninger. Emotional/analogic responses occurred when commenters associated the way the episode made them feel with memory of how other media or fan objects affected them. In an example that contrasts with that of *velocityknown*'s, the following comment from the Newbies thread connects the deaths of the Starks to a scene from the television series *Gilmore Girls*:

Heisenburg The Boltons, The Freys, The Lannisters...
...they will all pay.
The A.V. Club Remembers.

↳ *The Archmage of the Aether* The A.V. Club
We will talk about avenging your favourite fictional slights

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

Analogic response reflected the eclectic cultural knowledge of the *AV Club* community. Like humour, the use of analogy was characteristic and conventional among *AV Club* members, which helps explain why each category emerged as separate themes in the analysis. The fact that *AV Club* is a pop culture review website meant that its readers were well-versed in popular culture. Indeed, many were fans that belong to multiple media fandoms, as evidenced by the different examples of referential comments that connect other cultural figures and texts to the discourse of *GOT* (e.g., *Harry Potter*/Argus Filch, Matt Berninger/*The National*, *Gilmore Girls*, *Arrested Development*). Figure 5.2.4 illustrates how these different intertexts coexist with hypotext (i.e., *A Song of Ice and Fire*), hypertext (i.e., “The Rains of Castamere”), and paratexts in the form of *AV Club* comments.

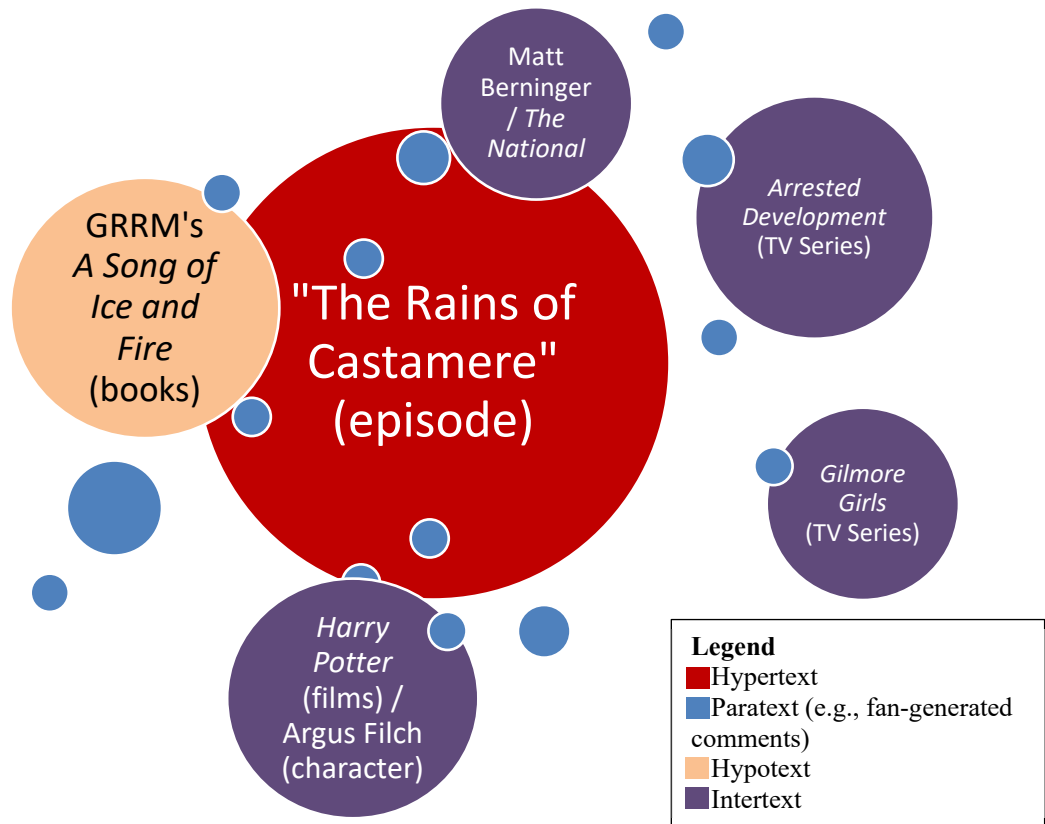


Figure 5.2.4 Hypotext, Hypertext, Intertext, and Paratext – “The Rains of Castamere” in relation to *A Song of Ice and Fire* (Martin), other media storyworlds, and AV Club fan comments.

The importance of intertextual reference to media fan practice cannot be understated. As the interview participants’ practices discussed throughout Chapter 4 indicate, the onlife fan’s engagement with fandom is heterogenous, mixing freely between different media, narratives, and storyworlds. Amriel’s creative interpretations in her cosplay-making, for example, and the body of fan-generated Tumblr content in the *SuperWhoLock* fandom (Booth, 2015, p. 25) both demonstrate how the spreadability of epitextual information (Jenkins, Ford, and Green, 2014, p. 4) by media fans is critical to onlife ways of doing. That is why it is significant that *all* analogic responses overlapped with another form of response: humorous, rational, and emotional. This could indicate that, rather than a distinct form, analogic response is actually a qualification for emotional, humorous, or rational responses. Analogic is another form of response that is not identified in Evans’ (2019) model. As such, it contributes new understandings of onlife fans’ media engagement. Whether considered to be a distinct form or a potential quality for the three

other forms, analogic responses represent a unique method for sharing information paratextually through analogy or reference.

Discussion. Figure 5.2.5 illustrates how commenters, based on the examples included in the preceding subsections, were situated according to different forms of responses.

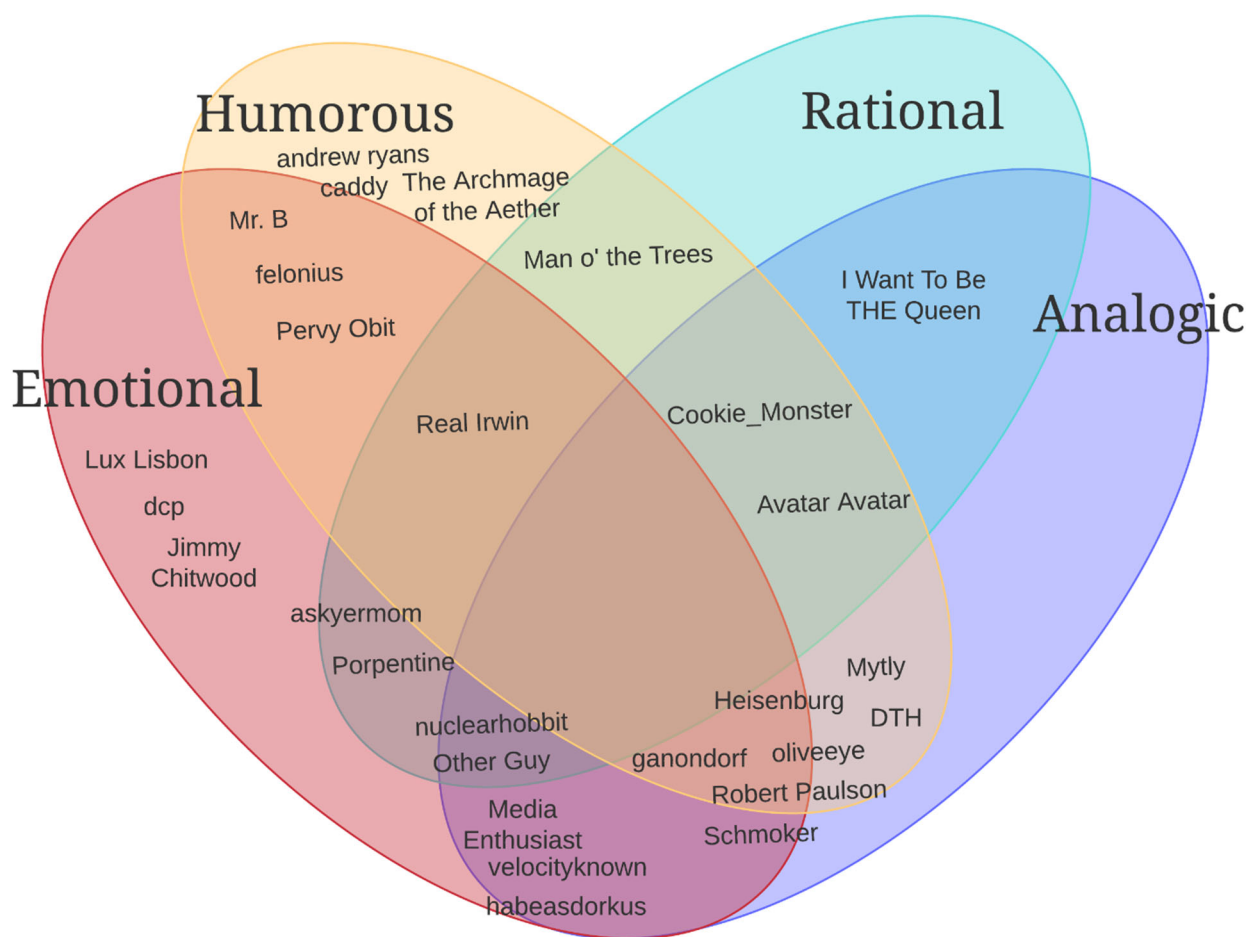


Figure 5.2.5. Forms of response, populated with usernames of commenters identified in examples. The position of each username indicates instances where different forms of response overlapped.

Figure 5.2.5 offers several useful observations. First, as noted previously, emotional and humorous represented the most common forms of response to “The Rains of Castamere”. I identified instances in each category where responses were uniquely emotional (e.g., Lux Lisbon screams) and uniquely humorous (e.g., The Archmage of the Aether’s pun about other commenters emotional responses). Some of the most interesting examples discussed above, however, are those that demonstrated different forms of response. For example, *ganondorf*’s

comment about his wife's reaction to the episode and his own feelings demonstrated emotional, humorous, and analogic responses. Such instances of overlapping response are evidence of fans making sense of challenging media content and coming to terms with how it made them feel. In this sense, affective response to narrative is about synthesising encountered information and incorporating it into a contextual frame for characters, narrative, storyworld, and fandom. Another observation that Figure 5.2.5 illustrates is that there were no examples found in the analysis of analogic or rational response that did not overlap with another form of response. This suggests that these two forms rely on other forms of response to be meaningful, within the context of "The Rains of Castamere" and the *AV Club* community. A different sample that includes a wider range of comments, alternate fandoms, and different digital affordances of the platform could offer new insights about forms of response. The second case study of *#FakeWesteros* on Twitter, in Section 5.3, revisits the concept of response using examples from that community's practices.

The analysis of how community members expressed themselves in the comments threads builds upon knowledge about the IB and engagement of fans gained through the interviews (in Chapter 4). As discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.5, Evans (2019) defines a fan's engagement with media in terms of moments, each composed of components: a type of behaviour and a form of response (p. 37). According to Evans (2019), types of behaviour include paratextual and interactive behaviours. In Chapter 4, I examined the concept of "para-active engagement" (Evans, 2016) in discussion around spectra of engagement (Section 4.3.2), which illustrated how various onlife practices described by the interview participants represented ordinary and extraordinary forms of engaging with media that were paratextual and interactive. Many of the examples throughout Chapter 4 demonstrate IBs and practices that are characteristic of para-active engagement (for example, Malakh's beta reading of fic, discussed in Section 4.2.2). Examples from the different ways of being of participants, as discussed in Section 4.3, offered glimpses of how they responded to media and to other fans through their engagement with fandom, and especially in the ways that they identified themselves as fans. Response, as illustrated in the *AV Club* comments, constitutes ways of being that relate to fan identity similar to the way it emerged from the interview results. This suggests that Evans (2019) concept of response can also be understood in terms of ways of being and identity construction.

Evans (2019) distinguishes three forms of response that are emotional (indicating an emotional reaction), cognitive (indicating a thoughtful reaction), and physical (a reaction that is manifested physiologically, e.g., laughing or crying). All three of these represent affective engagement, since they describe the “feeling state” of the fan in the moment they encounter narrative information (Niven, 2013, p. 49). Engagement, however, includes the processing of information, which is not instantaneous, particularly when engagement extends paratextually and interactively beyond a source text and when it is sustained across multiple interactions or moments of engagement with people and texts. From an IB perspective, information processing is one way that we can characterise response as a component of engagement (Nahl, 2007). This definition of response is also consistent with the concept of “hot cognition”, as mentioned previously, which refers to the ways in which affective and embodied experience of a text are manifested cognitively (Sanford & Emmott, 2012, p. 191). Therefore, as a component of engagement, a response is working through emotional, cognitive, and physical feelings elicited from encountered narrative information.

The analysis of *AV Club* comments expands on Evans’ (2019) definition significantly by presenting four forms of response observed from the IB of posting on the *AV Club* website, two of which were not previously noted in Evans’ (2019) work. The comments offer examples of how forms of response are performed as a way to make sense of narrative information in a social environment, adding important context to Evans (2019) own categories of emotional and rational/cognitive response. Humorous response and analogic response emerged from the analysis as unique contributions to the understanding of forms of response as a component of engagement. This may be due to the emphasis on referential humour that was an idiosyncratic part of the *AV Club* community; however, as the analysis in the Section 5.3 discussing a different online fan community suggests, humorous and analogic responses are a common feature of *GOT* fan engagement.

Additional themes associated with each form of response illustrated how *GOT* fans on *AV Club* made sense of profoundly affective and complex information from the competing source texts of the episode and the book it adapts, and how they engaged paratextually with other content in ways that generated new information about the fan object (Genette, 1987/1997; Evans, 2019). The forms of response observed demonstrate how onlife fans engage with fandom in

onlife ways, how they go about processing challenging narrative information encountered through affective experience, and how that impacts their self-narrative and identity as a fan. These insights benefit our understanding of the relationship between information and engagement and expand existing definitions of engagement in the IB context (as discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.3, e.g., Arapakis, et al., 2014; Nahl, 2007; Waugh, 2017).

5.3. *#FakeWesteros*: A Twitter Role-Play Fan Community

@LordGendry: I don't think I'm ready for the last #GameofThrones livetweet with our #FakeWesteros and Twitteros friends. No matter what the outcome, let's enjoy tonight. [Animated GIF]

@TheLadySansa: I'm honestly hoping the clock isn't actually moving forward today. I can't say I'm ready.

@LordGendry: I want it to happen already, but I also want to stop time.

@TheLadySansa: And keep it in a state of unknowing forever.

@KingRobbStarkk: We got this

(<https://twitter.com/LordGendry/status/1130097474163449856> Twitter thread, 19 May 2019)

#FakeWesteros was a community of *GOT* fans on Twitter. the FakeWesterosi brought with them a history and a set of unique performative, social, and textual practices that were shaped by the affordances of Twitter as a digital and social medium. Their activities extended beyond the everyday onlife of fans, the automatic encountering and disseminating of information across and between the porous boundaries of offline/online, into the elaborate forms of active play described by participants in the previous chapter. “Livetweeting” episodes (i.e., commenting during viewing) from around the world, these fans were engaged in a half-joking/half-serious communal role-play, assuming parodic versions of characters from *GOT*.

The *#FakeWesteros* community has been around since the start of the television series¹⁷. Twitter has always been the primary medium for their activity. In our interview, Kerra, who was a long-time member of *#FakeWesteros*, explained that the community tried websites outside of Twitter. These websites helped keep track of members and gave them a place to interact with other fans between seasons when the livetweeting performances ended; however, Twitter supported the functionality they needed for the particular set of practices that brought them together as a community. Kerra described the nature of the community and its practices:

So, everyone has a character. We're a group that we've been around for the entire series. We're recognized by HBO, we're recognized by the news outlets, like, whatever. We all—this is what we do—they're all parody, they are very blasphemous, they are not, you know, “true” to the show. It's all for fun. Umm, but every week we do it. We're in all, every member of the group is in different time zones, so we try and hit you know certain days, or like, Sundays obviously is when *Game of Thrones* airs, we try to all be around on a Sunday or a Monday for the UK or whatever, so it is organised for those. ...It's a lot of witty banter or razzing each other or whatever, so the fans enjoy it, we enjoy it.

While livetweeting, role-playing, and “fun” interactions were all hosted through the single microblogging social media platform (i.e., Twitter), the FakeWesterosi truly represented onlife, the seamless merging of digital and analogue/print (Floridi, 2014). They drew from knowledge of their viewing of the episodes on television or streaming online, and from their readings of the novels, to perform parodic aspects of the story's characters through their handles and tweets (for example, *NiceQueenCersei*, *DanyGoneBad*, and *SassySansa*) in the unique digital social environment that is Twitter. They created and reused visual materials found elsewhere in the online mediascape—from Tumblr, Reddit, Imgur, and other fan resources that

¹⁷ At the time of writing, two years after the conclusion of the series, while a number of the community members remain active (e.g., *Axechucker*, *BeautyBrienne*, *NiceQueenCersei*) and still include identifiers in their Twitter profiles that connect them to *#FakeWesteros*, the community and its Twitter-based livetweeting practices appear to be mostly dormant. It remains to be seen if the anticipated spin-off series *House of Dragons* (scheduled to premiere on HBO in August 2022) will bring all of its members back together to resume their activity on Twitter. The fate of *#FakeWesteros* and ongoing engagement of its members is discussed in Section 5.3.2.

generate memes—to express themselves. Whether it was a humorous meme of elephants swinging lightsabers in response to Queen Cersei’s season eight obsession with the exotic war animals or an image from the episode to draw attention to a sketch of a dragonglass weapon that resembled a broomstick from a different fandom, the FakeWesterosi left large digital and intertextual footprints that demonstrate how easily they moved between layers of mediation. The words online and offline are no longer particularly significant in these fannish behaviours because of how their practices seamlessly integrated layers of mediation into their para-active engagement, and so they perfectly represent the figure of the onlife fan.

Kerra recalled how the community reacted to “The Rains of Castamere” when it aired in 2013:

It [the Red Wedding] was just as brutal [for fans who had read the books], like, we *knew* it was coming, we *knew* it would be there, we weren’t necessarily sure it would be at the end of season 3. But we were all psyching ourselves up for it, trying to get ready, ‘cause we remember how much it hurt the first time. And we still weren’t. ...We were doing a drink for it, and we were going to play BINGO basically, how many different things could we knock off this BINGO card before everybody died, and umm, yeah, it was, it was *brutal*. We all were screaming about it for weeks afterwards. Even now, whenever we look back on it, we’re still like, it’s still too soon. Like, we still don’t talk about it. Those were dark days.

Kerra’s description of the community’s coming-to-terms with the events of the episode echoed the responses for fans on the *AV Club* comment threads. For fans, the graphic deaths of the Starks during the episode “The Rains of Castamere” mark a finale of sorts; the literal ending of these characters is also a metaphorical ending to their narrative arcs. Many of the *AV Club* commenters’ tactics, even those that employed humour, communicated a sense of loss, as seen in the forms of response discussed in Section 5.3.1. The fans were not *just* making sense of information and aligning it within a contextual frame but were also negotiating the reality that the potential for any new stories had been snuffed. This is what Williams (2015) refers to as a

“dormant” fan object, one which can no longer yield new instalments (p. 2). What follows is a period of post-object fandom, in which fandom continues after a fan object becomes dormant.

Contributing to the body of research on post-object fandom (e.g., Hills, 2019; Holladay & Edgar, 2019; Whiteman & Metivier, 2013; Williams, 2015), the second case study examines the behaviours of the *#FakeWesteros* community on Twitter during and immediately following the airing of the final season of *GOT*. Over 27,000 Twitter posts (tweets) were submitted by FakeWesterosi during this period, as noted in Chapter 3, Section 3.5.2. The concepts of response, behaviour, engagement (Evans, 2019), paratextual and epitextual information (Genette, 1987/1997), and contextual frame (Emmott, 1989; Sanford & Emmott, 2012) (described in Section 5.2 and introduced in Chapter 2, Section 2.5) are further expanded in the analysis that follows. Beyond these concepts, the results explore post-object fandom in *#FakeWesteros*, drawing parallels and extending conclusions from the previous case study. Finally, the information behaviour cycle of the onlife fan is revisited with results from this more contemporary community of onlife fans and their practices.

5.3.1. Categories of Behaviour

The category or set of behaviours observed among *AV Club* commenters could be reduced to a single type of action: posting on the comment thread. Forms of response provide additional context on what motivates that posting and different approaches to that action, but the specific medium of the comment thread limited the different behaviours available to fans. By comparison, the Twitter platform preferred by the FakeWesterosi allows users to embed images, videos, and other multimedia, to use a wider range of emojis, and with different functionality in relation to replies, sharing of other users’ posts (retweets), and the appending of search terms or tag words (hashtags) to messages. While the basic action of “posting a message” is the same on both platforms, users have greater opportunity for creativity and participation on Twitter. Thus, there are distinct sub-classes of the onlife behaviour that are more easily observable on Twitter than in the less sophisticated messaging platform used on *AV Club*. In the case of the *#FakeWesteros* data analysed for this study, there is a wider array of behaviours on display, thanks to the flexibility of Twitter as a medium and the distributed nature of online content

shared via the social platform. From the many different behaviours observed, I identified three primary categories of behaviour:

- **Quoting:** where fans quote lines from *GOT* or that quote other texts or paratexts in reference to scenes in the show.
- **Clowning:** where fans engage in humorous parody performed in-character, as well as joking, teasing, and playful interactions with other users in- and out-of-character.
- **Reviewing:** where fans include the review of content from the episode and of related paratexts, including the expression of opinions, reflections, and predictions about *GOT*.

These different behaviours are employed by the *#FakeWesteros* members, sometimes in combination, in their livetweet performances of the characters they represent and their interactions with other users on Twitter.

Quoting. Many analysed tweets were comprised entirely of direct quotations from the television show characters. Quoting, as a practice or set of behaviours, was employed for different purposes and to different effect. The most common and basic of these purposes is the use of quotation to draw attention to a particularly affective moment in a scene. For example, when *danygonebad* and *LordBranRaven* each quoted Bran Stark in the first episode of the final season: “The text from Bran is “We don’t have time for all this. The Night King has your dragon. He is one of them now. The Wall has fallen. The dead march south.” In the referenced scene, Bran was interrupting the otherwise happy reunion of other protagonists to remind them of the danger at hand. *danygonebad* and *LordBranRaven* were signalling their own emotional responses by emphasising the urgency and weight of Bran’s words. Pragmatically, the use of quotation during livetweet sessions is an efficient method for sharing response.

Additional content, such as a heart emoji or a hashtag (e.g., *#FORTHETHRONE*) can serve as a contextual marker for readers to better understand the message. A similar example that was categorised as “quoting” (despite not including written words), is a tweet by *LordGendry* that shared a heart emoji and the hashtag *#GameofThrones* as the only text alongside an animated GIF (short video) of a scene from the same episode, where the characters Gendry and Arya are reunited. *LordGendry*’s use of video as a visual reference can be understood as a kind of quotation without written text and is employed in the same way that *danygonebad* employs a

phrase-based quotation; the heart emoji again signals an emotional response to *#FakeWesteros*' audience of *GOT* fans on Twitter, one that many fans of the Arya/Gendry relationship can relate to. Research on the participatory culture of Canadian K-pop fans and the many ways they demonstrate "doing K-Pop" online (Yoon, 2017), but especially on YouTube, illustrates how visual media are reappropriated and circulated in fandom. While the different practices of K-pop fans, such as reaction videos, represent a complex culture of making, the content they produce can also be viewed as visual quotation not unlike *LordGendry*'s much simpler example.

Sometimes a quotation from *GOT* was transposed to describe what a user was doing, as when *JonNightsWatch* posted "Now our watch begins!" at the start of their livetweet session. The double-meaning of the phrase, which referenced both the frequently spoken oath of the Night's Watch and the beginning of *JonNightsWatch*'s viewing of the episode was a clever wordplay that signalled to fans on Twitter that the livetweets were about to begin. Another common phrase from *GOT*, "Valar morghulis", was quoted by several different users throughout the final season without any additional qualifying text or visual reference; for fans, the words were well-known, meaning "all men must die". This phrase was used the most following the third episode, "The Long Night", which featured a much-anticipated confrontation between dragons and a pitched battle against the Night King and his undead legions, which the protagonists managed to overcome against all odds. Given the context, quotation emphasised the nervous excitement of the fans, with foreknowledge that not all the characters would survive the episode. This behaviour represents Kristeva's (1980) concept of intertextuality, as a "mosaic of quotations" (p. 66). The paratextual content generated by the *#FakeWesteros* are traces of the source text that fans encounter, recognise, and assign new meanings that co-exist in the context of a storyworld and fandom. In this sense, the quotation makes a palimpsest of the source text, layering new information over top the original. This is a category of semiotic production that combines "fan talk" and "fan text" in a way that has not been closely examined in FanLIS (Price, 2017, p. 319; refer to Chapter 2, Section 2.3.2 for details).

Quotations were also often accompanied by commentary. For example, when *GameOverRos* quoted Tyrion Lannister in the final episode of the series: "'Did you bring any wine?' Nice to see that some things do not change." The comment humorously referenced the character's penchant for wine, as he was often quoted by fans for a line that appeared several

seasons earlier: “That’s what I do. I drink and I know things.” Another example is when *you_there_boy* wrote: “‘Where is my idiot brother?’ -Sansa Stark, first of her name, queen of the Andals and overall badass”. *you_there_boy* signalled their admiration for the character in that moment. Sometimes the #FakeWesterosi made up pretend quotes in reference to scenes from the episodes, usually as a humorous response in the guise of the character they were parodying. For example, *you_there_boy* imagined different dialogue in a scene where Jon Snow convinced his sister, Sansa, to acknowledge Daenarys Targaryen as queen:

“Look Sansa. There are zombies everywhere and we need to band together to fight them. And Dany is going to be a good queen! She's not her dad; she's only a little murderly!”

“Oh. Well. Let's go then.”

This is similar to *BeautyBrienne* offering her own caption for a still photo that another fan shared on Twitter: "Dear... Penthouse...I never thought it'd happen to me..." The photo was of the character Brienne in one of the final scenes of the series, eyes turned up in thoughtful reflection as she added her first entry to the White Book of the Kingsguard. This is what Booth (2015) describes as “pragmatic parody”, which audiences use to particular ends (p. 21). Building on Bakhtin’s (1984) characterisation of parody as *double-voiced* (speaking both about and to a particular text) (p. 193), Booth (2015) indicates that “parody enacts a humorous and unexpected breaking of boundaries through the mockery...of those boundaries” (p. 21). *BeautyBrienne*’s comment represents this transgression between the boundaries of texts by connecting *GOT* and the character Brienne with a contemporary trope associated with erotic letters to *Penthouse Forum* magazine (Mc Entire, 1992). This example demonstrates humorous and analogic response as well as the specific behaviour of quoting, and how together they enact a parody of *GOT* and its characters. Such parody lies at the heart of #FakeWesteros’ fan practice and is the focus for the next subsection on *Clowning*.

The use of quotations exemplifies Kristeva’s (1980) open system of intertextuality and Barthes’ (1977) view of the poststructuralist text as “a tissue of quotations” (p. 146). Genette (1997) also acknowledges quotation as one of the most basic ways of signalling textual “copresence” (p. 1). These examples of quoting from #FakeWesteros are performative

expressions of each fan's engagement with *GOT*, reliving and enacting scenes for themselves and for other fans. Just as with the comments on *AV Club*, *#FakeWesteros* tweets are paratexts that expand on the information shared in the episode (see Figure 5.3.1).

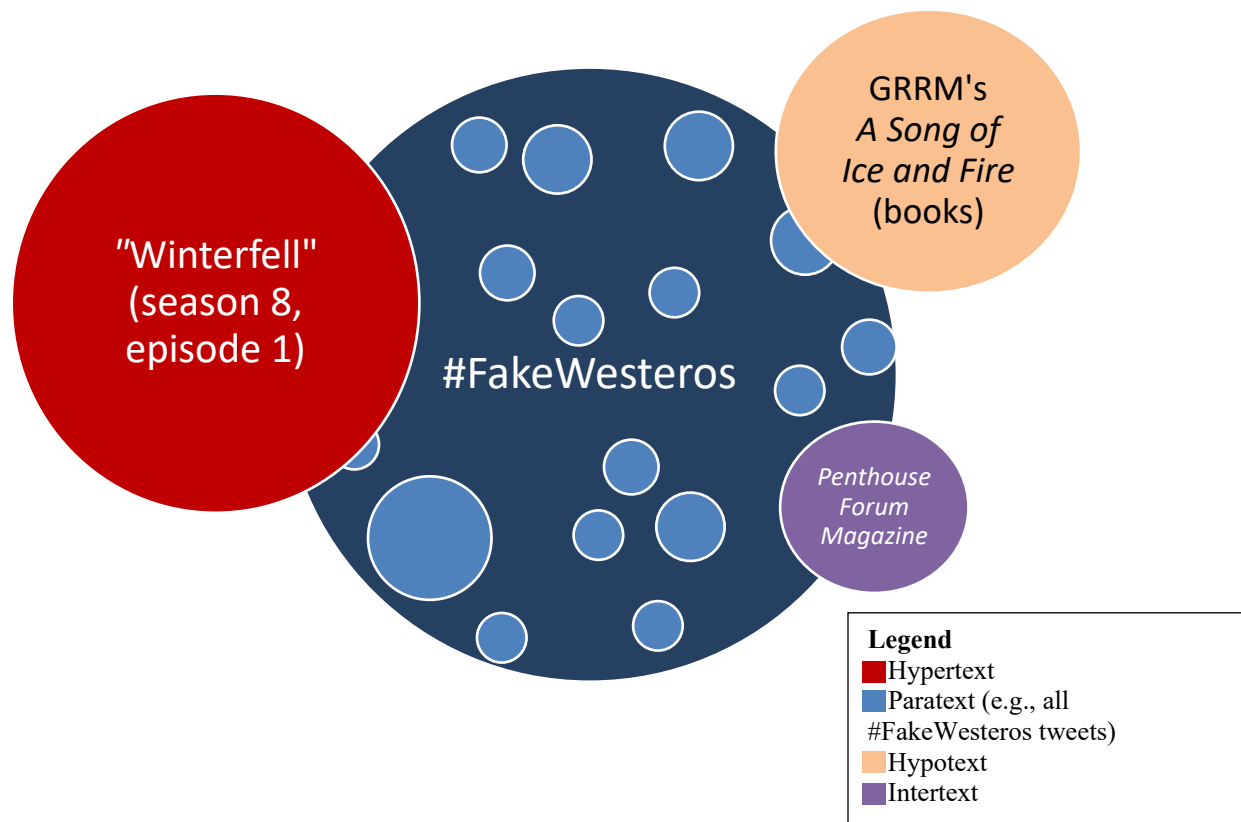


Figure 5.3.1 Hypotext, Hypertext, Paratext, and Intertext –#FakeWesteros tweets in relation to source texts.

The difference, as discussed in Section 5.4, is that the livetweeting fans' engagement with the text and the paratext are conflated into the same moment. In a pre-digital age, moments of engagement with textual and epitextual information were more isolated in time, as there was no network medium in which to engage with both simultaneously. The results from *#FakeWesteros* suggest that interactions with paratextual and epitextual information has increased significantly due to the emergence of platforms like Twitter and practices like livetweeting. The fact that paratexts are experienced in the same moment as the text influences how fans make sense of narrative information. We can imagine that the fan that encounters *BeautyBrienne's* tweet about the *GOT* character Brienne's final scene in the series will affect how they interpret the scene and how they will remember the character. The tweet makes of *Forum Magazine* an intertext to the episode and the world of *GOT* (as illustrated in Figure 5.3.1).

Comparison between the two case studies illustrates how the experience of media has evolved because of mediating technologies and technology practices. The evolving practices of the *#FakeWesteros* community on Twitter demonstrate how the “spilling over” of the digital-online world into the everyday routine that characterises living onlife is increasing (Floridi, 2014, p. 43). Finally, quoting behaviours in *#FakeWesteros* were associated with the same forms of response identified in the *AV Club* case study. As noted above, the posts by danygonebad and LordBranRaven signalled emotional responses. *LordGendry*’s visual quotation with the animated GIF of Gendry and Arya’s reunion was also emotional. *you_there_boy* and *BeautyBrienne*’s imagined quotations were humorous, and *BeautyBrienne*’s post was also analogic, referencing an otherwise unrelated media trope. No clear examples of this rational response were identified in instances of quoting because a quote is less easily used to communicate the predictions and theories associated with that form of response.

Clowning. Clowning was the play-performance at the heart of *#FakeWesteros*. It represented the antics of the community members that involved joking about episode events and teasing each other based on the words and actions of their television show counterparts. This was a defining behaviour of *#FakeWesteros* as a community, since it represented most of the content produced by members. Some of the examples of quoting also fit into the category of clowning behaviour, such as *BeautyBrienne*’s photo caption quotation that parodied a scene that should be a solemn and uplifting moment by referencing it with the *Letters to Penthouse Forum* trope. Another similar example was a post by *LordGendry*, which featured a still image from the episode “Winterfell” (season 8, episode 1). The image was of the sketch of a weapon Arya asked Gendry to forge in the episode, but which looked suspiciously like an iconic object from a completely different fandom:

I thought Arya was asking me to make her a Firebolt. #GameofThrones
#quidditch
(<https://twitter.com/LordGendry/status/1117620282540212225>)

It is precisely this sort of intertextually mischievous comment that engaged other fans and Twitter followers, enhancing the experience of narrative through digital media in a uniquely onlife way. Another Twitter user responded to *LordGendry*’s post by writing “...if we’re going

to play fandom crossover here... We heard you tell her ‘As you wish’ and we know what that translates to!” to which *LordGendry* replied with an animated GIF of Westley from *The Princess Bride* (1987).

Another moment in the episode “Winterfell” marked not just in *#FakeWesteros* but by the entire *GOT* fandom was when Cersei Lannister expressed her disappointment over the mercenaries she hired to defend the throne, “the Golden Company—20,000 men, horses, elephants, ...” (“The Dragon and the Wolf”, 2017). “I wanted those elephants,” Cersei pronounced. The *GOT* fandom responded with delight, with several posts on Reddit garnering significant attention (“Cersei’s Elephants”, knowyourmeme, n.d.) At the same time, Twitter was alight with *#FakeWesteros*’ response. The following in-character exchange captured the moment:

NiceQueenCersei: Elephants were promised!!!!

you_there_boy: You ASSUMED there would be elephants.

NiceQueenCersei: I just wanted to ride an elephant around and use it to stomp on peasants. <Loudly crying face><Elephant> [Animated GIF of a juvenile elephant trumpeting]

<https://twitter.com/NiceQueenCersei/status/1117610694403293185>

The line also served as a humorous callback when posting about other scenes during the episode, such as when Sansa asked Daenerys about the eating habits of her dragons:

GameOverRos: Thought.

““What do dragons eat?” “Whatever they want.””

Seems like a throwaway line.

So, someone is getting eaten. Any bets on who becomes dragon snacks?

Thetsas: Not an elephant apparently

GameOverRos: This. This is a good answer.

These examples are all characteristic of the analogic and humorous forms of response observed in the *AV Club* case study. As a behaviour, they also manifest the behaviour of de Certeau's (1984) readers, which he describes as "inhabiting the text" (p. xxi; see also Chapter 2, Section 2.6).

Analysis of examples indicates that clowning behaviour can be in-character or out-of-character. *LordGendry*'s post about the Firebolt and *NiceQueenCersei*'s melodramatic response to a lack of elephants are examples of in-character clowning. In another example, *Euron_g* observed how Daenerys' army appear to be unaffected by the frigid temperature in the North of Westeros. *DanyGoneBad* responded delightfully in-character:

Euron_g: I honestly don't know how the Dothraki can handle the cold so well.

DanyGoneBad: They insisted on hot water bottles

Euron_g: They never been in a place below 20 degrees. The same unsullied. And they seem to not bother at all, wtf? xD

DanyGoneBad: They followed me, because I'm awesome duh

The persona of *DanyGoneBad* was a clever take on the character of Daenerys, one of the show's chief protagonists. The character's arc over the course of the series rides an increasingly treacherous line between hero and villain to successfully win her claim as queen of Westeros. In the final season, Daenerys transformed from one of the chief protagonists and into the prime antagonist. *DanyGoneBad*, true to the choice in screen name, represented this dual aspect in a characteristically—for *#FakeWesteros*—playful way. In the final episode, "The Iron Throne", in a scene where Jon Snow failed to convince Daenerys of the wrongfulness of her actions (a final confrontation that ends in her death), *DanyGoneBad* commented "Jon's pep talks need some work..." In response to the same scene, *BeautyBrienne* wrote "Girl, the wheel is broken," referring to a quotable phrase spoken by Daenerys in an earlier season, "You can chill. Go to Ikea. Have some meatballs. You're gonna need a LOT of cheap furniture to rebuild all this." *BeautyBrienne*'s post, by contrast, was *not* specifically in-character. Similarly, *GameOverRos*' previous example, where she questioned the dialogue between Sansa and Daenerys, slipped out-of-character, revealing what Goffman (1959) refers to as backstage (p. 22). The analysis of

comments indicates that fans who represent characters that play a more significant role in the narrative, such as *DanyGoneBad* and *NiceQueenCersei*, were more likely to post in-character. Whereas users like *GameOverRos*, who was identifying with a minor character that does not appear in the books and features only in the first three seasons of the television series before their on-screen death, more often post out-of-character. In all instances, the identity of the fan on Twitter can be understood as a kind of palimpsest, in which the story of the character they are portraying layers over their own self-identity.

As discussed in the context of cosplaying in interview results (Chapter 4, Section 4.2.2), play/performance is a way of enacting individual and collective fan identity by inhabiting and embodying characters from storyworlds and fandoms. In this sense, the clowning behaviour of *#FakeWesteros* is similar to the cosplaying of interview participants discussed in Chapter 4, except that *#FakeWesteros* is primarily situated in the virtual social space of Twitter, rather than in any physical space. Just as with cosplaying, we observe a blurring of front stage (the face or persona presented to a public) and backstage (what an individual perceives internally about themselves) in Twitter posts, where the in-character mask slips to reveal the real fan underneath (Goffman, 1959; p. 22). In some cases, like *BeautyBrienne*'s quoting, the slip is deliberate; the discontinuity between Brienne's solemn moment in the episode and reference to *Penthouse Forum* is what allows the post to succeed as a parody. In other instances when posts are not explicitly in-character, backstage and front stage are not easily distinguishable. For example, *GameOverRos*' reflection on the exchange between Sansa and Daenerys took her out-of-character to question the narrative construction of the scene, which then resulted in a funny exchange with another fan that referenced Cersei's elephants. This instance suggests that, like cosplayers, many of the *#FakeWesteros* members perceived their activity as a "pleasurable escape from what they see as a stable self" (Masi de Casanova, Brenner-Levoy, & Weirich, 2020, p. 17). We can also think about how front stage and backstage, particularly in a virtual social space, represent different registers, or codes, of communication and information-sharing. When *LordGendry* writes as if he is the character Gendry enacting the scene playing out on the screen, he is using a code that other fans recognise and are invited to play along with. *BeautyBrienne*'s reference to something that exists outside the world of *GOT*, but that is recognisable to others, represents a shift in registers that moves closer to backstage.

GameOverRos' question represents yet another shift. What this indicates is that there are not just two ways of communicating information in *#FakeWesteros* (i.e., front stage/in-character and back stage/out-of-character). Instead, there are many ways in which information and identity are constructed and shared that exist in the liminality between backstage and front stage.

Clowning behaviour, like the example of visual quotation discussed earlier, also employed visual media, such as animated GIFs. For instance:

GameOverRos – Actual video of me preparing for *#GameOfThrones*
[Animated GIF of Amy Schumer drinking from an absurdly oversized
wine glass, <https://twitter.com/i/status/1117547642773487618>]

In this example, *GameOverRos* uses a GIF that references the Comedy Central television series *Inside Amy Schumer* to describe part of their livetweet ritual and media experience (references to drinking wine while viewing *GOT*, referred to in the analysis as wine-posting, are common enough to be a theme among *#FakeWesteros* comments). It is also an indication of anticipation or anxiety at what the episode would bring. As discussed further below, comments throughout the final season were deeply influenced by the context of endings; the ending of certain character and narrative arcs, the ending of the television series, and the end of a community's purpose are often acknowledged directly and obliquely in *#FakeWesteros* posts. This particular post can be read as the latter, a subtle reminder that the final season required more liquid fortification than normal. As such, it falls under expressions of post-object fandom (Williams, 2015) as an overarching theme in this analysis. Another example for the use of GIFs was the following post from *Queen_Cersei* during "Winterfell", in a scene where Jon Snow was learning how to ride his dragon:

Starks: preparing for war

Unsullied: preparing for war

Dothraki: preparing for war

The North: preparing for war

Jon Snow: [GIF of Bastian riding Falkor from *The Neverending Story*
(1984) <https://twitter.com/i/status/1117912700825194496>]

This example of clowning poked fun at the character Jon Snow. In the film *The Neverending Story* (1984), Bastian, a young boy, is pulled into a storybook world and experiences the thrill of riding Falkor, a luck dragon. The GIF at once evoked nostalgia for fans of the film and jokingly implied that Jon's priorities may be skewed.

In response to Cersei's elephant outrage, *You_there_boy* posted:

“Actual footage of Golden Company Elephants. I can understand her disappointment.” [Animated GIF of a juvenile elephant swinging a lightsaber with its trunk.]

https://twitter.com/you_there_boy/status/1117885099549179904

The GIF, in this case, was altered stock video of an elephant with the graphic effect of a lightsaber from the *Star Wars* universe. The result is the image, both fierce and absurd, of a lightsaber-wielding pachyderm. The use of visual media in posts represents yet another method in which *#FakeWesteros* employed pragmatic parody, consistent with Booth's (2015) definition of the concept (discussed earlier under *Quoting*). Booth's (2015) study of digital fan play includes similar examples for the use of animated GIFs and GIF fics that illustrate a similar kind of play/performance.

Clowning behaviours were most typically associated with humorous responses, as found in the *AV Club* case study. Many posts were coded as analogic responses, such as when *LordGendry* referenced “#quidditch” (Harry Potter fandom) and *The Princess Bride* (1987), or when *Queen_Cersei* shared an animated GIF of Bastian from *The Neverending Story* (1984). *NiceQueenCersei*'s in-character outburst over elephants was an interesting example, because it offered a humorous response disguised as an emotional response in the form of dramatic parody. *BeautyBrienne*'s suggestion for Daenerys to go to Ikea and buy cheap furniture to help rebuild the smouldering ruins of King's Landing is an example of both humorous and rational responses.

Reviewing. Whereas quotations were most commonly posted during livetweet sessions, and clowning occurred at any time before, during, and after livetweeting, reviews always followed after the initial viewing. Reviews took the form of opinions of episodes, characters, and story elements shared within a single tweet or series of tweets; links to text and video reviews created on other websites; and episode recaps that aggregated Twitter content.

Most common was the sharing of opinions, thoughts, or hot takes as a single post, in the brief format imposed by Twitter's character limitation. Some overlap with clowning was observed here, as we read in the examples of *GameOverRos* (reflecting on the line "What do dragons eat?") and *euron_g* (wondering about how the Dothraki do not seem to feel cold) as this type of reviewing behaviour. Sometimes clowning was employed in reaction to a review. For example, a fan posted this recap of "Winterfell": "Sansa is being reasonable. Jon is being willfully naïve. Dany is being entitled. Arya is flirting. Bran is being THAT BITCH. Meanwhile, the Night King is making art." *BeautyBrienne* retweeted the post with the comment: "So... high school." There was no shortage of such content in the *#FakeWesteros* tweets, particularly as the community was challenged, on the one hand, with unpredictable or questionable narrative decisions in the story told on-screen, and on the other with fan outrage over said decisions.

Several posts demonstrated a cognitive dissonance, where love of *GOT* and the desire to enjoy the content and defend it from criticism was weighed against a negative response to the narrative, as told particularly in the final episode of the series, "The Iron Throne". Cognitive dissonance is evident in expressions of negative affect (Festinger, 1957). The following comments, for example, were posted at the end of the episode, which all express some level of dissatisfaction with the conclusion:

Flame_Khaleesi: Oh, the wall is magically rebuilt. That's nice.
https://twitter.com/Flame_Khaleesi/status/1130297176637267968

FatPinkMast: The Hand's chair survived Drogon's burninating. Ok then.
#GoTFinale
<https://twitter.com/FatPinkMast/status/1130294355238035462>

you_there_boy: Tyrion gets to keep being Hand, in spite of incompetence and actual literal treason. #GameofThrones #GoTS8
https://twitter.com/you_there_boy/status/1130291736343994369

LordGendry: Can we just make Sansa the Queen? #GameOfThrones
<https://twitter.com/LordGendry/status/1130288955633487872>

Each of these examples reflect the cognitive dissonance experienced when audiences encounter elements of narrative that are illogical or that do not fit their contextual frame. In another example following the finale, *WightsKing* posted a GIF set of the last scene depicting the

character Arya and her decision to leave Westeros. *WightsKing* commented, “Arya is the most consistent character.” *ASnarkyCatLady* responded by recapping Arya’s role in the episode: “Except for that time she gave up her vengeance for her family against Cersei and wandered around a burning city until a horse saved her.” This characterisation of Arya’s actions, it is understood, are inconsistent with her motivation to avenge the death of her father, and the deaths of her mother and brother at the Red Wedding, which define her for most of the series. For *GOT* fans, there is even more at stake; the degree to which the series reached a satisfying conclusion validates—or invalidates—the many hours spent engaged and immersed in the *GOT* storyworld.

For the FakeWesterosi, most of whom have been fans from the start of the television series, their investment in the storyworld is measured in years. However, for some members of *#FakeWesteros*, the investment of time and energy into the fandom is rationalised not by their satisfaction with the end of the story, but rather by the attachments they had forged with other members of the community. In Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3, we explored how Williams’ (2015) differentiated two types of “fan pure relationships” that help understand post-object fandom: fan/object pure relationships (a fan’s attachment to fan objects, such as a character or a narrative) and fan-fan pure relationships (a fan’s attachment to fellow fans) (p. 21). The *#FakeWesteros* tweets throughout the final season of *GOT*, and especially immediately before and after the final episode, demonstrated a shift in focus from fan/object to fan-fan relationships. The different behaviours identified help depict this transition. Reviewing was involved in evaluating the narrative content and, as such, was fundamentally an expression of a fan’s relationship with the fan object. Quoting was similarly in direct relation to the narrative object; however, it was also employed tactically in ways that foster and reinforce relationships with other fans, as when *JonNightsWatch* posted “Now our watch begins!” at the start of their livetweet session. Clowning, as interactive play between willing participants (members of *#FakeWesteros* and their followers on Twitter), was primarily an expression of each fan’s relationship with other fans, even when the user was ostensibly commenting about narrative content. The in-character posts of *NiceQueenCersei* and *DanyGoneBad* discussed earlier as examples of clowning illustrate how the underlying fan-fan relationships are what make their onlife interactions possible, at least as much as the narrative content they happen to be “clowning” about.

Reviewing as a behaviour also moved beyond the boundaries of the platform, in much the same way that the creative use of emojis, images, and animated GIFs succeeded in extending a message beyond text in examples of quoting and clowning. Fuller reviews of *GOT* content outside of Twitter, such as blog posts, podcasts, videos, and websites, can be easily shared and disseminated on Twitter. Even a humble retweet, for instance, as when *Margaery_Tyrell* shares a tweet from *ThatShelf* (thatshelf.com) promoting an episode review on its website (https://twitter.com/Margaery_Tyrell/status/1119326091771092992). *ThatShelf* is a Canadian media review website that is not affiliated with *#FakeWesteros*, but the content of the website enters into a paratextual relationship with *GOT* and *#FakeWesteros* through *Margaery_Tyrell*'s decision to share it with the community. In comparison to quoting and clowning, "reviewing" in this sense is a liminal behaviour, occurring on the thresholds of the *#FakeWesteros* community. These productions are instances where the community members shift fan identities, moving from an identity position as *#FakeWesteros* member to a more generic *GOT* fan. Other examples of this activity occur when *BeautyBrienne* shares a link to their podcast reviews and Patreon page (<https://www.patreon.com/chrysk>), or when *Axechucker* aggregates tweets from the *GOT* fandom into unique episode recaps for the website *watchersonthewall.com* (e.g., <http://watchersonthewall.com/tweeting-winterfell-part-1/>). These examples of reviewing behaviour demonstrate how paratextual information shared using Twitter spreads across the digital space. They represent the concept of the spreadability of online content (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013) and, as introduced in Chapter 1, Section 1.3, how spreadability shapes mediated onlife experience.

An extension, or subset, of reviewing found in *#FakeWesteros* comments was predicting. Predicting generally followed reviews of episode content, where users anticipated what turn the narrative might bring next. Comments exhibiting rational / cognitive responses of *AV Club* members discussed earlier also demonstrated this type of behaviour, and in much the same way. There is little difference between *Cookie_Monster*'s step-by-step thesis predicting that Daenerys or Jon would sit the Iron Throne and *KingRobbStarkk* making predictions for who may survive the finale based on the actors listed in the opening credits:

KingRobbStarkk: Jerome Flynn was in the opening credits. Bronn is in this episode and he needs Tyrion alice to get to highgarden, dany should

know better than to get between Bronn and his castle #TheFinalEpisode
#GameOfThrones

TheLadySansa: He still can't have Highgarden, I said no.

KingRobbStarkk: If he saves your best husband give him the north sis
<crying laughing emoji>

TheLadySansa: No! That's where my rose was from. He can have..
Harrenhal.

(<https://twitter.com/TheLadySansa/status/1130284023043874817>)

The evidence that this behaviour was present in both case studies suggests that it is common to the GOT fan experience, and more generally, the media fan experience.

5.3.2. *Post Object Fandom and #FakeWesteros*

Williams' (2015) post-object fandom, as discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.5, explores the self-identity and self-narrative of fans coping with the "emotional void and forced detachment" (Costello and Moore, 2007, p. 10) from a fan object (i.e., a book series, a television series, other serialised narratives) when it becomes dormant and is no longer producing new instalments. Williams (2015) distinguishes two types of pure relationships (Giddens, 1992): fan/object pure relationships (a fan's attachment to a fan object, such as a character or narrative) and fan-fan pure relationships (a fan's attachment to fellow fans). Many *GOT* fans, including members of *#FakeWesteros* and *AV Club* communities, defined themselves through a fan/object pure relationship with the *Game of Thrones* storyworld. When the television series ended, it challenged the self-identity of these fans. Communities like *#FakeWesteros* and *AV Club* provide a way for fan identity to be constructed around other fans that comprise fandom, rather than the object itself (be that a narrative, a character, etc), through what Williams (2015) refers to as fan-fan pure relationships. Indeed, a key finding in the study of *#FakeWesteros* is that fan-fan pure relationships supplant fan/object pure relationships during post-object transitions such as the final season of *GOT*.

In the days before the airing of the final *GOT* episode "The Iron Throne", many members of *#FakeWesteros* expressed their love and gratitude for the community. *iMissandei_* wrote:

To all of #FakeWesteros & the complete ASOIAF/GoT Twitterosi.
I hope we all stay active & connected even after the show ends. You all mean so much to me & it's been such an amazing time watching the show with you that I cannot imagine life without this loving & warm community! <red heart emoji> [animated GIF of bunny sending love on phone] (Fig. 5.3.2)

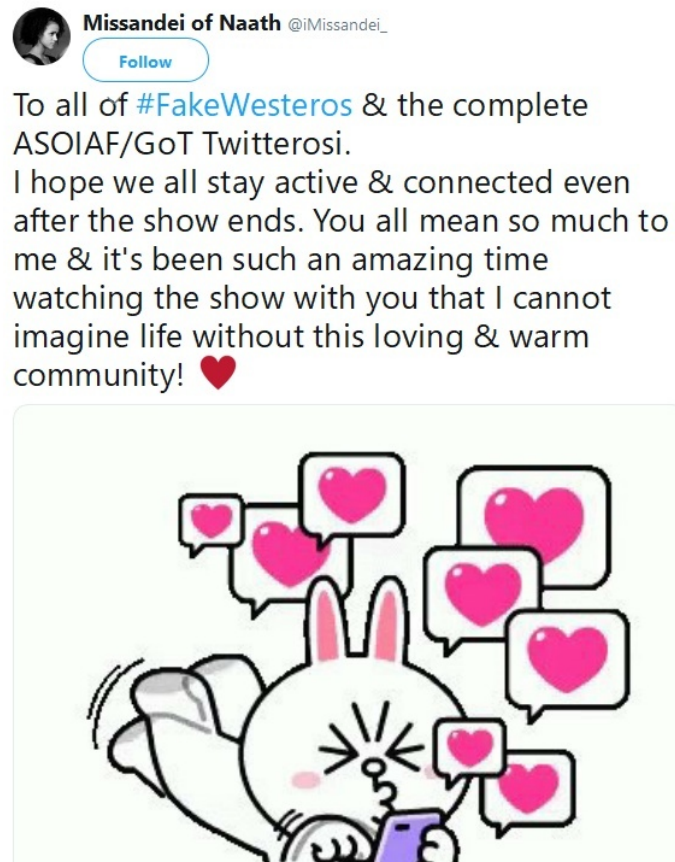


Figure 5.3.2 @iMissandei_ Twitter post (https://twitter.com/iMissandei_/status/1128330013269299201, 14 May 2019)

iMissandei_'s post focused on the fan-fan pure relationship that they had with the community. This outpouring of emotion was brought on by the impending cessation of the series; while the examples examined so far under the quoting and reviewing behaviours were preoccupied with the fan object, this example offers something different. It is most similar to the examples of clowning, which were occasionally directed at other members of the community and fandom or performed in such a way that they encouraged an in-character response from others (for example, *you_there_boy* and *NiceQueenCersei*'s exchange about elephants). In these cases, fan/object and

fan-fan pure relationships appeared to overlap. In *iMissandei_*'s post, there was a change in tone and focus (or register, as discussed previously under *Clowning*) that shifted away from the object attachment and prioritised the social attachment to other community members. Underlying *iMissandei_*'s "hope" that everyone remained active and connected after the finale was the fear that they might not; that the end of *GOT* would also spell the end of #FakeWesteros. This anxiety is expressed by others as well. For instance, *IronbornTheon* wrote:

I've been thinking a lot about the show ending this week, and while I'm both excited, dreading it, and sort of not wanting to see it, I have realized that just because the show is going off the air, doesn't mean the community is going anywhere. We still have the books to (hopefully) look forward to in the future. And there are so many analyses and podcasts that study every single line and character action in the entire series. But also, I want to mention how thankful I am for the opportunity to have been and continue to be apart of the amazing community around #FakeWesteros and the ASOIAF / GoT.

(<https://twitter.com/IronbornTheon/status/1128282649032888322>)

This example even more clearly illustrates how fans negotiate threats to their attachments. *IronbornTheon* redefined their relationship with the various objects they associate with *GOT* (i.e., the ongoing series of books and various paratexts in the form of "analyses and podcasts"). Williams (2015) points out that, so long as fans "continue to enjoy that which can be derived" from a sustained engagement, they will continue in their fan/object attachments (p. 22); thus, they will also continue to identify themselves as fans of that object. Moreover, like *iMissandei_*, *IronbornTheon* reaffirmed their relationships with their fellow fans (fan-fan pure relationships) in the #FakeWesteros community. Both posts indicate that *IronbornTheon* and *iMissandei_* shifted their priority from the show and the enjoyment they derived from it, to the community and the rewards it engendered for them. This suggests that the social relationships involved in onlife fandom often move beyond parasocial interactions with the inanimate (i.e., a book, a television program, a film, a narrative, a fictional character) and into reciprocal friendships with other fans sustained in the mediated spaces of onlife. This understanding of fan-fan pure relationships also offers insight on the ways of being and fan identification of interview

participants, like Uilleand's relationships with RP writing partners and Rhamiel's friendships with fellow Diana/Wonder Woman cosplayers that were discussed in Chapter 4, Section 4.3.

"Self-narrative" (Williams, 2015) is a process whereby a self-reflexive person continually "integrate[s] events which occur in the external world, and sort[s] them into the ongoing 'story' about the self" (Giddens, 1991, p. 54). As seen in Chapter 4, online fan identities are constructed reflexively through what I have characterised as ways of being. Additionally, self-narrative is constructed very much in the same way that fans and audiences construct a contextual frame for any narrative or storyworld (Emmott, 1990; Sanford & Emmott, 2012), evaluating and assimilating new information into their individualised understanding. Twitter presents a platform for public self-reflexivity where a coming to terms with the end of series can play out on each person's wall (i.e., web page that aggregates a user's tweets). On 19 May, 2019, the posts of the FakeWesterosi provided spontaneously offered up an oral history for its members, with a number of posts such as these:

BeautyBrienne: I don't think I'd be who I am today without this series, or without you. In fact, I know I wouldn't be. I owe you all an enormous debt that I can't pay.

<https://twitter.com/BeautyBrienne/status/1129915126818267136>

GameOverRos: Started watching around the start of Season 2. Between Ep3, and Ep4, I created Ros. Live tweeted for the first time during Ep4. Garden of Bones. 22nd April, 2012. Devoured the books over 6 weeks in summer. A crazy, intense 6 weeks. The rest is history!

<https://twitter.com/GameOverRos/status/1130142379346944001>

TheBearHeir: TPOMF¹⁸ is where I really jumped into the deep end of the pool of this craziness. I made memes, I theorized, I read the books and I ended up meeting one of my favorite characters, Dacey. With

¹⁸ "The Page of Many Faces" was a Facebook group dedicated to *A Song of Ice and Fire*: <https://www.facebook.com/ThePageOfManyFaces/> Several members of #FakeWesteros were associated with it.

Dacey I felt myself grow which is why I modeled my Twitter after her

<https://twitter.com/TheBearHeir/status/1130141707683749888>

This self-reflexive process represents a form of assessment and reclassification of information related to a fan's identity. Regardless of whether these fans intended to maintain their pure relationships with *GOT* or their fellow fans, the ending of the series brought about a change in how they defined their fan selves. Their online ways of being would change once the series ended. Some members, like *IronbornTheon*, sought to isolate the activities that would extend their engagement post-object. For example, *ellariasnake* attempted to organise other members of the community for a book club:

So, book re-read club (BRRC), are we going to start with a Game of Thrones? When does this start? Do we have worksheets? Assigned chapters? Stickers? [Animated GIF of IDK girl]

<https://twitter.com/ellariasnake/status/1130235714707214336>

In another instance, *NiceQueenCersei* reassured *AerysGoneMad* that the community would go on:

AerysGoneMad: I feel like I just joined #FakeWesteros and now it's ending <heart breaking emoji>

NiceQueenCersei: It's not ending. We have books, spin-offs and quite frankly it's far too fun to leave now. #FakeWesteros #GameOfThrones

<https://twitter.com/AerysGoneMad/status/1130166379712339968>

A review of the content of #*FakeWesteros* members in the years since the television series ended indicates, in fact, that the community on Twitter has fragmented. Many of the members of #*FakeWesteros* are still active and continue to post *GOT* content, but some accounts are now dormant or deleted. It is possible that fans that formed close bonds have continued their relationships outside of Twitter, but that cannot be confirmed within the scope of the current study. Fans like *BeautyBrienne* continue producing content, such as review podcasts for other media and fandoms (e.g., *Westworld*, *Wheel of Time*). Nevertheless, for those members that remain active, many still include descriptions in their bios that acknowledge their attachment to *GOT* and #*FakeWesteros*. Future research may confirm if the community is merely dormant and

will reform with HBO’s planned launch of spin-off series *House of the Dragon* in 2022 (<https://www.hbo.com/house-of-the-dragon>).

5.4. Para-active Engagement in *AV Club* and #FakeWesteros

The examples discussed in Sections 5.2 and 5.3 demonstrate how behaviour and response make up moments of engagement with media texts. Figure 5.4.1 illustrates this basic process of behaviour and response in the initial moment of engagement with a text, like when the *AV Club* members watched “The Rains of Castamere” episode and the FakeWesterosi watched the episodes in the final season of *GOT*.

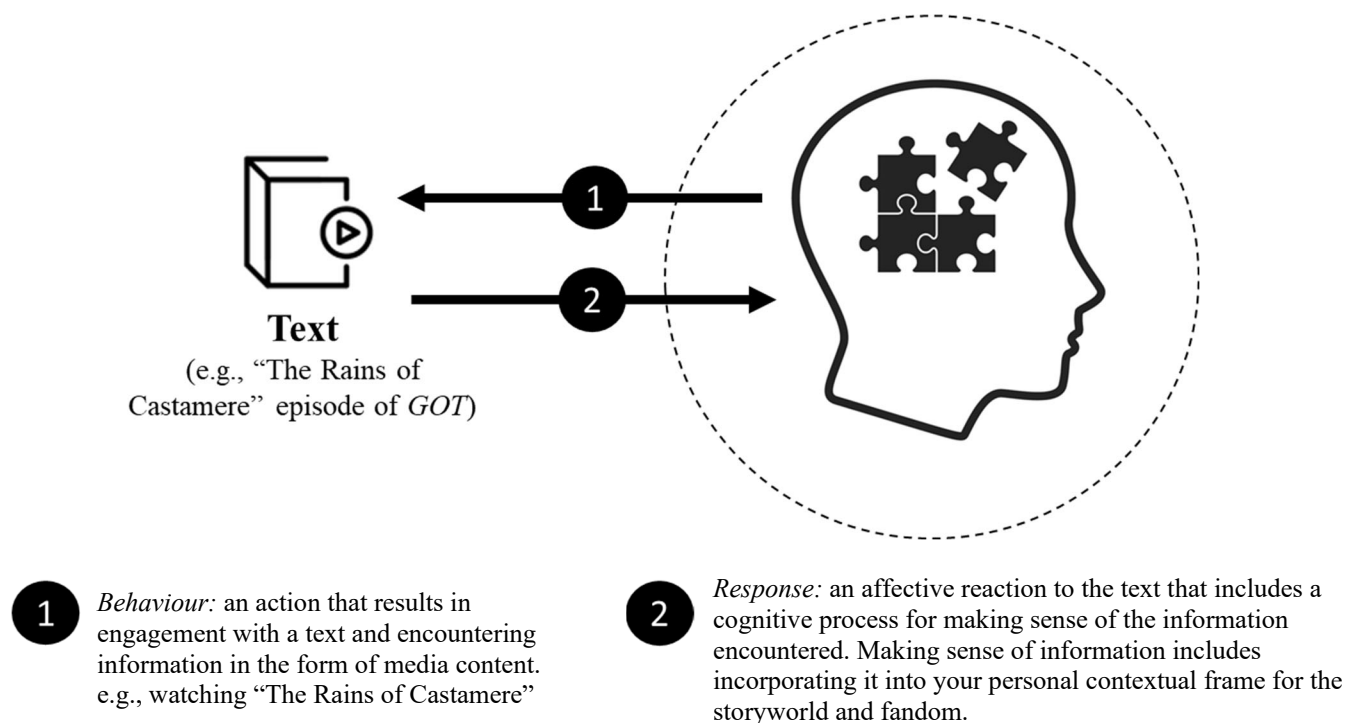


Figure 5.4.1. Behaviour and response in the initial moment of engagement with a source text.

The moment is initiated with a behaviour: watching the episode “The Rains of Castamere” represents such a behaviour. This action also constitutes IB since it results in an information encounter; the media content represents information that the viewer derives meaning from (in addition to enjoyment, pleasure, and potentially other affective states). Response is the affective and cognitive reaction to information encountered. The response includes sense-making, as semantic information is incorporated into the viewer’s contextual frame for the narrative,

storyworld, and fandom. The different forms of response (emotional, humorous, rational, and analogic) are ways in which the sense-making in moments of engagement play out. Response can move fans from one moment of engagement to another; the *AV Club* members engaged paratextually on the *AV Club* website and the FakeWesterosi posted on Twitter as ways of processing and contextualising information they encountered initially. Figure 5.4.2 illustrates this subsequent moment of engagement with paratexts.

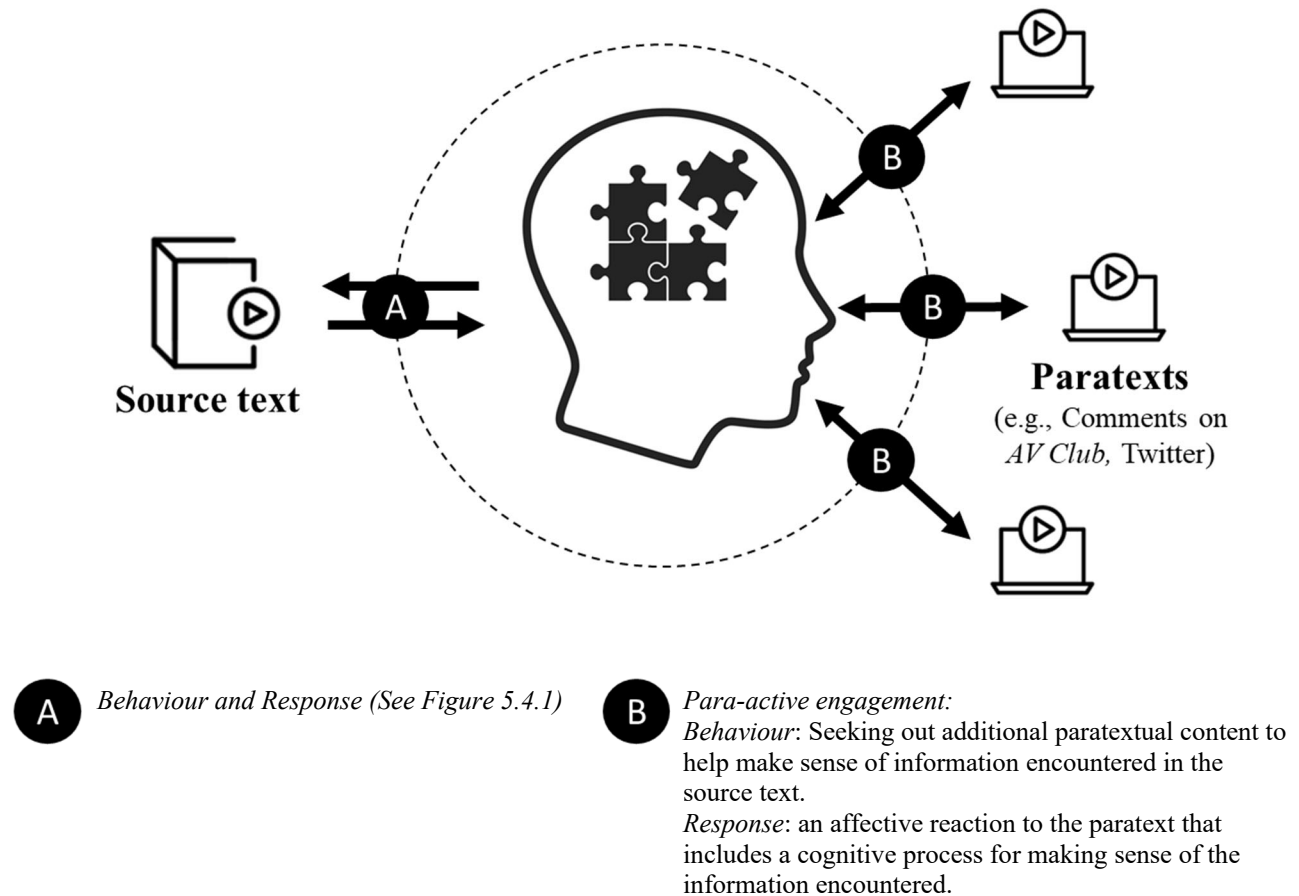


Figure 5.4.2. Behaviour and response in para-active engagement.

Evans (2016) uses the term para-active engagement to refer to fans' engagement with paratextual content, and specifically with epitextual information. Fans are para-active when they are moving beyond engagement with a text (like viewing "The Rains of Castamere" or "The Iron Throne" episodes) and seeking to find or share additional related content in the form of paratexts (e.g., visiting the *AV Club* website, livetweeting the episode, reading comments, posting comments, quoting, clowning, and reviewing). The production of fans in both case studies is generated through para-active engagement. To understand how this takes place, let us first look

at how moments of engagement with *GOT* and related paratextual information are observed in the *AV Club* case study.

As we have seen with the examples from both case studies, fans encounter existing paratexts and create new paratexts through this engagement. The *AV Club* comments are responses that are para-active because they are found in moments of engagement that occur in the paratextual space (see Figure 5.4.3).

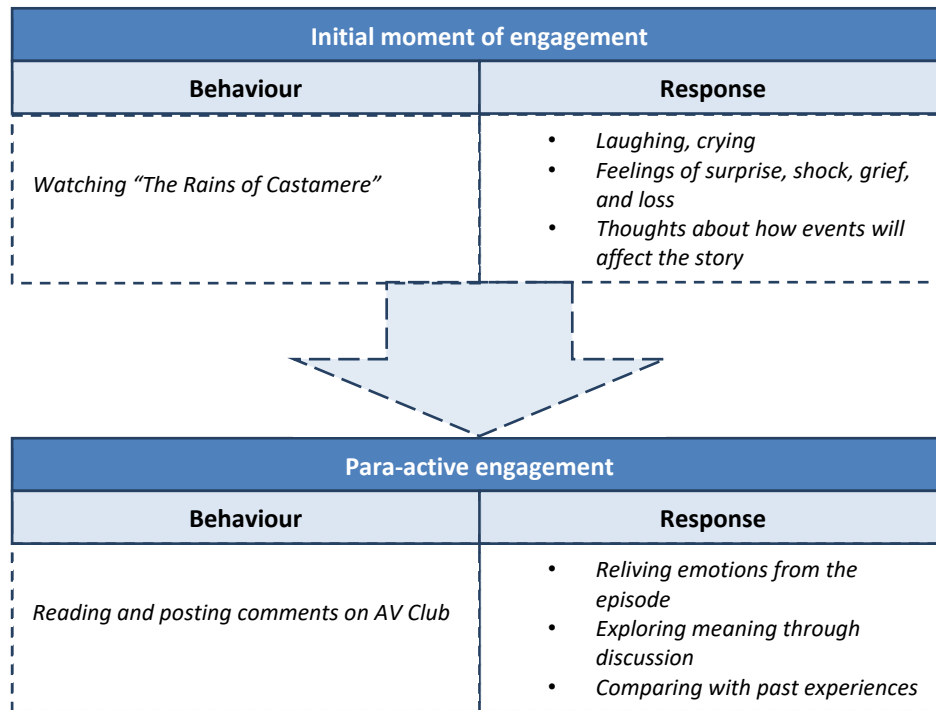


Figure 5.4.3 Layers of engagement: Relationship between initial moment of engagement and successive moments of para-active engagement in *AV Club* case study.

However, as the *AV Club* examples represented in Figure 5.4.3 demonstrate, they also build upon and reflect responses experienced initially. For example, *ganondorf* recalled their wife's reaction and how it made them feel like a monster in the initial moment of engagement. Similarly, *porpentine* and *nuclearhobbit* discussed the impact of the ending credits sequence, responding to each other para-actively while at the same time sharing something of their initial responses. In this sense, moments of engagement, be they with an original text/fan object or with paratextual content, layer upon each other. Every subsequent layer of engagement expands a fan's contextual frame. For example, other community members reading *porpentine*'s and *nuclearhobbit*'s

comments would potentially have a different appreciation for the credits sequence that they experienced originally when watching the episode.

Evans (2019) also breaks down the moment of engagement into its component parts, notably, type of behaviour and form of response. According to Evans (2019), behaviour is about “doing something” with content (p. 36). Behaviour is what determines whether the moment of engagement is para-active based on whether a fan is “doing something” with the text or with a paratext (i.e., reading it, viewing it, interpreting it). Behaviour can be “receptive” (e.g., viewing a television episode, reading a book) when a fan “receives information from the content” and “interactive” (e.g., posting online) when the fan has “mechanical input into the content” (Evans, 2019, pp. 35-36). These different types (Table 5.4.1) can also be understood as IB, specifically in the way content is transformed into meaningful (i.e., semantic) information when it is encountered through what Floridi (2002) refers to as “semanticisation” (pp. 130-131) (as discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.7).

Table 5.4.1 Type of behaviour found in AV Club case study (cf. Evans, 2019, p. 38).

	RECEPTIVE	INTERACTIVE
TEXTUAL	Viewing the episode (text)	Discussing the episode (text) with another viewer
PARATEXTUAL	Reading reviews and comments on <i>AV Club</i>	Responding to reviews and comments on <i>AV Club</i>

Evans’ definition corresponds to a critical understanding of IB as “doing something” with information, whether it is accessing, using, sharing, or creating information (Case & Given, 2016). In this sense, IB can also be classified as interactive or receptive, textual and paratextual (see Table 5.4.1).

When we consider the examples in Table 5.4.1, both receptive and interactive behaviours related to paratextual content can be understood as para-active because they engage with epitextual information. If we turn to the results from *#FakeWesteros*, however, receptive as a type of behaviour is problematised because para-active engagement occurs at the same time as the initial moment of engagement with the text (Figure 5.4.5).

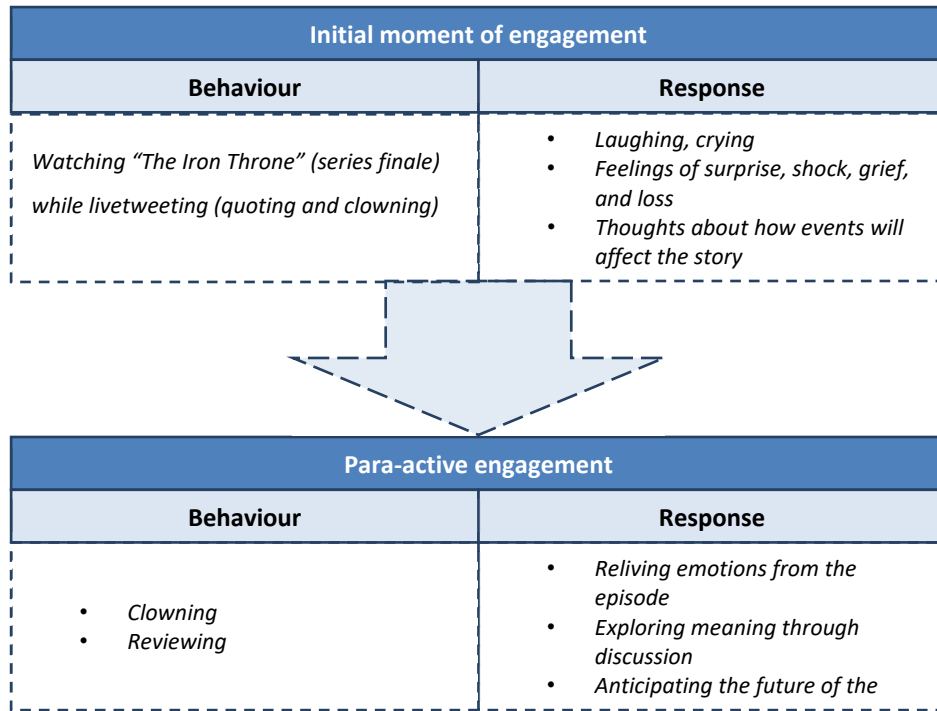


Figure 5.4.4 Layers of engagement: Relationship between initial moment of engagement and successive moments of para-active engagement in #FakeWesteros case study.

The #FakeWesteros examples demonstrate that all four types of behaviour (receptive, interactive, textual, and paratextual) articulated by Evans (2019) can occur in the same moment of engagement. The livetweet session, which is today a common fan practice (e.g., Florini, 2019; Negrete & McManus, 2021; Schirra, Sun & Bentley, 2014; Stewart, 2020), offers a medium in which fans can encounter paratexts in other tweets even as they are still experiencing the source text on their television screens, and to share their responses in the same instant. Examples of quoting, such as *danygonebad* and *LordBranRaven* posting the same portentous line, and of clowning, such as the immediate reactions to Queen Cersei pronouncing “I wanted those elephants!” illustrate how these behaviours occur in real-time with the experience of the episode. Evans’ (2019) behaviour types are useful for describing discrete behaviours, but the study results make it clear that any moment of engagement can be para-active, including the initial encounter with the text.

5.5. Everyday Onlife Practice of GOT Fans

Figure 5.5.1 illustrates how the forms of response and categories of behaviour identified in each of the online communities are interrelated, in the same manner that ways of being and doing were in the analysis of interviews (as seen in Chapter 4, Figure 4.4.1), and how they are embedded within the onlife environments of the fans performing them.

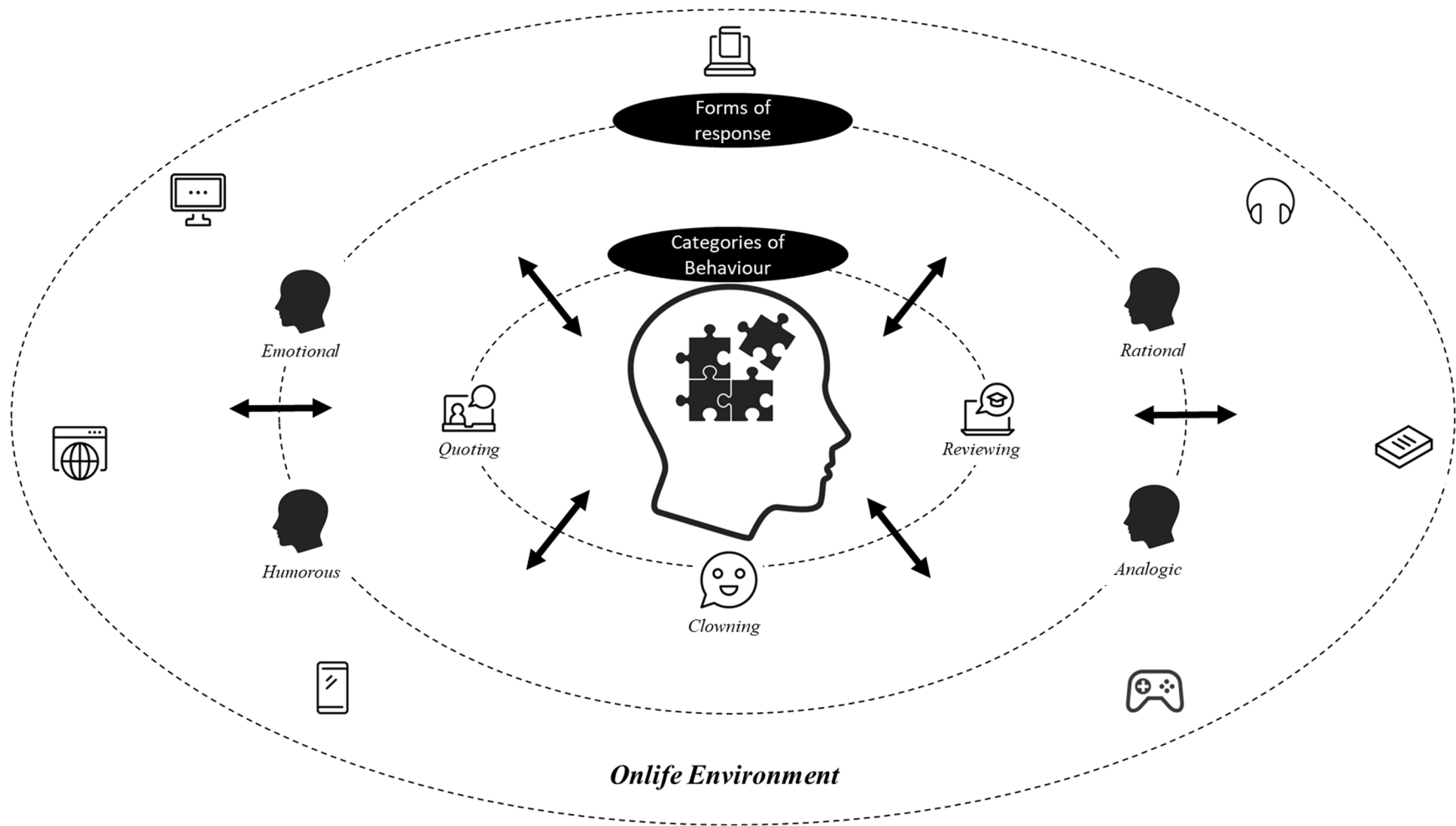


Figure 5.5.1. Forms of response and categories of behaviour from the AV Club and #FakeWesteros online communities.

As a fan practice that represents everyday engagement with ICTs, the activity investigated in both case studies (i.e., posting on the *AV Club* website and on Twitter) falls somewhere between reading (Dresang & Koh, 2009; Rothbauer, 2016) and fan production (Jenkins, 2006a; Price & Robinson, 2016). In this, it resembles the “quasi-invisible” production of de Certeau’s consumers (1984, p. 31). Consider the successive moments of engagement that made up the experience of the *AV Club* and #*FakeWesteros* fans: each person viewed the episode on television or computer screen, usually on the Sunday or Monday hour when it first aired in their region. As noted in Emmott (1989; 1997) and Van Steenhuyse (2014), media fans develop their personal contextual frame based on their consumption of narrative content. For *AV Club* members, the immersive experience of watching “The Rains of Castamere” episode transformed each one’s context for the *GOT* storyworld, providing new semantic information that they were then required to fit into their contextual frame. They then visited the *AV Club* website. This potentially represented part of each one’s regular media fan experience, as pre-existing members of the *AV Club* online community. They gravitated to the Experts page or Newbies page to read the review, or perhaps read both reviews. Some, knowing what to expect from the review threads based on past experience, scrolled past without reading in order to reach the comments at the bottom of the page. And, here, they read the comments of other fans and posted their own responses, reacting to the episode and to each other as a community.

For #*FakeWesteros* members, the initial encounter is messier; they prepared themselves for the episode with a mobile device or computer logged in to their Twitter account and tuned in to the episode on another device. They immersed themselves in the experience of the episode but remained attuned to any information shared in their Twitter feed, and ensured that any reflections, comments, or jokes that occurred to them as they watched were shared with their followers. Information surged fast and furious; even as they made sense of the episode content, they had to register new information that scrolled on Twitter, and just as rapidly contribute to the torrent of paratextual content. Yet, much the same as the *AV Club* members, they evaluated all the encountered information, synthesised and incorporated it into their contextual frame. While #*FakeWesteros* members are more embedded in the digital environment than *AV Club* members, the challenge of making sense of the semantic information they encounter remains the same. Next, we can examine the set of behaviours evidenced in these successive moments of

engagement to better understand the role of information. For example, the fans that visited *AV Club* or posted on Twitter because it was part of their regular experience as members of their community, illustrate an everyday practice dictated by routine rather than an articulated information need.

Wilson and Walsh's (1996) general model of IB, described in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.1, accounts for passive attention and passive search as part of information-seeking behaviour. Laplante and Downie (2011) provide an example of the application and adaption of this model in their study of music information-seeking in everyday life. For *GOT* fans that actively sought out paratextual content on the *AV Club* (the reviews and comments by other users) and on Twitter (posts by other *GOT* fans and *#FakeWesteros* members) to qualify or supplement their viewing experience, their IB parallels that of the information-seeking experience of music fans (Laplante & Downie, 2011). The information seeking of music fans resulted in the experience of pleasure that reinforced engagement. These "hedonic outcomes" are described as a type of information use (Laplante & Downie, 2011, p. 204). The process of seeking out paratextual content, whether it is about music or musical artists, online reviews of television or film, commentary about media, or social interactions with other fans, all have similar hedonic outcomes: "fun" information use that defines the fan experience. The emerging research area of fun-life contexts provides a basis for understanding the relationship between fun and information (Ocepek, et al., 2018; refer to Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2 for details). For example, when each *GOT* fan chose one review page over the other on *AV Club*, they chose 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 some of the comments posted, and then added their own. In many cases, as we have seen, posting responses resulted in a dialogue with other fans. As a tactic for interpreting the semantic information from "The Rains of Castamere", the *AV Club* posts illustrate how engaging with paratextual information online is understood as a commonplace activity; one that is a routine, if not daily, part of the lives of these fans, in which information from media is encountered, interpreted, and replicated within each individual's contextual frame.

The dialogue between fans on *AV Club* is but one method fans employ behaviours and responses to negotiate information from the episode and television series. The clowning

behaviours exhibited by *#FakeWesteros* members through joking, teasing, and banter is another, similar way in which fans make sense of narrative information. The interpretive process, we can surmise, continued for all of them, as they each took something away from their interactions that shaped the storyworld in their own minds. This aspect of negotiating information is a hyperdiegetic gap-filling process (Hills, 2002), where fans are invited to speculate and assign their own affective meanings.

The framework for understanding how *AV Club* and *#FakeWesteros* members engage with media representations, and *inhabit* these representations, can be applied beyond the media fan context to onlife experience in general. Floridi's (2002) notion of the "semanticisation of the Self" (p. 130) is illustrated in examples from both case studies, demonstrating how individuals and communities make sense of the information they encounter in the mediated spaces of their everyday lives. The specific behaviours and responses of *AV Club* and *#FakeWesteros* members depicted throughout this chapter, which represent their onlife ways of being and doing, are valuable because they offer a new way of thinking about how we encounter and use information in the complex, information-rich modern world, defined in this research as everyday onlife practice.

6. Everyday Onlife Practice

6.1. Introduction

We have moved inside the infosphere. Its all-pervading nature also depends on the extent to which we accept its interface as integral to our reality and transparent to us, in the sense of no longer perceived as present. What matters is not so much moving bits instead of atoms—this is an outdated, communication-based interpretation of the information society that owes too much to mass-media sociology—as the far more radical fact that our understanding and conceptualization of the essence and fabric of reality is changing. Indeed, we have begun to accept the virtual as partly real and the real as partly virtual.

(Floridi, 2014, p. 218)

This study employed a constructivist grounded theory (CGT) approach to the study of fans and their information behaviours in the spaces where media have converged (Jenkins, 2006a). As first introduced in Chapter 1, Jenkins (2006a) theorised a convergence culture that transformed fan practices. The study has taken this notion a step further by demonstrating the impacts of convergence culture on the ways that people encounter and make sense of information, and how people are themselves transformed by information encounters. The term *onlife*, the literal merging of so-called real embodied experience and online/networked experience mediated by information and communication technologies (ICTs) (Floridi, 2014; 2015; see also Chapter 2, Section 2.5 for details), is used to describe these changes. The constant comparative method of CGT permitted a close study of interview transcripts from 17 fan participants and posts from two online fan communities (*AV Club* and *#FakeWesteros*) to identify recurring themes that connect information use to fan practices. This analysis confirmed that the intertwining of daily life and online experiences in moments of engagement has routinised onlife for these fans; fan practices today are *de facto* onlife. They are performed in the onlife environments that constitute the infosphere in the manner that Floridi (2014, p. 218) describes in the quotation that heads this chapter. It is through the observation of how the

information-rich onlife behaviours and practices of fans are situated in the *everyday*, the “nexus of work, leisure, and family life” (Ocepek, 2018, p. 399), that de Certeau’s (1984) everyday life practice becomes especially relevant. What the analysis reveals is that fans are involved in *everyday onlife practice*.

The study’s research questions asked who is an onlife fan and what are their information behaviours (IBs). The analysis, driven by a social constructionist lens, plumbed the depths of interviews and case studies to answer these questions. The different facets of fan identity explored in interviews, including how participants constructed their identities through their engagement with media representations (Chapter 4, Section 4.3), and the examples of self-narrative through digital forms of response in comments and posts in the *AV Club* and *#FakeWesteros* communities (Chapter 5, Sections 5.2.1 and 5.3.1), provide us with a detailed portrait of the onlife fan and their different ways of being. The comprehensive examples of interview participants’ fan practices in Chapter 4, Section 4.2, under the broad categories of making, collecting, and playing, present a robust catalogue of IBs that advances our understanding in numerous domains, including information creation, play communities, serious leisure, and fun-life contexts. The case studies further these results by providing a wholly new understanding of IB through the combination of behaviour and response in moments of engagement (Chapter 5, Section 5.5.2). This expands and connects disparate research on engagement as it relates to information use (Evans, 2019; Nahl, 2007). The following sections offer discussion and synthesis of results from interviews and case studies that illustrate the emergent theory of *everyday onlife practice*.

Section 6.2 revisits the discussion of moments of engagement that emerged from the analysis of the *AV Club* and *#FakeWesteros* communities to develop an understanding of *sustained engagement*. Sustained engagement represents an ongoing cycle of behaviour and response that is self-generating. Section 6.3 introduces the concept of *tactics* as the combination of behaviour and response within sustained engagement. As suggested in the conclusion of Chapter 5 (Section 5.5), behaviour and response align with the different ways of being and doing that interview participants described through their perspectives in Chapter 4 (Sections 4.2 and 4.3). The discussion reveals how tactics represent an understanding of IB that includes the synthesis of information encountered onlife and creation of new information, and as a way of

asserting identity. Section 6.4 brings together the theorised concepts of para-active engagement, sustained engagement, behaviour, response, and tactics, and uses them to develop a comprehensive model for the IB of onlife fans. The model demonstrates how tactics (i.e., behaviour and response) generate a pattern of IB within the onlife environments where media engagement takes place. Section 6.5 revisits the hobbyist context that emerged as the context in which the perspectives of interview participants were situated and proposes that the information-based activities of media fans represent a category of leisure distinct from existing conceptions of serious leisure. This finding represents a unique contribution to the study of leisure activities, beyond the model for the IB of fans. Section 6.6 summarises the theory of everyday onlife practice that emerges from the key concepts of para-active and sustained engagement, behaviour, response, and tactics arising from the study results. The totality of onlife experience, as represented through the ways of being and doing of media fans in this study, suggests that the everyday has been transformed by ICTs: what I refer to as everyday onlife practice. Finally, Section 6.7 addresses study limitations and offers opportunities for future research that can further extend the theoretical contributions of this study.

6.2. Sustained Engagement

Para-active engagement, as discussed in Chapter 5, Section 5.4, represents encounters with paratextual information following an initial moment of engagement with a source text (e.g., “The Rains of Castamere” episode of *Game of Thrones (GOT)*). This suggests that fan engagement, as a broader concept, is a concatenation of such moments where information is encountered through the texts and paratexts of media content. As the experiences of interview participants examined in Chapter 4 demonstrate, participation in and identification with a fandom includes countless such connected moments. Consider the involved practices of making, playing, and collecting that were described in Section 4.2. To name but a few examples that could only be achieved through many moments of engagement with media, consider how Isthi wrote fic and participated in *rvbficwars*; how Malakh contributed her time as beta reader for other fic writers; how Eriner planned, researched, and facilitated a *Dungeons & Dragons* campaign using the digital platform Roll20; how Amriel described finding inspiration for new cosplay designs by watching media and how her designs allowed her to develop a cosplayer persona via social media; how Kerra cosplayed *Riverdale* with her friends outside a local diner;

how Aziraphale hunted and ultimately acquired Faith's knife for her *Buffy* collection; and how Agnephi's *Transformers* toy collecting was inspired by childhood nostalgia and led to a community of practice with like-minded collectors and sellers. Each one of these examples of fan practices began with an initial moment of engagement with media and can be measured in successive moments over time. I refer to this as *sustained engagement* (see Figure 6.2.1).

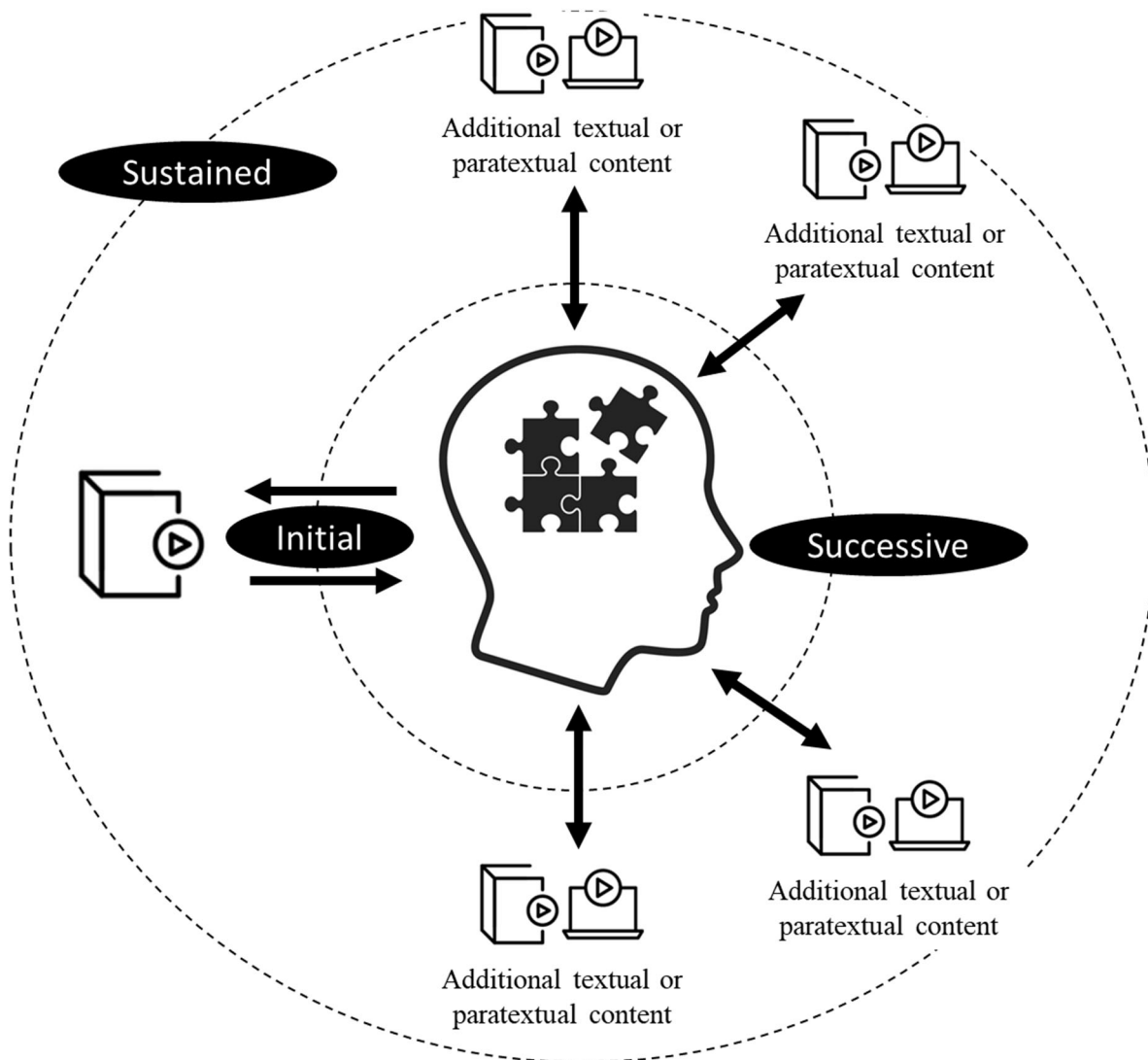


Figure 6.2.1. Sustained engagement.

The process of engaging with a storyworld or fandom through multiple texts and paratexts over time. This includes initial and successive moments of engagement where, in each instance, new information is encountered. See also Figure 5.4.2.

Sustained engagement is the process of engaging with a storyworld or fandom through multiple texts and paratexts over time. It includes successive moments of engagement where, in each instance, new information is encountered and incorporated into a fan's contextual frame.

While the *#FakeWesteros* and *AV Club* members were involved in para-active engagement at different stages of their information encounters with *GOT* content (as discussed in Chapter 5, Section 5.4), the two case studies offer evidence that each successive moment that made up fans' sustained engagement with *GOT* builds upon a generative cycle of behaviour and response. Forms of response are the "adjective" (or adverb) to the action of behaviour: when the *AV Club* commenters post comments, they are "doing something" (Evans, 2019, p. 36) emotionally, humorously, rationally, and analogically. This implies that response qualifies behaviour (the action or verb). However, the analysis of both online communities suggests the relationship between behaviour and response is more complex, particularly when we think about engagement as the concatenation of moments. A fan's response to the initial moment of engagement (e.g., how they responded while viewing an episode) motivates the behaviour that triggers their subsequent para-active engagement (e.g., reading and posting on *AV Club*).

Discussion in Chapter 5, Section 5.4 illustrated this by showing how forms of response and categories of behaviour are many-layered (as represented in Figures 5.4.3 and 5.4.4). Analysis of *#FakeWesteros* Twitter posts in Section 5.3.1, which focused on the behaviour rather than the response, also demonstrated how behaviour generates response, and vice versa. The behaviours of quoting, clowning, and reviewing were motivated by fans responding to episode content (textual information), to other fan content on Twitter or the internet (paratextual information), or some combination of both. These behaviours also created paratextual information that others could engage with and respond to. This generative process (behaviour → response → behaviour → response → etc.) represents the most basic level underlying sustained engagement. When engagement with a storyworld or fandom is sustained, the process of behaviour (engaging with a text/paratext) and response (responding to a text/paratext) is a self-perpetuating cycle that encourages ongoing engagement with new texts and paratexts. Just like *AV Club* members, the FakeWesterosi participated in a generative cycle of sustained engagement (see Figure 6.2.2).

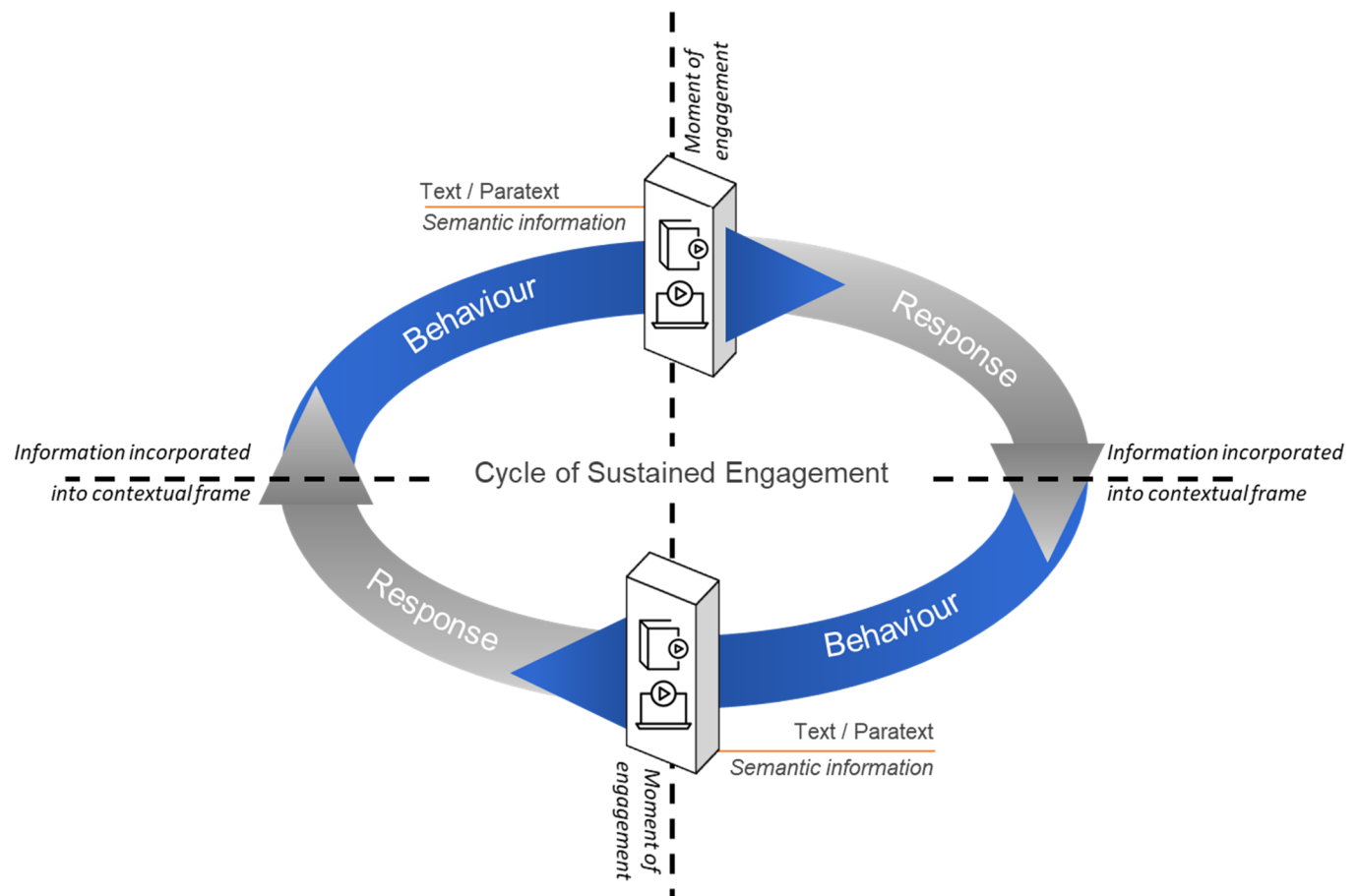


Figure 6.2.2 Cycle of sustained engagement.

A fan's response from a previous moment of engagement motivates behaviour that leads to a successive engagement. Information encountered at each successive moment of engagement is incorporated into a fan's contextual frame.

Figure 6.2.2 depicts this cycle of sustained engagement. It demonstrates an ongoing synthesis of information, since in each moment of engagement new information is encountered and incorporated into the fan's contextual frame for the storyworld and fandom. This process is also observable in the accounts of interview participants in Chapter 4. For example, in Chapter 4, Section 4.2.1, when Isthi sees relationships play out between characters in the media she consumes and wonders "what the fic is", or when Amriel watches *GOT* with a "discerning eye" for cosplay ideas, the synthesis of existing knowledge with information encountered in media texts becomes evident. As Amriel points out, what can follow is "information gathering" (her words, as discussed in Section 4.2.1, *Making cosplay*); watching an episode of *GOT* (behaviour)

sparks an idea (response) that motivates Amriel to seek out additional information (behaviour) from other media texts or paratextual content, which eventually and cumulatively helps transform her idea into a fully-fleshed design. Sustained engagement with the television series sparks additional ideas (for instance, Amriel's gender-bending Khal Drogo). Sustained engagement also includes interactions with other sources of information, such as fan-generated paratextual content; in the cases of Amriel and Isthi, this would include the fic written by or cosplay of other fans shared online.

These examples from interview participants demonstrate how concepts from IB literature (as discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.1) like information reception, reactions, and rewards (Diwanji, et al., 2020), monitoring, semi-defined browsing, and searching in patterns of information acquisition (Lee, Ocepek, and Makri, 2022), and the figure of the information flaneur (Dörk, Carpendale and Williamson, 2011) are all notions that are relevant to the process of sustained engagement. These concepts represent aspects of the synthesis of information that takes place at the interaction of behaviour and response, where encountered information is incorporated into a fan's contextual frame. Each of these IB concepts, through the generative cycle of sustained engagement where behaviour and response extend media fandom, can also be understood as *tactics*, which moves beyond synthesis to the creation of information.

6.3. Tactics

6.3.1. Tactical Behaviours and Responses

Behaviours and responses can be described as *tactical* in the sense used by de Certeau (1984; see also Section 2.6 for details), when they are deliberate, performative, and para-active. It is possible for responses to not be tactics, for example, when they can be classified as uncontrolled reactions to stimuli. Evans (2019) describes a third form of response that is “physical” (p. 36), which was not clearly distinguishable in either of the case study examples. Physical responses would be, for example, laughing or crying in response to the episode while watching it. In psychology, this is referred to as affect arousal (Niven & Miles, 2013, p. 50). By itself, such a response is not a tactic since it is unconscious or subconscious physiological response. Physiological responses are described and even performed (or re-enacted) in the comments and posts (for example, when *Lex Lisbon* screams or when *NiceQueenCersei* uses the

crying emoji), but they are done so in the “virtually limitless” and asynchronous paratextual space, rather than in the initial moment of engagement with the original content that stimulated the response (Genette, 1987/1997, p. 344). The concept of “hot cognition” (Sanford & Emmott, 2012), which was discussed Chapter 5, Section 5.3, as a conscious cognitive process for translating thoughts and feelings (i.e., affect), is useful for distinguishing between tactical and non-tactical responses. A tactical response is distinguished from a non-tactical response using the following criteria:

- a) **para-active:** if a response pairs with a decisive action (i.e., behaviour) that leads to subsequent moments of engagement, such as accessing the *AV Club* website to read and comment; and
- b) **performative:** if a response is performed with a social goal in mind (e.g., to relate and connect with other fans within a fandom or community).

Similarly, behaviours are “tactical” when they meet the following criteria:

- a) **deliberate:** the behaviour involves a decisive action, such as: consuming media that includes textual or paratextual content, visiting a website or social media site to read paratextual content, or to create and share paratextual content in the form of a comment or post; and
- b) **para-active:** when a decisive action leads to encountering new paratextual information and the response to it, which results in subsequent moments of engagement, such as livetweeting an *GOT* episode and Twitter and receiving reactions to posts.

The combination of a response and a behaviour is, therefore, a “tactic” in the de Certeauvian sense. Figure 6.3.1 illustrates how tactics correspond to engagement, as seen in previous figures of para-active engagement (Figure 5.4.2) and sustained engagement (Figure 6.2.1).

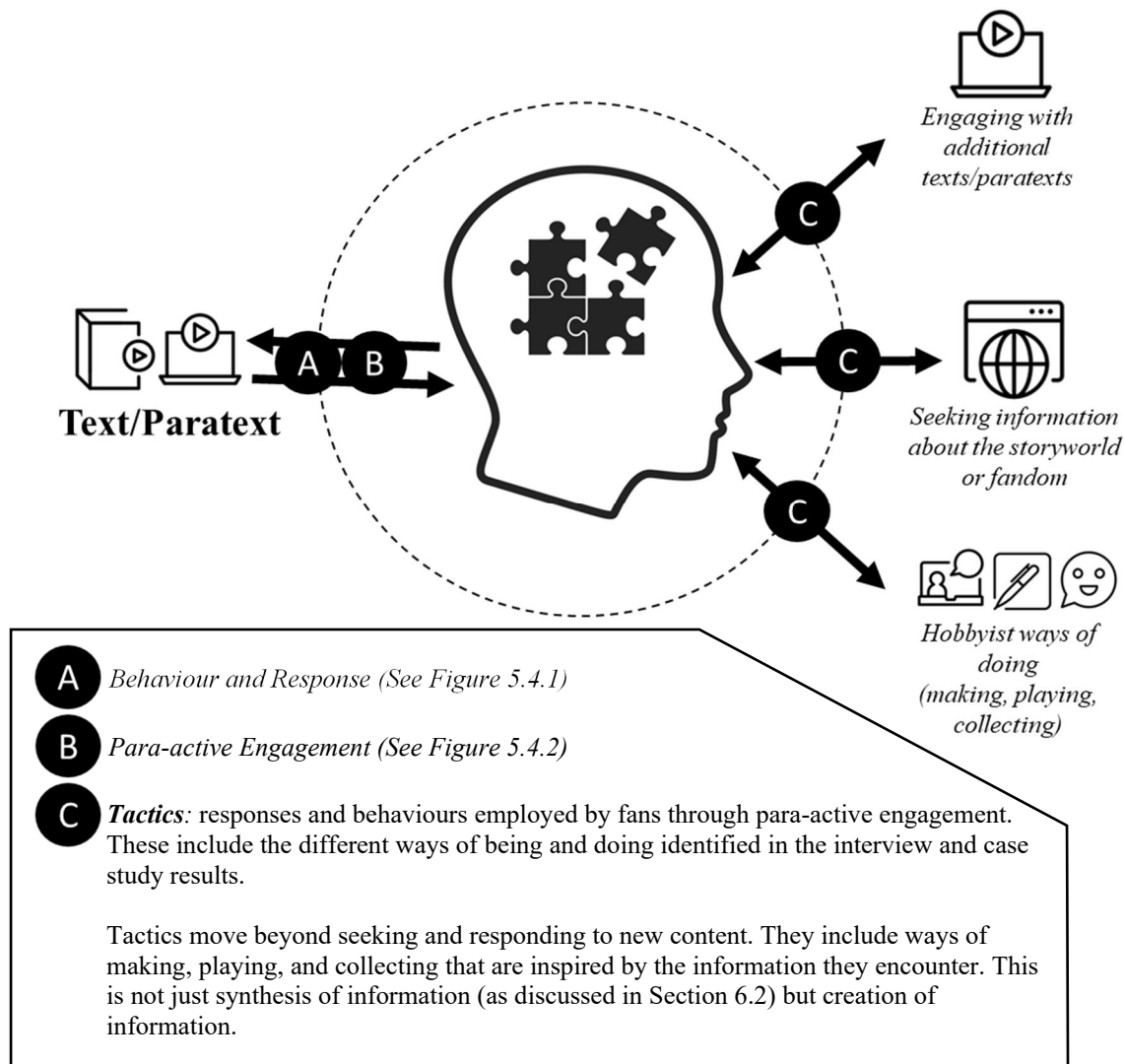


Figure 6.3.1. Tactics

Figure 6.3.1 provides different examples of tactics that include: engaging with additional texts/paratexts (as part of sustained engagement), seeking information about the storyworld or fandom, and hobbyist ways of doing (as examined in Chapter 4, Section 4.2). The deliberate, performative, and para-active criteria of behaviours and responses that make up tactics articulate more than just the cycle of information encounters and synthesis of information into a personal contextual frame; they also are ways in which new information is constantly and continually produced by fans through their sustained engagement with media and fandom (Figure 6.3.2).

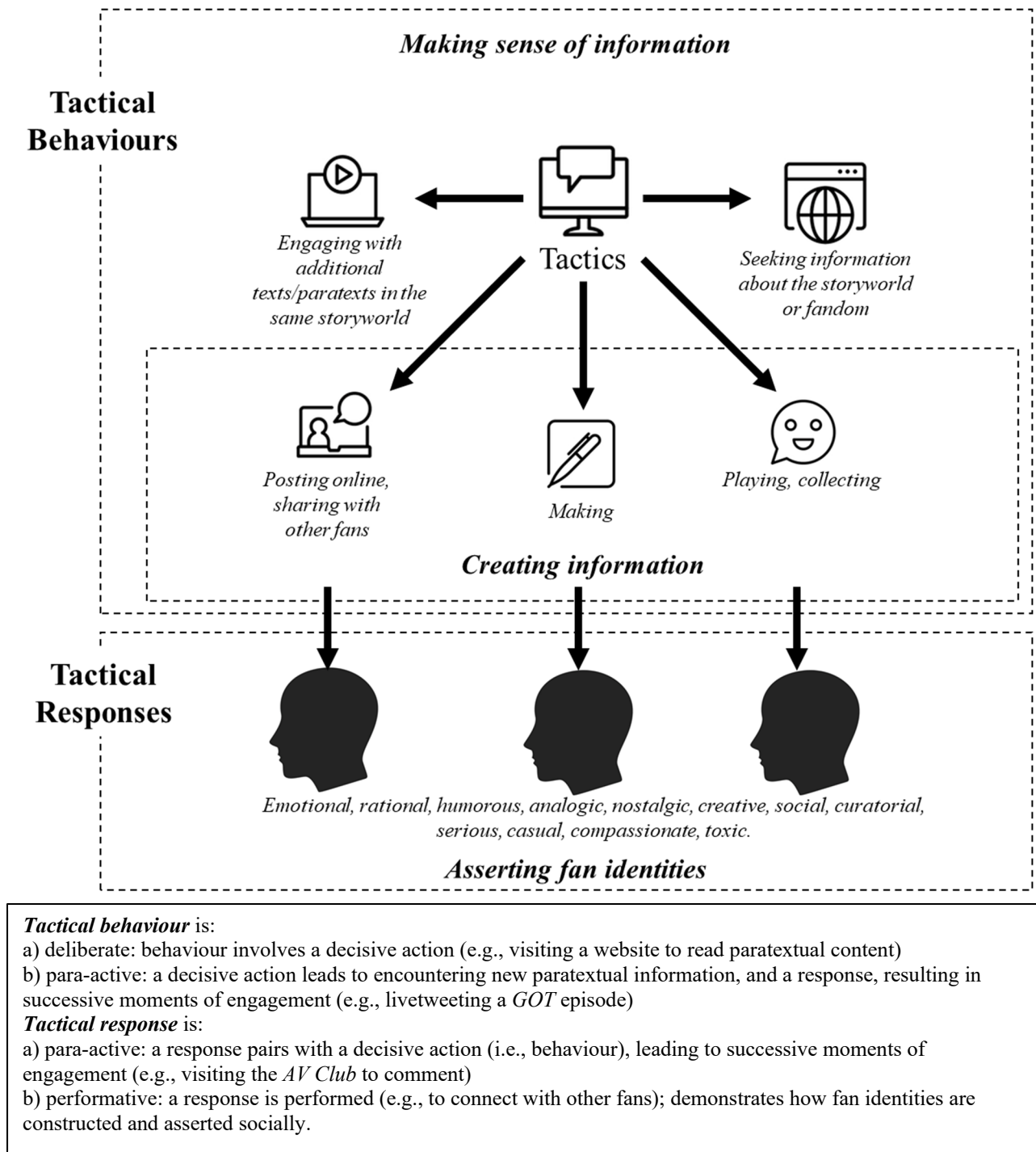


Figure 6.3.2. Tactics as tactical behaviour and response.

Tactics, as depicted in Figures 6.3.1 and 6.3.2, are critical to understanding how fans engage with information online, because they are what give fans agency. When understood as a tactic, behaviours and responses form deliberate actions that shape sustained engagement with

media. Sustained para-active engagement is what allows fans to take information encountered in media and transform it into something that is their own, “inhabiting the text” (de Certeau, 1984, p. xxi). An example of a tactic, such as sharing with others on the *AV Club* website how “The Rains of Castamere” made them feel, is one way for a fan to own the experience. It also allows fans to affirm their fan identity within a group or community. From the accounts of interview participants, Esme’s playing *WWE SuperCards*, Uilleand’s aggressively friendly approach to interactions with other fans in her online communities, and Emphyrean’s desire to show off his *Star Trek* collection are all ways that tactics affirm fan identity. The paratextual space where tactics are employed by fans is where onlife ways of being and doing intersect.

Based on this definition of a tactic, the different forms of response and categories of behaviour examined in Chapter 5 (Sections 5.2 and 5.3) can all be understood as *tactical*. Tactics, as discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.6, are defined in opposition to “strategies” (de Certeau, 1984, pp. 36-37). Strategies are calculations (or manipulations) of power relationships by a subject with will and power, that delimits a particular *space* that is its own. Tactics, on the other hand, are “calculated actions” by subjects that lack the will and power to make and hold such a claim. In fan studies, many authors have positioned tactics employed by fans as a form of resistance against the media industry (e.g., Kinder, 1991; Jenkins, 1991/2013; Booth 2015). Such resistances are actually tactical behaviours and are therefore components of para-active and sustained engagement. Both strategies and tactics, in a broader sense, can be understood discretely as information behaviours, depending on the subject’s orientation, because they represent ways that people engage with information.

It is important to recognise that the paratextual production of *AV Club* and *#FakeWesteros* fans both represent the construction of self-narrative (Williams, 2015) in ways that are analogous to how interview participants constructed their own facets of fan identity. As seen in Chapter 4, Section 4.3, fans construct their fan identity through their different ways of being. Ways of being can be characterised as responses to media experiences, which shape not only a contextual frame of a given narrative, but also their own self-narrative as a fan. As such, all fan production examined in the case studies serves a dual purpose: first, it expands the body of content related to the narrative by *creating* paratextual information, and second it contributes

to the fan's own self-construction. The interpretation of information and meaning making involved in the social media interactions of the *AV Club* and *#FakeWesteros* members are doubly complex when we consider that fans will assign themselves a social media persona through which they can act out their fan identities. This is most evident in *#FakeWesteros*, where the persona each fan inhabits is a parodic version of a character from *GOT*. Section 5.4.2 discussed results in the context of post object fandom and included an example that illustrates this finding. *TheBearHeir* posted that meeting the actor that plays the character of Dacey Mormont in-person was what prompted her to model her Twitter account after the character. But that encounter equally shaped her as a fan (she wrote, "I felt myself grow") and motivated her to engage more actively, and more para-actively, in the fandom. This example situates the entire catalogue of examples examined throughout this research, in interviews and case studies, as ways of being and doing embedded in onlife experience.

6.3.2. *Tactics as Ways of Being and Doing*

The hobbyist context of interview participants, as discussed in Chapter 4, Section 4.2, demonstrated a variety of ways of doing. Making, playing, and collecting emerged as different contextual frames for understanding participants' fan practices and IBs. The numerous examples of participants' experiences in the subsections of Section 4.2, represented onlife ways of doing.

Chapter 5 examined the generation and sharing of content on the *AV Club* website (avclub.com) and on Twitter among *#FakeWesteros* community members as the ways of doing of *Game of Thrones* (*GOT*) fans. Posting comments on an online social platform (be that a message board thread on a website or Twitter) was the specific fan activity examined in each case study, from the perspective of forms of response and categories of behaviour as components of media engagement (Evans, 2019). In the hobbyist context of the interview participants fan practices, this activity of posting included ways of doing that primarily represented playing. Each of the studied communities are what Pearce and Artemesia (2009) describe as virtual communities of play, with conventions, values, and norms that define their collective practices. These collective practices are represented in the different forms of response (emotional, humorous, rational, analogic; see Section 5.3.1 for details) and the different categories of behaviour (quoting, clowning, and reviewing; see Section 5.4.1 for details) observed. As a form

of production (i.e., writing, digital content creation, poaching, re-mixing), posting on *AV Club* and Twitter also represented examples of making, not unlike how Isthi's experience of *rvbficwars* illustrated both making and playing practices. Based on the results from the community contexts explored in Chapter 5, an ontology of doing based on the study results begins to take shape (See Figure 6.3.3).

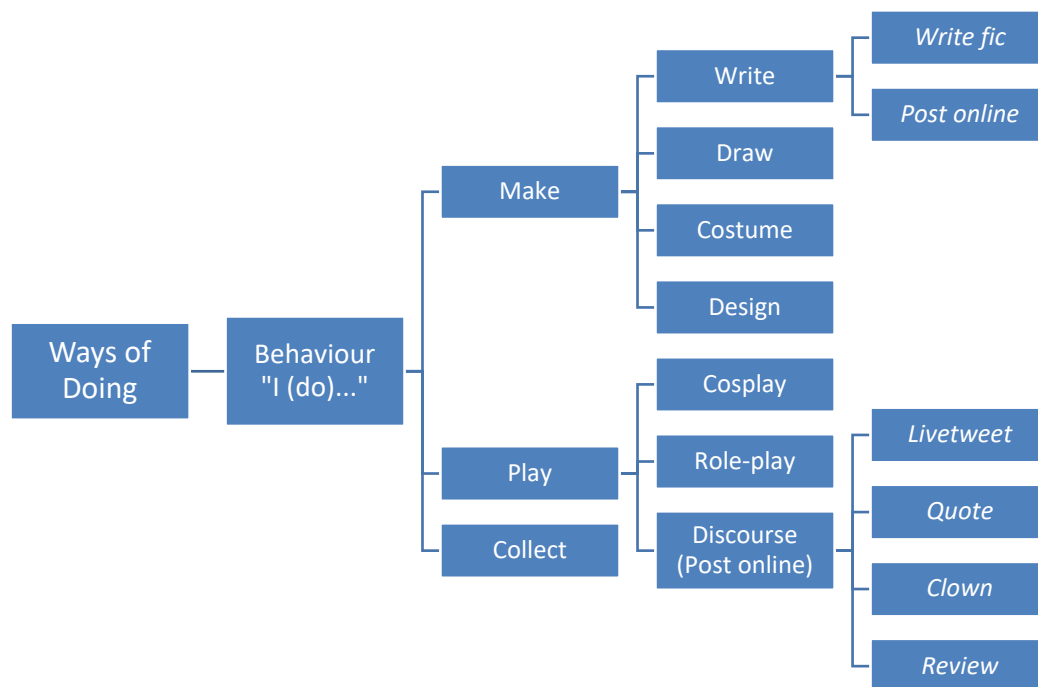


Figure 6.3.3. Ontology of Doing (in the hobbyist context of onlife fans)

In Figure 6.3.3, I conceptualise each ontological category that describes a particular practice, activity, or behaviour as a subject/verb clause: “I make...”, “I play...”, “I collect...”, etcetera. Figure 6.2.2 is intended as a representation of the different categorical distinctions that emerged from the data in this study, and not as an exhaustive model for all ways of doing associated with media fans’ onlife practices. It is likely that fan scholars familiar with the practices of fans could envision additional ontological sub-categories under making, playing, and collecting; this represents an opportunity for future research, where the findings of this study could be expanded, which is discussed in Section 6.7.

The interview participants also described different ways of being through the accounts of their information experiences, as described in Chapter 4, Section 4.3. These ways of being emerged as facets of fan identity that contribute to the construction of self and social positioning

within the fan and hobbyist contexts of their practices. The discussion in Section 4.3, as well as other parts of Chapter 4 that touched on how fan practices revealed how fan identities take shape (e.g., Section 4.2.2, *Cosplaying and Play/Performance*), relied heavily on Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical analysis as a sensitising concept. Goffman's (1959) analysis presented an empirical understanding of face-to-face interaction and co-presence among actors in a predigital context, and therefore it may seem anachronistic to employ it in the everyday onlife context. The current study focuses on the mediated everyday lives of contemporary fans who exist in onlife environments that are quasi-physical and quasi-virtual; in this context, notions of face-to-face and co-presence are far more complexly enacted. In onlife experience, identity is less *performed*, as it is *mediated* through many lenses and filters. Visual, aural, digital modes, and technological interventions make up part of the mediation. These may pose different affordances, limitations, or augmentations to an individual's expression. Some forms of mediation may be imposed on a person, while others are deliberately employed.

While Goffman's ideas were composed in a pre-digital age, as other researchers have shown, they are imminently relevant in contemporary onlife experience (e.g., Bailey, 2005; Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013; Khazraee & Novak, 2018; Kilvington, 2021). The use of masks, or identity facets by participants, aligns with Goffman's (1959) conclusions on self-presentation, and is also consistent with post-structural notions of identity in social construction (e.g., Burr, 1995; Davies and Harré, 1990; Shotter, 1989). As a study steeped in social constructionism as a research paradigm (see Chapter 3, Section 3.3.1), interview results illuminate how "persons are composed of multiple selves through which they define their identities" and how these selves are the product of social interactions with others and with their environments (Given, 2002, p. 129). The social construction of the interview participants was influenced not just by interactions with other fans, but by the onlife environments within which the everyday practices and information behaviours related to their fandoms took place. Research that discusses social media sites as stages for virtual hate (Kilvington, 2021) and onlife fan practices like cosplaying (Masi de Casanova, Brenner-Levoy, & Weirich, 2020) that illustrate how the distinction between Goffman's notions of front stage and back stage blur are helpful for understanding the application of Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical analysis for social positioning and identity construction in the modern context. The participants' examples offered four core

identities (the nostalgic fan, maker fan, social fan, and curatorial fan, discussed in Section 4.3.1) and four complex identities (the serious fan, casual fan, compassionate fan, and toxic fan, discussed in Sections 4.3.2 and 4.3.3) as the various facets of their fan identities, which represent different ways of being. The community contexts examined in Chapter 5 revealed an alternative approach to conceptualising identity construction through the observation of forms of response. Emotional, humorous, rational, and analogic forms of response identified in *AV Club* and *#FakeWesteros* posts (as introduced in Section 5.3.1 and expanded in Section 5.4.1) illustrated the different ways that affective engagement with media contributed to self-narrative. The blurring of front stage and back stage in virtual spaces was evident through these examples, demonstrating how Goffman's (1959) notions of identity and self-presentation remain applicable in the contemporary context of onlife experience. Forms of response, therefore, contribute to an ontology of being (See Figure 6.3.4).

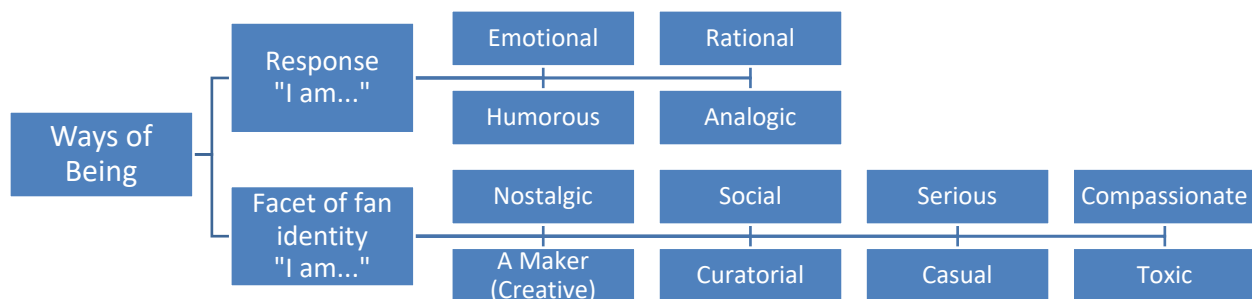


Figure 6.3.4. Ontology of Being (in the hobbyist context of onlife fans)

Figure 6.3.4 illustrates how both forms of response and identity facets are understood as onlife ways of being that answer the question of who is an onlife fan. As with the ontological categories of doing, we can conceptualise each ontological category that describes a response or a facet as an adjective that describes a subject: “I am emotional”, “I am nostalgic”, “I am compassionate”, etcetera. Responses and facets are complementary categories within such an ontology. For example, Esme’s identity as a nostalgic fan was shaped by the totality of her responses to WWE media and fandom (as discussed in Section 4.3.1). Her emotional response to the wrestler The Undertaker, and her memory of that response, are part of the nostalgia she felt and identified with. Identity facets, then, represent an accretion of responses from sustained engagement in fandom, that construct a particular aspect of the self. Future research, as discussed

in Section 6.6, may identify additional categories that expand this ontology, both in terms of forms of response and facets of fan identity. In Chapter 5, the different forms of response were shown to operate in relation to practices and categories of behaviour; the analysis of *#FakeWesteros* Twitter posts, for example, showed how livetweeting, quoting, clowning, and reviewing also demonstrated emotional, humorous, rational, and analogic forms of response. In Chapter 4, the fan identities evident in the onlife experiences of participants and discussed in Section 4.3 were predicated on the practices that each participant described in Section 4.2. The different facets of fan identity emerging from interviews and the different forms of response identified in community contexts each offer a unique perspective on how media fans construct themselves through their fan practices. The ontological categories of being in Figure 6.3.4, therefore, are correlated to the categories of doing illustrated in Figure 6.3.3.

The discussion in Section 6.3.1 arrived at a definition of tactic as a deliberate action formed by the combination of behaviours and responses. It is through tactics that fans can assert their agency in relation to the storyworlds and media they engage with. Tactics were further defined as discrete examples of IB, that is, ways of making sense of and using information that contribute to a individual's agency in everyday onlife experience. As IB (in the sense originally used by de Certeau (1984)), tactics are ostensibly ways of doing. For example, the categories of behaviours identified in the *#FakeWesteros* analysis and included in the ontology of doing (Figure 6.3.3) represent ways of doing. However, the examples from *AV Club* fans, as tactical forms of response, illustrate a potentially overlooked characteristic of tactics. Tactics are not just behaviours, but responses, and when we atomise a tactic to its response, as discussed in Section 6.3.1, we are able to decipher a process of identity construction rather than resistance against those with will and power (in the sense used by de Certeau (1984) and taken up by first-wave FS scholars; see Section 2.4 for details). These facets of fan identity and self-narrative are reflected in the responses that make up engagement, rather than the behaviour itself. It is important, therefore, to consider ways of being and doing together, to understand how tactics function in fan contexts and in everyday onlife to make sense of information. Figure 6.3.5 brings together the ontologies of doing and being to illustrate the ontology of a tactic.

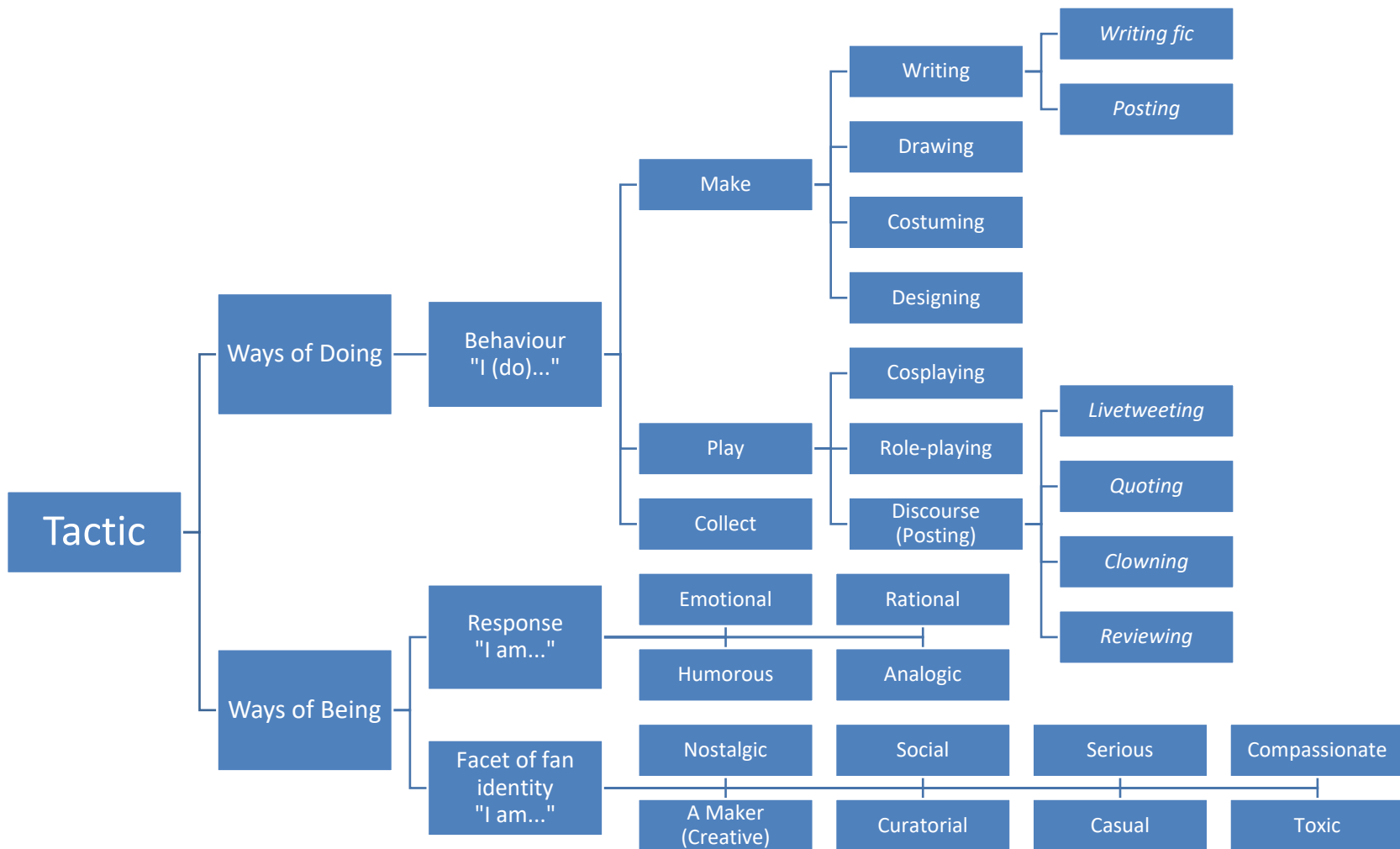


Figure 6.3.5. Ontology of a tactic: Tactics include ways of doing and ways of being.

Together, ways of doing and being represent a tactic deployed by a subject. Specific tactics can then be classified based on behaviour and response. Examples from interview participants discussed in Chapter 4 help illustrate this:

- Isthi is involved in *rational making* when she is outlining a fic to be canon compliant.
- Amriel is *cosplaying humorously* when she is performing a genderbend Khal Drogo, a satiric transformation of the original character; she is *cosplaying rationally* when she is using social media to share her cosplay costumes and promote her brand/persona.
- Uilleand is *writing emotionally and analogically* when she posts in RP forums.
- Rhamiel's *Sailor Moon* fanvids, as pastiches, are *humorous making*; however, they are also analogic in the way they reference characters, episodes, and paired music, and emotional in the nostalgia and affect evoked by the source material that helps motivate her making.
- Agnephi's basement-raiding for *Transformers* collectibles is *collecting emotionally* when he feels a strong enough connection with the toy to keep it in his collection and *collecting rationally* when he is reselling it in his Instagram store.

Examples from the case studies Chapter 5 also demonstrate the function of a tactic:

- *Cookie_Monster* is *commenting humorously and rationally* on *AV Club*.
- *NiceQueenCersei* is *livetweeting emotionally and humorously* while watching *GOT*.
- *LordGendry* is *posting a GIF humorously and analogically* on Twitter, using an image from *GOT* to reference the Harry Potter fandom.

The tactics observed in the *GOT* fan communities studied, at a basic level, about making sense of what the fans have viewed on their screens (i.e., the information they have encountered) and the complex emotions and thoughts fans experienced during the viewing. Sorting, filtering, categorising, classifying, negotiating, and making sense of information related to a fan object could also be described as the most basic motivation for any of the fan practices discussed so far in this project, including all interview participants and both case studies. *AV Club* comments illustrate how tactics are not only minor forms of resistance, but information-related activities that occur after semantic information is encountered (such as through viewing the episode).

Tactics are ways for people to derive meaning, or knowledge, from information, so that they can better understand and strengthen their position within their environment. Examples from interviews in Chapter 4 illustrate how ways of being (response) generate ways of doing (behaviour), but the opposite is true as well; ways of doing, in turn, influence ways of being (i.e., identity, sense of self, facets of self-presentation), and that this is a continual, cyclical process of sustained engagement (as discussed in Section 6.2).

Underlying each comment in the *AV Club* threads and each tweet by #FakeWesteros members, is a question about how the writer identifies themselves as a *Game of Thrones* fan. This process of identification demonstrates how fans perceive themselves—and how they wish themselves to be perceived—in other ways: as “newbies” or “experts”, as readers or celebrity fans, as members of other fandoms, as entertainers, as players, as critics. Engagement with episodes in the television series also forces fans to decide if the violent and unpleasant depictions are justified for the purposes of narrative and entertainment, and to explore how such depictions will impact their continued enjoyment of the storyworld. This process of interpretation through engagement is also present in the accounts of interview participants; Esme’s engagement with violent narratives in wrestling entertainment (i.e., WWE) for example, as well as Uilleand’s and Rhamiel’s social encounters with toxic fans within their fandoms, demanded a similar process of internal reflection and identification, as discussed in Sections 4.3.1 and 4.3.3 of Chapter 4. Therefore, para-active tactics represent the process of interpretation of the semantic information encountered through paratextual content. Interpretation, in this sense, represents the hidden production of consumers/fans (de Certeau, 1984, p. 31), fans that Jenkins (1992/2013) referred to 30 years ago as textual poachers. This insight is profoundly relevant for future information and fan researchers because it illustrates how the concept of tactics can incorporate identity and action to understand how fans access, use, share, and create information. In the contemporary context, para-active ways of being and doing are deeply embedded in everyday digital practices: they are indelibly etched into the fabric of our lives, or rather, *onlives*.

The concept of tactic is consistent with that of de Certeau’s (1984) everyday life tactics (“ways of operating”), as described in Chapter 2, Section 2.4; however, it makes a substantial contribution to information science (IS), information behaviour (IB) studies, and fan studies (FS) through an emergent theory that allows us to fully articulate how people act to assert their

identities and make sense of complex information in the modern-day context of onlife experience and the infosphere (Floridi, 2014; see also Chapter 2, Section 2.5 for details).

6.4. Model for the IB of the Onlife Fan

Based on the analysis from interviews and case studies, and the resulting development of theoretical concepts that include para-active and sustained engagement, behaviours, responses, and tactics, a model for IB emerges. This model, in the context of the onlife fan, demonstrates how tactics are used to derive and create meaning from narrative information through engagement with media storyworlds and fandoms. The cycle of response and behaviour that defines sustained engagement (as seen in Figure 6.2.2) and makes up the tactic (as theorised in Section 6.3) lies at the heart of this model. Figure 6.4.1 illustrates a meaning-making process that develops a fan's contextual frame of a storyworld and fandom while providing opportunities for them to assert their identity as a fan and strengthen their position within fandom and in relation to the media industry.

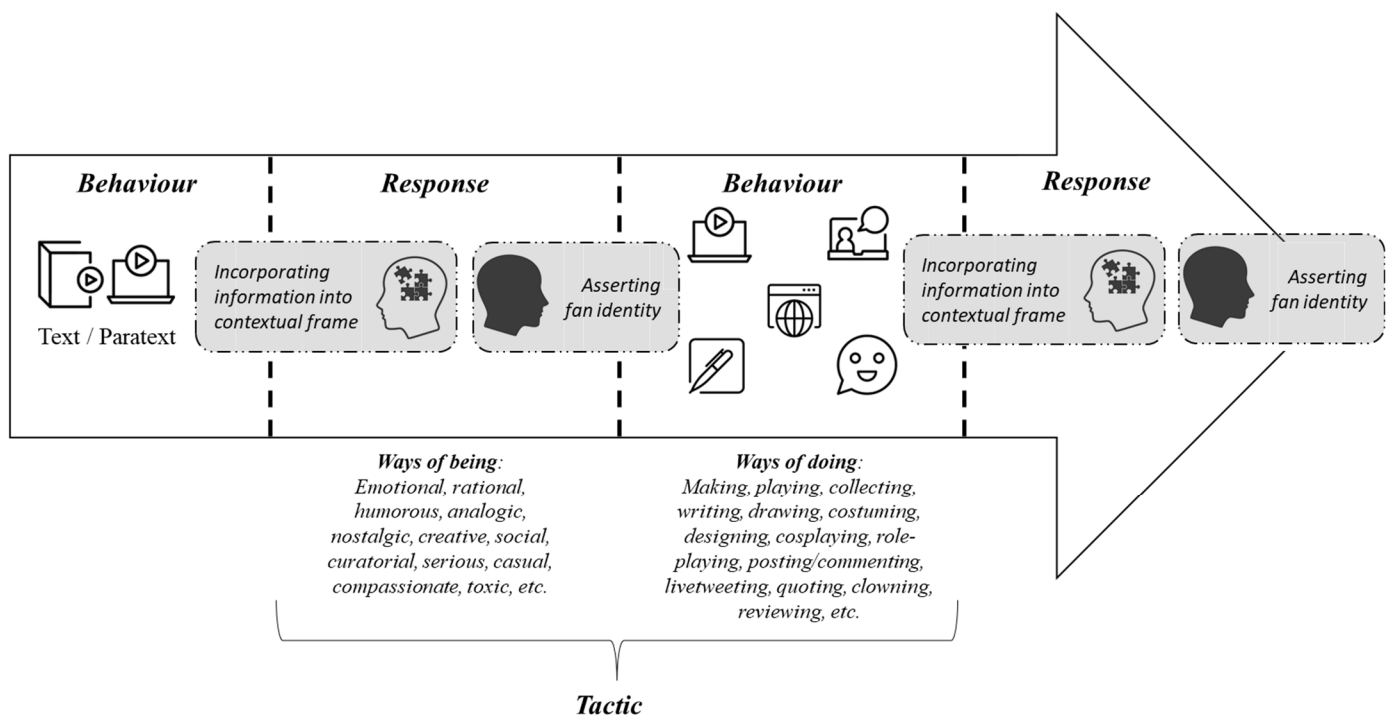


Figure 6.4.1. Model for the IB of the onlife fan.

The entire process is embedded in the everyday experience of onlife environments. Figure 6.4.2 illustrates how the IB of onlife fans fits into this broader context.

Figures 6.4.1 and 6.4.2 illustrate how tactics shape sustained engagement that represent

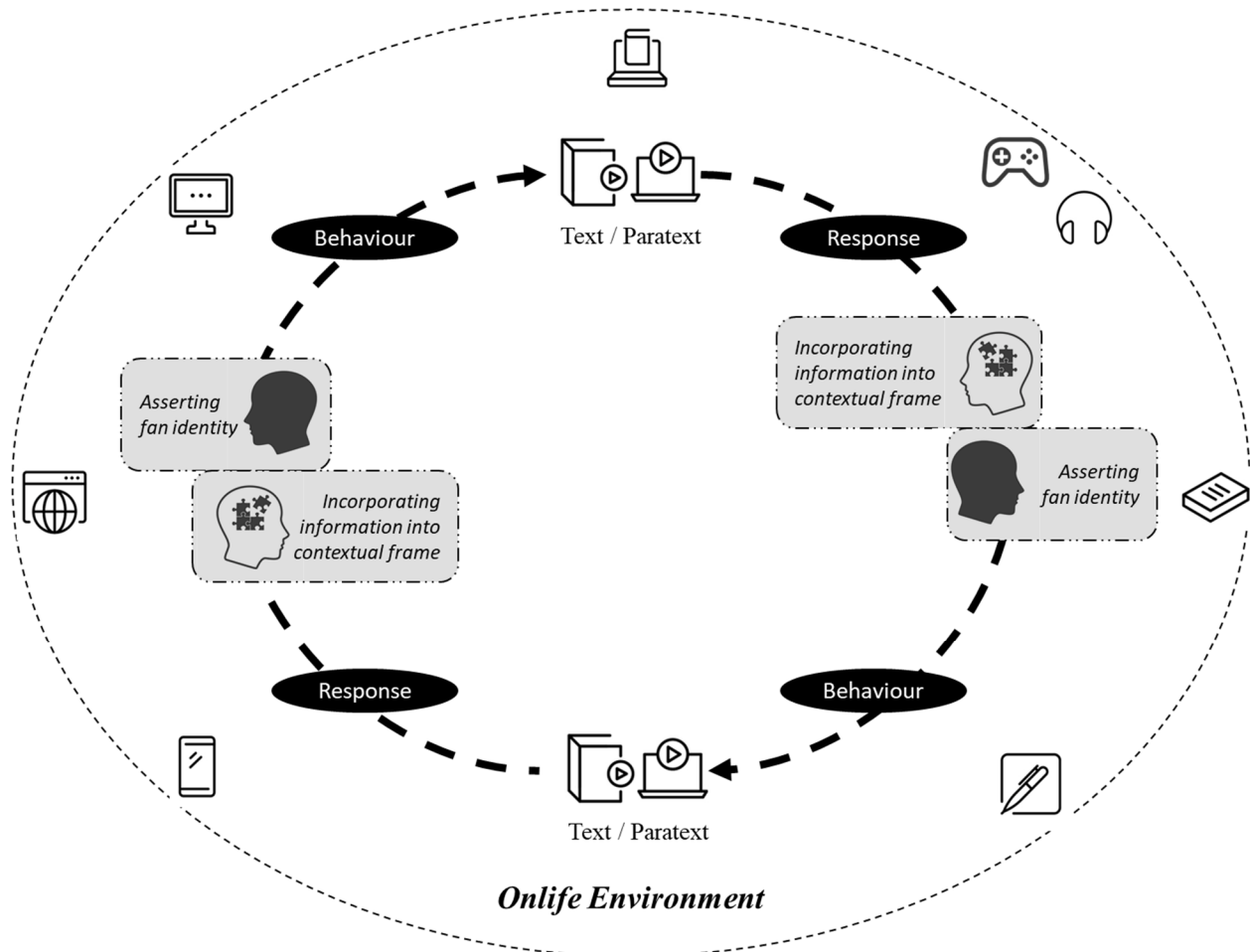


Figure 6.4.2. Model for the IB of the onlife fan (in relation to onlife environments).

patterns of IB. Sustained engagement, as discussed in Section 6.2, begins with an initial moment of engagement, where a particular behaviour (such as viewing a television episode) presents new narrative (textual or paratextual, or both, as in the case of *#FakeWesteros* livetweeting) information to the fan. The fan's response to the information dictates how they derive meaning from it and how they situate it within their contextual frame of the storyworld. Their response also motivates information seeking behaviour, such as searching for reviews or commentary online, accessing other fans' responses on websites and social media, or creating and posting their own content. In these successive moments of engagement with paratexts (e.g., play-performance, reviews, commentary), the fan responds in each case to sort and make sense of the

paratextual information they encounter. Tactical responses in these moments provide opportunities for a fan to assert their identity, as when the *AV Club* community members posted their own comments, which in turn generates information that other fans can engage with. Tactical behaviours represent the specific ways in which fans “do something” to assert their fan selves (Evans, 2019, p. 36). The model acknowledges how behaviour and response are interrelated as everyday tactics for making sense of information.

The digital environments that mediate moments of engagement (e.g., the *AV Club* website and Twitter) highlight how the IBs of media fans are truly onlife, fully integrated with the digital space. Amriel’s example previously examined under the hobbyist context of making (Chapter 4, Section 4.2.1) helps illustrate how the IB cycle takes place in complex fan practices like cosplay design. Amriel explained how watching her favourite television programs gave her ideas for cosplay costumes: “...As a cosplayer you’re almost always on the lookout for the next project, and you do it without thinking all of the time and I guess it’s a constant need for you to create something new.” Amriel’s description of her creative process offers a scenario that demonstrates a pattern of IB. Information encountered through Amriel’s viewing experience sparks an analogic response, connecting what she sees on-screen with her maker knowledge as a cosplayer. Her creative urge sparks an idea for a costume, which represents a way of potentially asserting her identity as a fan. The information from the narrative is incorporated into her contextual frame, which includes her personal interpretation of the character that inspired her. The idea gives rise to new behaviours. Searching the internet for visual references and technical resources, such as sewing patterns needed to plan the costume design, is a tactic that involves an information-seeking behaviour. The media content she finds represents new paratextual information to engage with, respond to, and incorporate into her contextual frame for the character and the narrative she knows, as well as the representation of character and narrative she intends to create. The incorporation of information into her contextual frame, an outcome every time a tactic is deployed, is a process of “semanticisation” (Floridi, 2002, p. 103), that is, of making sense of information. Tactics of information-seeking lead to tactics of information synthesis and creation, as the idea moves from design to application. Production in the form of sketches, mock-ups, and different material components of the costume represent different phases of the project. The continuous cycle of behaviour and response, of encountering and using

information, repeats throughout the making process, until she is ready to put on the costume and manifest her interpretation of the character through cosplay. Even then, the cycle continues, as she takes photographs of her cosplay and shares them via social media with the people that represent her fandom. It never ends, in fact, as each time she engages with media representations will lead to new ideas, new interpretations, and new ways of being and doing as an onlife fan. The role of ICTs is to offer digitally mediated onlife environments in which the cycle sustained engagement takes place, where virtual experience is integrated with physical experience. Amriel, as an onlife fan, is not given pause to think about how her experiences are mediated through ICTs, including the original source text that she inhabits through her engagement, because mediation—as characterised in Chapter 1, Section 1.2—is both mundane and marvellous.

The model for the IB of onlife fans represents a unique contribution to the emerging subfield of FanLIS (discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.4). It builds upon the work of FS, IB, and FanLIS scholars that have identified the intersection of information and fandom to offer a detailed explanation for how media fans access, use, share, and create information. It also brings together new interpretations of concepts, in particular de Certeau's (1984) everyday life practice and Floridi's (2014) onlife experience, that benefit the understanding of information in the fan context. Finally, as discussed in the next section, it distinguishes fan-based leisure apart from other forms of leisure, highlighting its importance as a subject in leisure studies.

6.5. Fan-Based Leisure

The IB of interview participants examined in Chapter 4, Section 4.2, was situated within a unique hobbyist context distinct from serious or casual leisure as it has been previously defined by Stebbins (2007/2015). Instead, this hobbyist context suggests a different category for understanding fan practices as IB, which I refer to as *fan-based leisure*. Making, playing, and collecting emerged as the primary onlife practices characteristic of this type of leisure. These sets of practices, which were illustrated through numerous examples of participants' experiences in the subsections of Section 4.2, represented the onlife ways of doing of interview participants.

These different ways of doing illustrated onlife experience because of how they were embedded in the use of ICTs. Some of these practices, like playing *Dungeons and Dragons*, collecting toys, and making and performing cosplay were situated in physical spaces that were

facilitated by digital technologies. Others, like writing and sharing fanfic on multi-fandom archives, participating in fic wars, making GIF sets and fanvids, or streaming on Twitch were practices that existed primarily in virtual worlds. Floridi's (2002) concept of onlife is valuable for taking all of these practices and grounding them in the lived experiences of people, a process referred to as "semanticisation" (p. 103), which are nevertheless mediated by the technologies that facilitate engagement (cf. Floridi, 2014). The many examples discussed in the hobbyist context that emerged from interviews with fans demonstrated how onlife fans access, use, share, interact, and engage with information in their everyday lives (Case & Given, 2016). These practices represent the IB of participants.

In Chapter 5, what seemed like a basic fan activity (i.e., posting online) was revealed to be a much more complex set of interpretive and information sharing practices. Discussion of the case studies revealed something about media engagement, as it relates to IB, that was not previously evident. Firstly, the case studies demonstrated how para-active engagement (Evans, 2016), through successive moments of media engagement over time and through different layers of mediation (i.e., viewing an episode, searching and encountering new information online, posting information in an online community), resolved into what I refer to as *sustained engagement*. Sustained engagement is a cycle of behaviour and response that leads from one moment of engagement to the next, as described and depicted in figures in Chapter 5, Section 5.5.1. The cycle of behaviour and response matches observations by Lee, Ocepek, and Makri's (2022) on "naturalistic information acquisition" and what they refer to as "information behaviour patterns" (p. 595) (discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.1). Secondly, the case studies also revealed how response and behaviour represent everyday tactics for making sense of information encountered through sustained engagement (see Chapter 5, Section 5.5.2).

Tactics, as a theoretical concept discussed in Section 6.2, represent the most compelling result of this grounded theory study and the basis for an emergent theory of everyday onlife practice. The theory of tactics generated from study results aligns with de Certeau's (1984) characterisation of tactics as behaviours ("ways of operating", p. 30) performed in response to information (see Chapter 2, Section 2.6). The chief concern of IB is what we *do* with information and how we experience it in its many varied contexts (Case & Given, 2016, p. 7), and the tactic represents a quantum for what we do and how we do it. While the concept of tactics emerged

most clearly in the analysis of the *AV Club* and *#FakeWesteros* through the examination of behaviour, response, and engagement as interrelated concepts, as we have seen it can also be discerned in the experiences of interview participants. The onlife IB each participant employed through their ways of making, playing, and collecting (as described in Section 4.2) also represent tactics to navigate the many information channels that shaped their sustained engagement with fandom in the hobbyist context. The perspectives of participants were especially powerful in demonstrating the lived experience of fandom; each participant's description of their practices relating to media storyworlds and fandoms captured how fan-based leisure was embedded in their everyday lives and, moreover, how mediated experience of fan-based leisure through ICTs was a mundane and essential part of the experience. In other words, they perfectly illustrated how sustained engagement with media is part of their everyday onlife experience.

As examples of hobbyist activity from the interviews and case studies illustrate, “fanac” (Bloch, 1956, p. 16) and fan works are rich sites for the study of onlife IB. The focus on the hobbyist context emerged from data as a saturation point. The hobbyist context included creative and labour-intensive forms of activity described by participants that fell into the three subcategories of making, playing, and collecting. Stebbins’ (2007/2015) serious leisure perspective (SLP) provides some definitions for understanding the hobbyist context. Hobbyists, along with amateurs and volunteers, are the people involved in “serious leisure”: agreeable activity which they find “so substantial, interesting and fulfilling that they launch themselves on a (leisure) career centered on acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience.” (p. 5) There are five types of hobbyists, according to Stebbins: (1) collectors, (2) makers and tinkerers, (3) activity participants (in noncompetitive, rule-based pursuits), (4) players of sports and games (competitive, rule-based activity), and (5) enthusiasts of the liberal arts hobbies, who are devoted to the acquisition of knowledge for its own sake (Stebbins, 2007/2015, p. 8). As fans, the study’s participants share these characteristics and yet, as discussed in Chapter 4, Section 4.2.1, fans and fan practices are associated with the experience of fun (i.e., hedonic pleasure) and play, which are characteristics relegated to casual leisure. Based on the study results, a critical conclusion is that SLP is lacking a category that can accommodate fans. As noted by Lee and Trace (2009), “what is unfortunate about the defensive armor of seriousness is that it posits itself against a vague other—a strawman of frivolity—that is

unworthy of study” (p. 622). And as Price (2017) notes, “perhaps surprisingly – Stebbins does not consider fans as part of the Serious Leisure perspective, instead classing them with passive audiences and spectators of the social world that Serious Leisure ‘practitioners’ are a part of” (p. 105). Nevertheless, IS and FanLIS scholars like Price (2017), Hartel (2010), Lee and Trace (2009), and Margree, et al. (2014) have employed SLP and the hobbyist context to research leisure that is fan-based. At the same time, the theoretical distinctions between casual leisure and serious leisure that Stebbins (2007/2015) established, and the complex social construction of fans revealed through the current study’s results and illustrated earlier in the ontology of being (Figure 6.2.3), suggest that fan-based leisure should more properly be recognised as a distinct category that shares the hobbyist context with other forms of leisure. The study results indicate that a form of leisure exists that is distinct from serious leisure, casual leisure, or project-based leisure and that is unique to fans. I call this fan-based leisure, which captures the participatory activity, creative labour, and engagement of fans with fandom.

6.6. Emergent Theory of Everyday Onlife Practice

For a subculture to exist, one must be able to cite networks of communication through which common information is transmitted.

(Fine, 1983, p. 26)

The chief concern of IB is what we *do* with information and how we experience it in its many varied contexts (Case & Given, 2016, p. 7); the tactic represents a quantum for what we do and how we do it. In the same way that a photon represents a single quantum of light, a tactic represents a discrete instance of IB. As the onlife fan is continually exposed to new information from texts and paratexts related to their sustained engagement with the fan object, this study theorises that a continual process of information generation takes place. Fans employs sophisticated tactics not just to make sense of the information they encounter, but to assert their own identity and their own contextual frame of storyworld and fandom to strengthen their position within their social grouping; the content they generate is paratextual information that other fans within their fandom can engage with and be affected by in turn. As discussed in Section 6.2, the sustained engagement of interview participants’ experiences, in many cases spanning months and years of daily participation in fandom, represents how tactics are

performed as part of everyday life in onlife environments. Taken at this macro level, that is, the totality of a fan's experience of fandom, tactics represent everyday onlife practice.

Initially this research posited that the state of media convergence, as argued by Jenkins (2006a) and Floridi (2014), has led to an overwhelmingly information-rich world. The data supports this claim, providing evidence that—in navigating the narrative storyworlds of fandom, at least—there is an ever-proliferating body of information to be sifted, made sense of, and assimilated. Information takes the form of texts, paratexts, relationships, and interrelationships (as seen, for example, in the fan-fan pure relationships of the FakeWesterosi's post object fandom). The danger in such complexity is that individuals in society may be excluded or left behind. Media fans, as those most immersed and engaged in heavily mediated environments, can teach us by example. The analysis has provided many examples of living onlife that can be used to model the management of information and knowledge in other contexts. For instance:

- Uilleand, Isthi, and Malakh's archontic fic-related practices, which make use of digital resources to perform community-based archival work in managing and expanding the paratextual information of their fandoms (Section 4.2.1, *Writing and Sharing Fanfic*, and Section 4.2.2, *Reading and Writing as Play*);
- Aziraphale and Rhamiel's bricolage in the creation of fanvids and GIFs as a DIY ethos that uses available digital resources for creative remixing of fan content for the sharing of narrative and fandom-based information (Section 4.2.1, *Making GIFs and Fanvids*);
- Amriel's use of social media to curate and promote her cosplayer persona/brand (Section 4.2.1, *Making Cosplay*);
- Agnephi's use of Instagram to facilitate a community of practice with other fan collectors for nostalgic speculation of desirable collectibles (Section 4.2.3, *Speculating*)
- *#FakeWesteros*' live online roleplaying of parodic characters via Twitter that generates an interpretation of narrative and enhances enjoyment of media through communal paratextual production (Section 5.4).

These examples of IBs, while specific to the fan contexts that produce them, demonstrate how the ICTs increasingly embedded in the social fabric can be embraced to benefit its users in daily life. They reflect what Woo (2019) refers to as the “digital mundane” (p. 10) in the

everyday lives not just of media fans, but all participants in modern social life. The IBs observed in this research represent onlife literacies that can help information users in similar contexts navigate and make sense of complexly mediated information.

6.7. Opportunities for Future Research

While this study was broad in its scope and resulted in emergent theory about the everyday onlife practice and IB of fans, there remain many ways in which the research could be extended. First, it is important to note that hobbyist ways of doing were only the most prominent of fan contexts that emerged from interviews through a saturation of codes (refer to Chapter 3, Section 3.4.1 for an explanation of the analytic method). The “hobbyist experience” was a theoretical category where I achieved a saturation of themes (i.e., where fresh data no longer “sparks” new insights and no new properties of a pattern or theme are evident, Charmaz, 2014, p. 213). The codebook, however, developed a number of other related theoretical categories that would benefit from further data sampling and analysis to achieve saturation (e.g., “narrative experience”, “social life experience”, “barriers to fandom”, “information avoidance”, “headcanon”, “ethical fandom”, “agency/personal influence”). Further research is needed to offer conclusions on these additional fan contexts, to understand how they fit into everyday onlife practice, and to determine what other categories or contexts exist.

The different facets of fan identity identified as ways of being from the experiences of interview participants could be extended with research that looks at a larger population of fans. The application of a survey instrument, for example, could help determine how the different identity facets are perceived among media fans and fan communities, and if there are other facets of fan identity to explore. The notion of ways of being, in the context of fan identities, and the use of social positioning theory (Van Langenhove & Harré, 1999) as a sensitising concept could also benefit future research, particularly sociological inquiries in FS. Such research would help answer Woo’s (2019) call for FS scholarship that examines a broader and more diverse array of media-oriented practices to avoid essentialising and exceptionalising fan identities.

In the context of FanLIS, future research is needed to understand the specific ways in which Price’s (2017) model of fan IB (p. 319) can be understood in the context of everyday onlife practice. For example, it would be valuable to examine how the “fan information

communication chain” (p. 291) observed in Price’s (2017) serious leisure Delphi study corresponds to the cycle of sustained engagement and tactics as key concepts observed in this study. Additional analysis and, potentially, collection of data would be required to explore this particular avenue and continue building upon the foundations that currently exist in the emerging interdisciplinary field of FanLIS.

This study has already offered valuable insights related to naturalistic information acquisition and patterns of IB proposed by Lee, Ocepek, and Makri (2022), with such concepts as sustained engagement and tactics. However, additional research is needed to examine complexly interconnected interactions with information that “follow, feed, and facilitate each other” (Lee, Ocepek, & Makri, 2022, p. 595), particularly in contexts outside of fandom, to determine if the patterns of IB identified in this study are found elsewhere. Examining the arts and crafts hobbyists that are the focus of Lee, Ocepek, and Makri’s (2022) study for evidence of the cycle of sustained engagement, for example, would confirm whether the observations from this study are applicable to other subject populations. This study has also proposed a number of ways in which fans not only synthesise existing information by incorporating it into their understanding of a narrative, storyworld, or fandom, but also how they create information. Gorichanaz (2019) characterises information creation as an emerging area of IS research (cf. Huvila, et al., 2020; Huvila, 2022). Further analysis that specifically examines the results of this study and engages with the concepts and theories that emerge from its findings in the context of information creation could contribute new understandings to this important topic in IS.

Finally, recalling the ancient Roman fans whose media included graffiti on the walls of Pompeii discussed in Chapter 1 (Section 1.3), I conclude by emphasising how the results of this research speak to a fundamental aspect of the human experience. Consuming and producing content, interpreting and making sense of information, communicating, sharing, and connecting: these are basic cognitive behaviours that have existed from the earliest society to our present postdigital one. The ways that we perform these behaviours and how we respond and perceive ourselves while doing them change depending on the technologies and environments that influence them, but ultimately they remain at the core of what it means to be human. *Everyday onlife practice* highlights these changes in our current information age, while positioning the behaviours themselves firmly at the timeless centre of lived experience.

Appendix A: Recruitment Ad (Sample for poster and web content)

Faculty of Health, Arts and Design Swinburne University of Technology

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH INTO TRANSMEDIA AND FAN CULTURE

*Are you a **fan** of any media franchise*?*

(e.g., Doctor Who, Dota, Dragon Ball Z, Harry Potter, Pokémon, Shadowhunters, Star Wars, Star Trek, Supernatural, Walking Dead, World of Warcraft, etc, etc)

**Including film(s), TV show(s), book(s), comic book(s), and/or video game(s)*

We are looking for volunteers in the **Edmonton Area** to take part in a study of the information access and sharing practices of **media fans**.

As a participant in this study, you would be asked questions about:

- Your fandom(s)
- The way(s) you engage with your fandom(s)
- The way(s) you access and share information about your fandom and with other fans
(e.g., meet-ups, conventions, social media, etc)

Your participation would involve *one* interview session,
which is approximately *60 to 90* minutes.

For more information or to volunteer for this study, please visit:

[project website]

or contact:

Eric Forcier, MLIS, MA, PhD candidate

at

Email: eforcier@swin.edu.au

This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through a Swinburne University Human Research Ethics Committee (SUHREC).

Appendix B: Pre-Screening Instrument (Example)

The following is an example of an email response to a potential participant inquiring about the recruitment ad (Appendix A). It indicates the pre-screening questions that I used and how I used them.

Thank you for your interest!

I just have a couple standard questions to verify that you meet the study criteria:

1. Are you 18 years or older?

(Note - Providing an age or age range would be helpful)

2. What is/are your fandom(s)?

(Note - if you have many, that's perfectly OK! Your top three is fine)

Thank you,

<signature line>

Appendix C: Information Letter (Sample)

Dear [Participant Name],

This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study I am conducting as part of my Doctoral degree in the Faculty of Health, Arts and Design at Swinburne University of Technology, under the supervision of Professor Lisa M. Given. I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you decide to take part.

The study explores the **modern media fan experience** by looking at how fans access, use, interact and engage with information related to their individual fandoms. By examining the information behaviours of fans, I hope to better understand how the mixing of media platforms shapes the experience of everyday life.

I want to know...

- What is your favorite film or film series? TV series? Web series? Book or comic book? Video game? Fictional story or world?
- What media entertainment are you passionate about?
- How do you engage with it?
- How often?
- How important is it in your life?

I am looking for media fans of all stripes to interview about their individual fan experiences.

- Interviews are approximately 60-90 minutes
- Can be in-person or online via Skype or video chat
- Are recorded for later analysis

Interviews are conversations. Together, we will chat about what makes you a fan: how you engage with your fandom(s), how different media and technologies affect your engagement as a fan, and how it all fits in your daily life. I will ask you about specific activities that you might take for granted, like reading, chatting with friends, browsing online and posting on social media. I will ask about any favorite websites, online communities or other information sources that you rely on. I will also ask you for some demographic/background information like your age and education.

What are the risks and benefits to me? The risks involved in participating in this study are minimal. At times, you may feel uncomfortable with disclosing details about your experiences as a fan. To minimise any anxiety, before the interview takes place you will be reminded of your right as a participant to refuse to answer any question or prompt, under any circumstance, as you see fit.

There is no direct benefit of the study to you. However, you may find value in the discussion and ongoing reflection of your information behaviours and uses of technology. The results of your interview may contribute valuable insights to the research fields of information behaviour studies, fan and audience studies, and media studies.

Is the interview confidential? Every effort will be made to protect your confidentiality and privacy. However, we are often identifiable through the stories we tell.

- You will be given your choice of pseudonym to mask personally identifying information.
- Any primary data collected in the form of interview notes, recordings and transcripts will be secured and retained as directed by Swinburne's Human Research Ethics Committee (SUHREC). This includes: storing physical notes in a locked cabinet, storing and backup of digital data on an encrypted hard drive.
- Segments of your interview may be shared in research publications, reports, conference papers or presentations resulting from this study.

What if I change my mind about being in the study? As an interview participant, you have rights, including the right to withdraw from participation. You can choose to withdraw participation from the study at any time, for any reason, within **two weeks** of the date of the interview. The reason for this is that analysis of the interview data will begin after two weeks.

Before the interview can take place, I will review your rights as a participant to ensure your free consent. You will have the choice of providing your consent verbally or in writing by completing a consent form.

How do I find out what was learned in this study? I expect to have this study completed by approximately **January, 2023**. A summary of the results will be posted on the project web page at that time. I will also update the web page over time to provide information about the status of the research and planned publications and/or presentations of work-in-progress.

Project web page: <http://ericforcier.ca/projects/transmedia-fan-communities/>

I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project. If you have any questions for me about the study, please contact me using the information below.

Sincerely,

Eric Forcier

PhD Candidate

Faculty of Health, Arts and Design

Swinburne University of Technology

Tel: 780-862-7721

Email: eforcier@swin.edu.au

Prof. Lisa M. Given

Associate Dean, Research and Development

Faculty of Health, Arts and Design

Swinburne University of Technology

Email: lgiven@swin.edu.au

Web: lisagiven.com

This project has been approved by or on behalf of Swinburne's Human Research Ethics Committee (SUHREC) in line with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research. If you have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of this project, you can contact:

Research Ethics Officer, Swinburne Research (H68),
Swinburne University of Technology, P O Box 218, HAWTHORN VIC 3122 Australia.
Tel (03) 9214 3845 or +61 3 9214 3845 or resethics@swin.edu.au

Appendix D: Consent Form (Sample)

Project Title: *Grounded in Convergence: The Information Behaviour of Transmedia Fan Communities*

Principal Investigator(s):

Eric Forcier (PhD Candidate)

Prof. Lisa M. Given (PhD Supervisor)

1. I consent to participate in the project named above. I have been provided a copy of the information letter to which this consent form relates and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

2. ***In relation to this project, please circle your response to the following:***

- | | | |
|--|------------|-----------|
| ▪ I agree to be interviewed by the researcher | Yes | No |
| ▪ I agree to allow the interview to be recorded by electronic device | Yes | No |

3. **I acknowledge that:**

- (a) my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without explanation, within two weeks of the date below;
- (b) the Swinburne project is for the purpose of research and not for profit;
- (c) any identifiable information about me which is gathered in the course of and as the result of my participating in this project will be (i) collected and retained for the purpose of this project and (ii) accessed and analysed by the researcher(s) for the purpose of conducting this project;
- (d) I understand the length of time researcher/s will have access to this information;

4. **Please circle your response to the following:**

For the purpose of analysis and dissemination of findings, any data obtained from my participation will be coded with the following pseudonym:

- (a) *Dagiel*
- (b) *Kasdeja*
- (c) *Sabrael*
- (d) _____

By signing this document I agree to participate in this project.

Appendix E: Interview Guide

Interviews will be conversational and exploratory in nature. Each interview will take from 60 to 90 minutes. Interviews are guided by the following basic structure and question prompts. Prompts are designed to encourage conversation and are not prescriptive. Following each section, the researcher may ask the participant if they need to take a break, at the researcher's discretion. This will ensure both the participant and the researcher's comfort during the interview. The researcher should take notes during the interview.

1. Getting to know you... (~15-30 mins)

This section focuses on background information about the participant.

- What are you a fan of?
 - *Participant may have multiple fan interests. Once they have listed any fan interests that occur to them, ask participant to focus on one particular fandom/narrative that they enjoy, that they consider the most important. Subsequent questions/prompts will flow from the participant's selection. Other interests/fandoms/narratives should be noted for context and to identify potential overlap between fandoms*
- What is it about (fandom/narrative) that appeals to you?
 - *Possible prompts/follow-up questions:
When did you first become a fan of ____?
Describe your first encounter with ____.*
- How comfortable are you with computers and other information technologies?
- Do you own a smartphone? Computer?
 - *This question may have been addressed in earlier prompts. If so, it can be skipped.*
- Do you use social media?
 - *Prompts explore the different social media platforms, technologies, and online ways that the participant engages with fandom.*
- Do you go to fan conventions? E.g., Edmonton Comic Expo.

- *Prompts explore participant's experience at fan conventions and similar live events.*
- Describe the way(s) that you access/read/play/watch/engage with (fandom/narrative).
- Do you think of yourself as a “serious” fan?
 - *Ask the participant to describe why they perceive themselves as serious / not serious.*
 - *Prompts explore how the participants define serious fandom.*

2. Fan practices and information behaviours (~15-30 mins)

This section focuses on all information activities related to the consumption of the fandom/narrative.

- Have you ever looked up information about (fandom/narrative)? *(Prompt for examples)*
- Do you think of (fandom/narrative) as a hobby? If not, is it more than a hobby or less than a hobby?
- How often do you think about (fandom/narrative)? Would you say that it is part of your daily life?
- Do you collect anything related to (fandom/narrative)?
- Are you part of any community or group of fans, in person or online?
 - *[For in-person interview participants, offer researcher's laptop/tablet to navigate to specific websites, if relevant. Ask if they can show you the site and what they would normally click on or look at when visiting it. If not in-person, ask for web addresses.]*

3. Transmedia experience (~15-30 mins)

This section focuses on the specific ways that a fandom/narrative is accessed, as determined in section 1, and how access affects experience of the fandom/narrative.

- How do you think the medium or platform affects your experience when reading/playing/watching (fandom/narrative)?

- In your personal experience, have digital media changed how you access, interact with, and/or engage with (fandom/narrative)?
- Do you think the experience of (fandom/narrative) across multiple media affects your interpretation, immersion and/or enjoyment of (fandom/narrative)?

4. Follow-up questions (~10 mins)

If there is still time remaining at the end of the interview, the researcher may review notes and ask any follow-up questions that they missed. The researcher should also ask the participant if they have any questions, now that the interview is completed.

Appendix F: Copyright Permissions

The following figures are photos provided by participants and used with their permission:

Figure	Permission disclosure
Figure 4.2.1 Photo of Aziraphale's collection (shared with permission)	<p>From: [redacted] <[redacted]> Sent: Friday, October 9, 2020 9:09 AM To: Eric Forcier <eforcier@swin.edu.au> Subject: Re: Transmedia and Fan Culture Study</p> <p>Good morning Eric!</p> <p>It's really good to hear from you, and I hope your dissertation's going really well!</p> <p>[redacted] And yes, it'd be my pleasure - I've zipped up and attached some pictures of various parts of the collection including books, photos with the cast, and a shot of Faith's knife both in and out of its display case. If there are any parts you'd like more pictures of, or clearer pictures, please let me know and I'd be more than happy to go snap a few more!</p>
Figure 4.2.2. Photo of Aziraphale's collection, featuring Faith's knife (shared with permission)	<p>Thanks,</p> <p>[redacted]</p> <p>On Oct 9, 2020, at 8:17 AM, Eric Forcier <eforcier@swin.edu.au> wrote:</p> <p>Hi [redacted],</p> <p>It's been some time since our interview!</p> <p>...I am currently working on drafts for the dissertation, and I have a section specifically on collecting. I'm wondering if you might be willing to contribute a few photos of your Buffy collection, and specifically of Faith's knife, that I can include in the section?</p> <p>Thanks, Eric</p>

Figure	License / Permission
Figure 4.2.3. Photo from Agnephi's Instagram account, indicating the end of sale of InHumanoids action figures (shared with permission)	<p>[redacted] <[redacted]> Sun 10/11/2020 4:24 PM</p> <p>To: Eric Forcier</p> <p>Hi Eric, Yes, absolutely! Best, [redacted] ---</p> <p>[signature line – redacted]</p>
Figure 4.2.4. Photo of Agnephi's collection (shared with permission)	<p>On 2020-10-11 14:05, Eric Forcier wrote:</p> <p>Hi [redacted]!</p> <p>I'm working on a draft of results for the dissertation (section about collecting), and I'm wondering if I could have permission to include a couple of the Instagram photos from [redacted]?</p> <p>Thanks, Eric</p>

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Figure	Source	Creative Commons Licence
Figure 2.2.2. Agarwal's (2015) model for seeking versus finding: placing serendipity within information behaviour [Copyright Information Research, CC BY-NC-ND 3.0]	Information Research : an international electronic journal (ISSN 1368-1613) http://www.informationr.net/	Copyright Information Research, CC BY-NC-ND 3.0.

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Appendix G: Ethics Approval

4/11/22, 8:41 AM

Mail - Eric Forcier - Outlook

SHR Project 2018/083 - Ethics Clearance

Sally Fried <sfried@swin.edu.au>
on behalf of
RES Ethics <resethics@swin.edu.au>

Tue 4/3/2018 6:35 PM

To: Lisa Given <lgiven@swin.edu.au>

Cc: RES Ethics <resethics@swin.edu.au>; Eric Forcier <eforcier@swin.edu.au>

To: Prof Lisa Given, FHAD

SHR Project 2018/083 - Grounded in Convergence: Information Behaviours of Transmedia Fans

Prof Lisa Given, Eric Forcier (Student) – FHAD

Approved duration: 04-04-2018 to 06-03-2023 [Adjusted]

I refer to the ethical review of the above project by a Subcommittee (SHESC3) of Swinburne's Human Research Ethics Committee (SUHREC). Your response to the review as e-mailed on 2 April 2018 was put to the Subcommittee delegate for consideration.

I am pleased to advise that, as submitted to date, ethics clearance has been given for the above project to proceed in line with standard on-going ethics clearance conditions outlined below.

- The approved duration is 4 April 2018 to 6 March 2023 unless an extension is subsequently approved.
- All human research activity undertaken under Swinburne auspices must conform to Swinburne and external regulatory standards, including the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* and with respect to secure data use, retention and disposal.
- The named Swinburne Chief Investigator/Supervisor remains responsible for any personnel appointed to or associated with the project being made aware of ethics clearance conditions, including research and consent procedures or instruments approved. Any change in chief investigator/supervisor, and addition or removal of other personnel/students from the project, requires timely notification and SUHREC endorsement.
- The above project has been approved as submitted for ethical review by or on behalf of SUHREC. Amendments to approved procedures or instruments ordinarily require prior ethical appraisal/clearance. SUHREC must be notified immediately or as soon as possible thereafter of (a) any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants and any redress measures; (b) proposed changes in protocols; and (c) unforeseen events which might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.
- At a minimum, an annual report on the progress of the project is required as well as at the conclusion (or abandonment) of the project. Information on project monitoring and variations/additions, self-audits and progress reports can be found on the Research Intranet pages.
- A duly authorised external or internal audit of the project may be undertaken at any time.

Please contact the Research Ethics Office if you have any queries about on-going ethics clearance, citing the Swinburne project number. A copy of this e-mail should be retained as part of project record-keeping.

Best wishes for the project.

<https://outlook.office.com/mail/id/AAQkADA3YThiNDhKLWwKZlTNDNINy05YmU1LTlxZGNjOTE1YjhjMAAQAFhONZH%2FUXCprSSbp8scAM%3D>

1/2

4/11/22, 8:41 AM

Mail - Eric Forcier - Outlook

Yours sincerely,

Sally Fried

Secretary, SHESC3



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