

# Wikia Fandom Craze: Connecting, Participating, Creating, and Re-negotiating Boundaries

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## Abstract

This article draws attention to latest online fandom practices that take place in online participatory environments as a result of intersecting technological and economic variables. After tracing the origins of fan practices in literary theories that regard readers as active agents in reading and meaning-making processes, the present study investigates fandom as a cultural event that is determined by changing technological, economic, and generic conditions. Through the study of *Wikia*—a vibrant online fan community—the article explores the de-territorialization of fan-fuelled media production and its re-territorialization as one of fans' ways to enter what Pierre Bourdieu calls the industry's "circle of belief." Its wiki structure and technology as well as the latest smart Web tools that it employs allow fans to access, edit, and share media content, as they push the fuzzy boundaries between corporate and grassroots production further. The article maps out the efforts of media platform producers, of the industry, and of the fans to re-negotiate their roles and relationships, and looks into the different types of fan subjectivity that evolve as fans voluntarily succumb to the policies of the popular culture industry.

*Keywords:* convergence, corporate, grassroots, production, consumption, fans, online fandom, popular culture, sharing, participatory culture.

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Wiki is the Hawaiian word for "quick," and *extremely* quick is how things are changing in the research of media studies and fandom practices in the last couple of decades.<sup>1</sup> The emergence of a participatory culture as a result of multiple media convergences<sup>2</sup> has led to the blurring of existing boundaries between production and consumption as well as between corporate and grassroots media production. Also, it has drastically affected the roles of the participating agents, producers, and consumers. In a constantly evolving media landscape, where popular culture fans do not only consume but are also able to affect circulation processes by sharing, remixing, and redistributing media content, it is imperative that novel social, cultural, and economic codes of communication and interaction emerge.

This article takes as its subject one aspect of this participatory culture, that of online fandom<sup>3</sup> for the production of fan culture. It studies the online platform *Wikia*, which is promoted as a "social Universe for Fans," currently, one of the world's largest and most vibrant online fan community. It is an online platform that uses wiki technology and structure

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1 John Tomlinson's *The Culture of Speed: The Coming of Immediacy* (2007) is a rigorous investigation of the cultural significance of modern life's accelerating speed. It explores cultural production and reception in relation to immediacy effected via new media. Also, it links technological acceleration to cultural acceleration.

2 "Convergence Culture" is a term coined by media specialist Henry Jenkins to describe the complex interrelations among participating agents and texts in a new media culture. Jenkins explains that by "convergence" he means "the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want" (*Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* 2).

3 Fandom has been defined by Henry Jenkins as the "ability to transform personal reaction into social interaction, spectatorial culture into participatory culture" (*Fans, Bloggers, Gamers* 41).

and allows any number of people to add, edit, and share content with or without the collaboration of other members. Through a study of *Wikia* fandom practices, this article reflects efforts to trace current developments in budding online fan culture and sketches out efforts to understand its effects on online fan subjectivity. Based on the communication pathways that *Wikia* enables in addition to the texts and the tools that it hosts, I trace the multiple ways in which *Wikia* media content affects commercial reception and production by fans in relation to the new roles molded under intersecting corporate and individual pressures. I examine both corporate and individual forces that affect what Henry Jenkins calls “the multidirectional flow of cultural goods around the world” (*Fans, Bloggers, Gamers* 155). More importantly, I follow Jenkins’s et al’s informed syllogism regarding the latest conflicts and frictions within present participatory culture, as this is expressed in their book *Spreadable Media* (2013). As they claim,

the affordances of digital media provide a catalyst for reconceptualising other aspects of culture, requiring the rethinking of social relations, the reimagining of cultural and political participation, the revision of economic expectations, and the reconfiguration of legal structures. (3)

Online fan practices on *Wikia*, I will argue, provide evidence of individual multitasking cultural activities that extend from blogging and social networking to co-production of open source material.

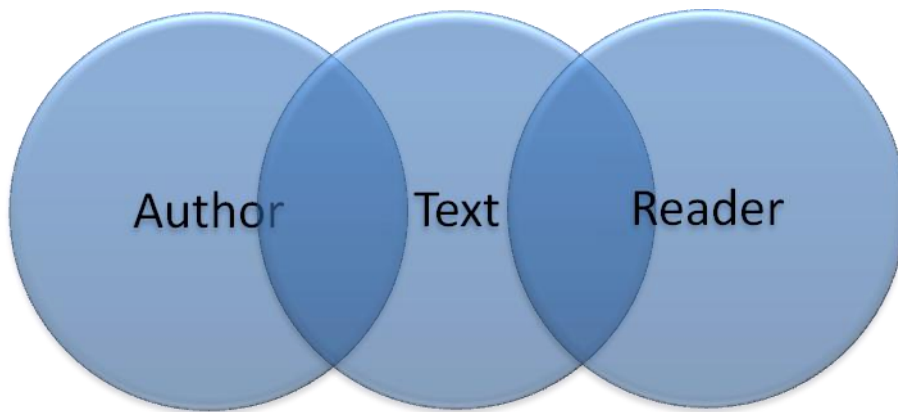
Those with a literary background would most likely situate the origins of fan fiction in theories that regard readers as active participants in the making of meaning rather than passive recipients of the writers’ intentions. This theoretical cross-over is necessary because fan practices also involve the reading and rewriting of texts; only this time texts are delivered, accessed, and appropriated on digital media platforms, such as wikis. Drawing upon debates and approaches most commonly identified with literary studies, and combining these with media and fan theories, this essay will attempt a new cultural reading of current online fan practices.

According to Wolfgang Iser, the “implied reader” is the one who is born with the text in the very processes of reading and re-writing the story. This theory is in agreement with Roland Barthes’s conception of readers as writers since they actively participate in the production of textual meaning, offering their own reading paths and their own writings of the story.<sup>4</sup> Yet, according to Paul Copley, before the text interpretation begins, “an authorial intention somehow creates a particular kind of reader or reading by means of a simple ‘transmission,’ through the medium of narrative, from one pole to another, from a sender to a receiver” (137). Although such intentions are defuse in corporate media production, they are not as straightforward in the age of the Internet when different channels of communication allow multiple paths and ways of accessing and appropriating the source text. The medium,

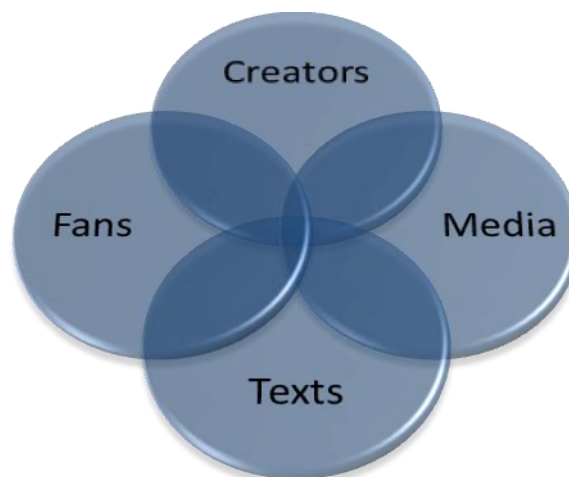
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<sup>4</sup> In *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* (1989), Roland Barthes identifies the pleasure of the text with the “co-existence [of both the author and the reader]” (7), when the author’s writings become “fragments of our own daily lives” (7). For the purposes of the present analysis, this co-habitation of the author and the reader in the text refers not only to the cognitive processes at work while reading a cultural text, but, also, to the actual processes of accumulating and re-working the cultural product via new media tools.

which in Marshall McLuhan's words has been regarded as man's "extensions" (*Understanding New Media: The Extensions of Man* 3-6), affects not only meaning and fan reception but also its appropriation. The communication continuum of a writer/creator communicating a text to the reader/recipient cannot simply be depicted as a "writer-text-reader" sequence (see fig. 1), since it cannot account for such complicated practices made possible in online interactive environments; thus a more flexible conception of readers as manipulators of electronic mediation needs to be adopted. Because of the multiple communication media channels available and the participatory roles enabled, fans can be in immediate contact with texts, and potentially access, share, and re-create them.



**Fig. 1.** Communication pathway between author, text, and reader in a horizontal continuum.



**Fig. 2.** Creative agents, media, and texts in dynamic interplay.

The new relationships arising among creators, fans, media, and texts that intermingle and inter-relate on digital textualities are preferably represented on a circular depiction (see fig. 2). The common space inhabited by all these mediating agencies constitutes the new creative space provided by *Wikia*. The electronic medium is not regarded as merely a digital surface

depicting images and texts. Instead, it is the “vessel” where diverse “communication pathways are established through which texts cycle in dynamic intermediation with one another” (Hayles, *My Mother Was a Computer* 105). In the context of fan production on Wikia-generated platforms, N. Katherine Hayles’s conceptualization of the electronic medium as a “vessel” potentially transforms it into a far more extrovert and interactive platform where new diverse roles and relationships among creative agents—Wikia producers, Wikia fans, and the industry—emerge.

As for fans, Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse suggest in respect of the reception and production process of fan culture that “[i]f the fan is a reader in the Barthesian sense, then serial production is the ultimate writerly text. In so doing, the open source text in particular invites fan fiction as an expansion to the source universe and as interpretive fan engagement where the fan not only analyzes the text but also must constantly renegotiate her analyses” (“Work in Progress” 6).<sup>5</sup> Elsewhere, in tracing the literary origins of fan fiction, they hold that new media communications resemble primary oral communication.<sup>6</sup> They see it as a form of collective storytelling within convergence and participatory culture with the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as the earliest versions of fan fiction (“Why a Fan Fiction Studies Reader Now?” 6). What is emphasized here is that when immediacy and active participation are seen under a “new media” light, this facilitates far more flexible relations among the participants that may lead to new media communication practices and actions.

Digital environments pose as the perfect space for fan interactivity and participation and James Newman agrees that “the Internet, and particularly the web, have considerably extended the communicative and discursive potential of fans and the various inter-connected websites, discussion groups and other forums have become the nexus for fan activity” (156). For Jenkins, “[t]he new information space invokes multiple and unstable forms of recontextualization” (*Fans, Bloggers, Gamers* 140). The different tools provided allow meaningful recreation of the existing cultural texts, while the great speed and immediacy of information trafficking on the web permit more flexible relations both with the artist’s media contributions and among fans in the online fan community. As discussed below, the flexibility and connectivity in electronic communications give more immediate pleasure and a sense of attainment and belonging to fans. Especially through transmedia storytelling, fans gain far more satisfaction and pleasure by engaging in diverse media content that reaches them sequentially. This is because transmedia storytelling generates a genuine interest in long-lasting developing plotlines and characters that are developed and delivered across diverse media; consequently, fans need to devote greater effort in order to fill in the knowledge gaps left on purpose by the producers. The synergy of variable agents and practices in different media environments fit for the production of fan culture draws our attention to the continuous revisiting and re-envisioning of stances and behaviors in online

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5 Roland Barthes draws the distinction between “readerly” and “writerly” texts in his *S/Z* (1970). “Readerly” texts “are products (and not productions), they make up the enormous mass of our literature,” he says, whereas, “the writerly text is ourselves *writing*, before the infinite play of the world (the world as function) is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system (Ideology, Genus, Criticism) which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages” (5).

6 For a discussion on primary and secondary orality, see Walter Ong’s *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (2002) and Marshall McLuhan’s earlier thoughts expressed in *The Global Village: Transformations in World Life and Media in the 21st Century* (1989).

fans. The great variety of media content distributed through the various electronic participatory platforms enable different types of fan engagement that depend on the freedoms and the constraints of the media, while they ensure varied types of fandom.

Digital platforms, such as Listservs, Yahoo!groups, forums, LiveJournal, Tumblr, and Twitter, have been affecting consumption and grassroots production practices in the last two decades. A new media fan culture has gradually developed away from the more conventional writers' and producers' forums, used as a space of information and gossip exchange where the meta-language around the artists and their work can flourish. Mailing lists, themed discussions, and threaded posts on fan blogs have opened up multiple communication channels between fans and producers as well as among fans themselves. The illusion of active agency, which has primarily been nourished in videogaming experiences because of the interactivity potential that they provide, is superseded now by the connectivity potential of the Web. The playful contact of media users and fans with technology has allowed them (with the click of just a few buttons) to turn into published authors of their own creations as well as into actors enjoying a few moments of publicity and recognizability as is the case with *YouTube* videos. More recently, Web 2.0 tools available online have turned their users into actual producers of online media content, what Alex Bruns defines as *produsage*. As he sees it, "[a]ll bloggers are both potential users (in the narrow sense of information recipient) as well as potential producers of content, and the blogosphere overall is an environment for the massively distributed, collaborative *produsage* of information and knowledge" (6, italics in original). Furthermore, hypertextual online technology and organization, which resist closure in all types of narrative, provide new openings to fans who can hold onto different narrative threads and add new dimensions to their fan stories.

Despite possible literary readings of fan practices, fan fiction is admittedly and primarily a cultural phenomenon, determined both by technological and economic parameters. Although "ephemeral, [these] artifacts are important traces of a culture where the producer has learnt to use freely available tools to rip, record, and disseminate derivative creative artworks based on another media source" (Hellekson and Busse, "Why" 1). As Hellekson and Busse note, "[i]n most cases, the resulting story is part collaboration and part response to not only the source text, but also the cultural context within and outside the fannish community in which it is produced" ("Work in Progress" 7). They, also, agree that "technological tools affect not only dissemination and reception, but also production, interaction, and even demographics [as] the history of fan fiction makes clear that technology is complicit in the generation of fan texts" (13). Since technology offers the connecting lines between grassroots<sup>7</sup> and corporate activity, *Wikia* users' creative production and subjectivity have to adjust both to the technological and the economic freedoms and constrains of the hosting platform.

Before commencing my case study, reference must be made to commerce as the other nodal factor in current socio-cultural equations. Media, commerce, and fan communities are quite compatible and interdependent since commercial policies are definitive also for the shaping of subcultural practices that are intended not to be popular, but subversive. Media, in

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<sup>7</sup> Henry Jenkins et al. explain "grassroots intermediaries" as "unofficial parties who shape the flow of messages through their community and who may become strong advocates for brands and franchises" (7).

turn, shape fan participation and entrepreneurship. Thus fandom seems to depend upon two-directional practices, comprising both bottom-up practices from grassroots production to the center, and top-down control, imposed by the center to the people, (Jenkins, “The Cultural Logic of Media Convergence” 37), all of which constitute part of an enormous industry. Shaped by the tensions between culture and subculture, the first group is characterized by the concentration of power by conglomerates, while the second one is characterized by the concentration of aspiring independent consuming fans who feed the market. The commercial profits of entertainment industries dictate the type of fandom they want to formulate through media control in addition to the freedoms and tools they provide fans with.

Although new media technology empowers fans with different economic and legal rights over original media content, this power is never uncontrolled by media conglomerates who want audiences they can manipulate. Once the product is given to the fan community for consumption, this community challenges “the media industry’s claim to hold copyright on popular narratives” (Jenkins, “In My Weekend-Only World” 279). It is at this point that readers/fans turn into quasi-autonomous readers and active agents who can share their contributions with the whole fan community, the authorial, and production teams. According to Jenkins, “[t]he media conglomerates do not want fans who make demands, second-guess creative decisions and assert opinions; they want regular viewers who accept what they are given and buy what they are sold” (“Weekend” 279). Therefore, the extent of freedom granted to fans and consumers of cultural products is not something that should be taken at face value, but it needs further investigation along with the other generic, technological, and community constraints.

Fans soon turn from active consumers of media products into producers of fan texts and content through the manipulation of a common consumer consciousness. Jenkins borrows Pierre Lévy’s idea of “collective intelligence” (“The Cultural Logic” 35) that binds fans together in networked communities in order to explain corporate tactics, such as spreading spoilers—pieces of information about a narrative work that can “spoil” the readers’ experience—rumors and gossip with the aim of creating suspense in a highly involved fan community, and then studying the consumers’ “affective economics”<sup>8</sup> for the empowerment of a communal consciousness among fans. Lévy sees the creation of “circuits” made up of “people, things, technology, capital, signs and skills [. . .] endlessly circulating within commodity channels” (177), and sketches the new relationships between the originators of artworks and the recipients as follows: “The distinction between authors and readers, producers and spectators, creators and interpreters will blend to form a reading-writing continuum, which will extend from machine network designers to the ultimate recipient, each helping to sustain the activity of the others” (121). The flow of information within this continuum on the digital medium boosts the spiral movement of ideas and products among all the participants. The strengthening of the bonds between the participating members in this emergent online community and their exposure to all possible multi-sensory experiences that

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8 By “affective economics” Henry Jenkins means “a new configuration of marketing theory, still somewhat on the fringes but gaining ground within the media industry, which seeks to understand the emotional underpinnings of consumer decision-making as a driving force behind viewing and purchasing decision” (*Convergence* 61-62).

are offered to them via multi-/hyper-media technologies lead to the creation of a communal consciousness that is mainly driven by fan instincts and demands.

As this article proposes, fan activities are desired and welcomed by the media industry because they engage the fans in a reflexive dialogue with popular products, their creators, and the industry itself, while they, ultimately, reinforce the promotion of the actual media product. Although fan practices commence independently and, initially, they might function as a decentered subculture, they actually exist to reinforce corporate norms, with media companies depending on such loyal fan participation as fans follow new media content through new media platforms. Jenkins affirms fans' transformative powers and argues that fans of popular culture proliferate interpretations and attract new audiences through rereading, remixing, and retelling corporate-produced content, thereby "repair[ing] the damage caused by an increasingly privatized culture" (*Convergence* 256). While they might at first pose as oppositional, seeking independence from the media content that they support, fans get more and more involved in industry-generated material in their effort to consume the new media franchises flooding different media platforms.

Fans who participate as agents in both consumer and corporate-driven practices, ultimately, fall within what Pierre Bourdieu calls the "circle of belief" that binds the creators with their audience (77-78). As he explains, for the accumulation of economic and symbolic profit of a product "[a]mong the makers of the work of art, we must finally include the public, which helps to make its value by appropriating it materially (collectors) or symbolically (audiences, readers), and by objectively or subjectively identifying part of its own value with these appropriators" (78). Fans' whole-hearted dedication allows them to enter Bourdieu's "circle of belief" and contribute to the formation of Lévy's "collective intelligence," "a form of *universally distributed intelligence*, constantly enhanced, coordinated in real time, and resulting in the effective mobilization of skills" (13, italics in original). Although fans might appear to be oppositional and seek distance from the center, they enjoy their recognition by the industry and their inclusion in the "circle" as "agents of consecration" (Bourdieu 78), finally attesting to the commodification of participation and fandom.

Despite fans' theoretical inclusion in the industry's circle of belief, much of the economic and symbolic value of popular culture artefacts depends on the fans' voluntary free labor that is promoted in online platforms, as is discussed by Catherine Burwell with reference to Tiziana Terranova's studies on "free labor" and the "social factory." Terranova describes the social pressures imposed upon fans in her article "Free Labour: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy":

Simultaneously voluntarily given and unwaged, enjoyed and exploited, free labor on the Net includes the activity of building Web sites, modifying software packages, reading and participating in mailing lists, and building virtual spaces on MUDs and MOOs. Far from being an "unreal," empty space, the Internet is animated by cultural and technical labor through and through, a continuous production of value that is completely immanent to the flows of the network society at large. (33-34)

Terranova draws our attention to the alarming phenomenon of "free labor" that results from digital cultural production online that intentionally confuses the distinction between the

audiences' willing consumption of media work and its creative reproduction. Far from granting the audience with the freedom to act, react, and interact with the media content, it imposes a new type of control over the fans that exploits their creative potential. Despite the re-negotiation of production and consumption, the industry still relies on fans' creative contributions. The control exercised by existing and expanding conglomerates on internet platforms leads to the imposition of the latter's laws on fan communities that enjoy the illusion of manipulating the circulating data without realizing their subjection to manipulation.

*Wikia* is an active collaborative platform that tries to bridge expert knowledge with fan curiosity by allowing the use of both collective and individual practices through resorting to creation and distribution tools of original content for experts and beginners. Stemming from *Wikipedia*, the world's largest growing online encyclopedia, also created by Angela Beesley and Jimmy Wales in 2006, *Wikia* uses wiki technology to provide a collaborative platform as the meeting point both for the fans of popular culture and for the industry. The platform provides fans with newsfeeds running every second, posts, and new media content added. In this way, it offers efficient tools that can promote fan interactivity and autonomy along with transmedia franchises. *Wikia* producers boast about hosting the world's largest fan community that operates on the Web in the western world, while its opening up to Asian and Japanese markets is proudly announced:

Wikia, the social universe of fandom, today announces it has secured Series D Funding to enable the company to accelerate its global momentum with a focused entry into the Japanese and Asian markets. Digital Garage joins existing investors Amazon, Bessemer Venture Partners and Institutional Venture Partners, as well as a strong line-up of additional investors with strategic strength in Japanese and Asian expansion, significantly raising the company's valuation. ("Wikia Continues Global Expansion with \$15 million in D-ROUND FUNDING")

The company's extrovert policies secure its presence in the pop media landscape with the world's most powerful pop-culture entertainment and gaming content "for fans, by fans [. . .]. *Wikia* with its 120 million fans hosts 34 million pages of rich content with regard to different popular culture areas, such as games, movies, TV, comics, music, books, and lifestyle. They proudly claim to support the world's most informed community and constitute "the fastest growing U.S. entertainment destination around the world" ("2K and Wikia Come Together with Fan Studio Partnership to Launch 'Civilization: Beyond Earth'"). The ongoing growth of the *Wikia* platform follows continuous technological developments and upgrades that justify its constant expansion.

Despite their professed fan-centered character, the company's profile tells another story. It is open and accessible to anyone who visits the platform, reaffirming earlier comments about the interdependences between commerce and subcultural activities as well as re-negotiations of fan freedom and corporate control. In online news releases and posts, *Wikia* promotes itself as a space in which expansive and revenue-driven policies connect marketers with consumers, and enable its partnership with official brands. With the profits and interests of some of the entertainment industry's conglomerates on the one hand and a lively and fast-growing, technologically literate and better-than-ever-informed fan community on the other,



it is easy to imagine who is in charge. Yet, *Wikia* producers claim to be offering the bridge between the two opposing but quite complementary sides, and opening up to both fronts. The company's policies, investments, and growth plans as well as past and future agreements on the news releases on its website, reveal its expanding character that also includes its fan-fuelled worlds and projects. As for the media tools available there, they provide "Wikia users with a unique collaborative web experience, [and help] to define an audience of next generation editors and collaborative curation techniques that will shape the way people create and consume content, inbound and outbound 3<sup>rd</sup> party licencing of technology, content and data" (*Wikia*).

As collaboration is the key policy, the company is making great efforts to expand into new markets as well as break up into smaller-scale but fast-evolving sectors. Their collaborations extend to agreements with *WarnerBros.com* (for original content and information about movies, TV, videogames, and music releases), Roddenberry Entertainment, smart technology development companies, and IGN media company for "Sony's launch of a range of next generation applications with richly syndicated Wikia community content" ("Wikia Continues"). These marketing and development tactics are only some of the examples that verify their moves towards the industry, instances that lead to what Jenkins has termed as "corporate convergence" (*Fans, Bloggers, Gamers* 155). On the other hand, syndication partnerships with Warner Brothers Interactive around the highly anticipated 2014 video game *Shadow of Mordor*, independent communities like Carbine Studios known for their knowledge and skill in the online fan community, and Rotten Potatoes, which bring in fans' latest critique from the movie and gaming communities, demonstrate *Wikia*'s efforts to capture grassroots practices. What these marketing policies shed light on is the pressing need of a ruling center to open up to and embrace fan practices, while grassroots activities seek for their legitimation via their contact with the center.

In accordance with its extrovert character and financial policies is *Wikia*'s celebration of its own media franchise. After *Wikipedia* and *Wikia*, comprising the afore-mentioned distinct areas of cultural interest, the creation of *Civilization.wikia.com* has been announced, as the Civilization strategy gaming franchise has turned to *Wikia* for expansion through the project called "Civilization: Beyond Earth." The announcement in the news release section announces that Civilization franchise is

leaving its historical roots and taking to the stars in the all-new "Civilization: Beyond Earth." In today's world of the superfan, 2K has taken to the Wikia platform to embrace collaboration as a means of resonating with audiences beyond gaming and into pop culture and science fiction, thanks to the game's new focus of colonizing another planet. ("2K and Wikia")

The insatiable hunger of the gaming industry is in search of new audiences in the ever-growing *Wikia* world that will eagerly and voluntarily work for the perpetuation of the gaming industry and the increase in the company's revenues. As technological developments are admittedly pushing economic and media convergences to the limits, *Wikia* practices facilitate more community and generic convergences.

Apart from opening up to corporate global markets, *Wikia* politics entail turning to fans, for marketing policies can have meaning only when they are consumed by fans. In the

“Video: ‘Star Trek’ Creator’s Son Kicks Off 2-Year Retrospective Project,” Rod Roddenberry, the son of Gene Roddenberry, *Star Trek* movie creator, announces the running of a two-year project to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Star Trek* franchise. After the running of countless *Star Trek* fan wikis, and the Trek Initiative, launched by Roddenberry Entertainment and *Wikia*, the company is organizing more promotional events of the franchise that will be able to boost consumer interest in tandem with fan participation and production. Online announcements read:

In addition to live and online showcases that will include panel discussions and even *Star Trek* game shows, the Trek Initiative is collecting what may be the first-ever fan census, a sort of Vulcan mind meld with fan memories. In short videos, *Star Trek* fans will explain what the franchise has meant to them. The videos will be published on [trekinitiative.wikia.com](http://trekinitiative.wikia.com). (“Video”)

Strikingly incongruous is the fact that the so-called “fan-fueled Warp 5.0 project” has officially been initiated by Rod Roddenberry himself, narrating his *Star Trek* experiences as a fan in front of his recording camera, while he, being among the organizers, insists on their aim to bring together fan stories, created by and intended for the fans. Playing between fandom and the canon, the project depends on the commodification of the fans’ memory. This constitutes another instance of merging the once incongruous roles and relationships of the industry with the fan community, blurring in this manner the already fuzzy boundaries between production and consumption. Pushing convergences further, Roddenberry media producers are venturing another opening towards older cast members and *Wikia* content creators, who are all bound together in an imaginary common “circle of belief” that will potentially send new *Star Trek* franchises to the skies. As Trevor Roth claims, “[w]e built it for the fans, but many of the cast members have become fans,” adding he would not be surprised if every once in a while someone from one of the TV series or movies showed up in the database” (“Video”). Thus despite their incongruous roles, the industry invests in fan creativity and in cultivating a belief in the common goals of an ever-growing and always-tolerant community.

Another example of a fan-related project that was created to promote fan knowledge of *Wikia*’s technologies, plans, and intentions was the *Wikia Fan Express Train to Comic Con*. It constituted another example of the platform developers’ intentions to open up to the fan world and players/consumers of the new game *Middle-Earth: Shadow of Mordor*: “The *Wikia*-sponsored railway journey [is a fan centric activity which] include[s] a preview of the upcoming video game a sneak peak at the fantasy-meets-reality TV series ‘The Quest’ and a demonstration of *Wikia*’s new interactive mapping feature. It allows users collaboratively to annotate maps of both real and fictional places like Middle-earth” (“Aboard the *Wikia Fan Express*”). Michael de Plater, *Shadow of Mordor* design director, demonstrated the game on the *Wikia*-sponsored train and showed off a level from the open-world combat game set between “The Hobbit” and “The Lord of the Rings” tales.

It is extremely hard to distinguish the categorization of fans, according to their involvement in online projects as is the case of *Wikia*, into affirmative and transformative ones, following Hellekson and Busse’s classification (“Why” 34). “Affirmative” fans are

those who “tend to collect, view, and play, to discuss, analyze, and critique, [while] [t]ransformative fans take a creative step to make the worlds and characters their own, be it by telling stories, cosplaying the characters, creating artworks, or engaging in any of the many other forms active fan participation can take” (3-4). In the case of *Wikia*-based activities, both affirmative and transformative types of fandom can be detected. Yet, most *Wikia* projects presuppose transformative fan practices since the whole process of sharing, reworking, and re-distributing entails possible content, medium, and even genre transformations. As Sherry Turkle notes, “new devices provide space for the emergence of a new state of the self, itself, split between the screen and the physical real, wired into existence through technology” (16). This works not only as man’s extension, echoing McLuhan’s words, but possibly as “a phantom limb” (Turkle 17). The flourishing of a wired culture facilitates the shaping of fan communities and fan roles that affect production and consumption practices more than ever.

Hellekson and Busse continue that “[f]andom is fragmented and fragmentary, just as it is self-perpetuating, itself a continual work in progress that cannot be shut down” (“Work in Progress” 8). In *Wikia*, fandom is indeed a work in progress as it provides this endlessly expanding space for *Wikia* fans who indulge in fan community and franchise meta-language. As they suggest, “[t]he appeal of works in progress lies in part in the way fans can engage with an open text: it invites responses, permits shared authorship, and enjoins a sense of community” (6). Similarly, fans’ subjectivity is revealed by this medium to be highly fragmented and fragmentary as diverse roles are presupposed and enabled through multiple mediation types, formed in accordance with extra-textual knowledge of the story within the hosting environment, and with the tools and freedoms that it supports. As this study presupposes that fans are technologically literate with special web skills and grassroots tactics, it is possible to argue that the immediacy and publicity of online media, and *Wikia*’s in particular, boost both creative and self-referential engagement with the source text. Contrary to the fear of media users turning anti-social, their hypersocial character is revealed as they engage in self-reflexive online talks about their creative reworking of the material. Additionally, the sense of common bond and belonging via the sharing of subcultural information and media content helps the development of immediate friendships, some of which can develop professionally as the following examples demonstrate.

“*Star Wars* Fanpedia,” “Wookieepedia,” “*Star Wars* Fanon,” and “*Star Wars* RP” are indicative instances of wiki generation that have been created by a *Wikia* user and Senior Community Member, who has also become a member of the professional *Wikia* team. As different roles and relationships are converging, he is seen working both from the perspective of the community user and that of the staff. Indeed, a visit around these expanding fan-created wikis showcases the possibilities for new media and fan fiction roles to evolve. They are only four of the thousands wikis that have been created on the *Star Wars* franchise and hosted on *Wikia*. “*Star Wars* Fanpedia,” originally founded by *Wikia* user Brandon Rhea in 2008 with the aim of launching fan projects, was re-launched on *Star Wars* Day in 2013 in order to provide latest news and rumors regarding the franchise. From the position of the *Star Wars* commentator, Rhea reports all the latest news on Lucasfilm, *StarWars.com*, *Star Wars* celebrities, and any other possible sources. Similarly, news blogs, discussion forums and live

chats allow far greater forms of interactivity as well as the streaming of the most current content by the wired fan community.

This wiki allows Rhea the space for recognizability in a way that no other media platforms or tools have done before. Following his posts, tweets, and game trophies, we see the multiple roles he assumes, from the *Wikia* user/consumer to the creator of media content, the *Wikia* staff, and the actual hero. In the “*Star Wars* Fanpedia Community Showcase Episode XV,” also posted by him, Rhea discusses Lucas’s film preview clips in anticipation of *Star Wars* Rebels. Now, from the position of the Fanpedia Founder, Rhea coordinates discussion with Brian Linder, Administrator of Fanpedia and Eric Moro, Jedi Master, all senior members in the *Wikia* fan community.

Apart from the more objective and journalistic character of posts, the *Star Wars* Fanon wiki works as a repository of fan stories with information on characters, planets, and battles emerging from the fans’ own explorations of the landscape of this imagined universe. Presently, the Fanon hosts one hundred and fifteen “good articles” (“*Star Wars* Fanon’s Good Articles”), which adhere to higher standards of quality than most articles, following community constraints such as fanon’s policies, style, and layout. Many of them become featured articles, while *Golden Age of the Republic: Hidden Truths* is the first *Star Wars* novel generated by Aban Fiolli, *Wikia* fan and user. Also, the “*Star Wars* RP” is home of the *Star Wars* Legacies role-play, offering “principal *Star Wars* role-playing experiences, with a mythology stretching from the earliest days of the Jedi Knights to over 1,000 years after *Star Wars* Episode VI: *Return of the Jedi*” (“Welcome to the *Star Wars* RP”). All these wikis hope to indulge all types of fans and engage them in diverse forms of creativity.

The interactions and activities described so far allow users to interact when online by manipulating media technology, creating new content, and communicating with the fan community. Yet, they also endorse a new seriousness that characterizes fans moving from decentered positions of culture towards central points of control, an illusion of newly acquired power. Yet, as Jenkins et al. point out, “[c]orporate interests will never fully align with those of participatory culture, and frictions will frequently emerge” (36). Media power control is a variable liable to change according to technological, economic, and social conditions. In these fragile relationships that are established, fan power relies both on the fans’ technical and social skills. Collaborative possibilities on the wikis encourage autonomy in the *Wikia* fans who learn to act with the tools of the latest technology. According to Lévy, “[c]ollective intelligence expands a community’s productive capacity because it frees individual members from the limitations of their memory and enables the group to act upon a broader range of expertise” (qtd. in Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers, Gamers* 138). As he writes, within a knowledge community “[n]o one knows everything, everyone knows something, all knowledge resides in humanity” (13-14). Yet, it should be noted that it is only a seeming autonomy since fans are (self-)taught to use those tools and communication pathways that the industry-based platform caters for, the tools that will be used for the free recreation of original media content. Indeed, the de-contextualization and re-contextualization of collective knowledge enables new forms of transformative expression. Yet, it is a different type of fandom from what Jenkins has envisioned as a form of consumer activism. *Wikia* does not pose what he describes as “a platform for consumer activism” (“Interactive Audiences” 141).

Rather it serves as a platform for consumption and re-appropriation of media content introducing in this way a new type of fan control.

Obviously, creative expression is allowed to a degree. Yet, the fact that the wiki material is re-usable and re-sharable questions the freedom to have an idea and own it. Louisa Stein's and Busse's theory of fan practices defined by technological, media, and cultural constraints is applicable at this point. Fan work acquires legitimation when created within certain constraints. As they see it, "fan authorship signifies a broader cultural transition away from a celebration of originality and newness, of creativity in a vacuum, and of individuals owning creative ideas and styles. Instead, fan authorship reveals a broader cultural embrace of the stimulating limitations of intertextuality" ("Limit Play" 193). Fan works inevitably evolve within the genre's and community's constraints due to the repetition of generic tropes, literary, and aesthetic styles. For example, certain names and acronyms have their roots in science fiction fandom and have migrated in media fandom and then the internet. As they suggest, "[m]any media fans move from one source text [as online platform] to another, creating and enjoying fan artifacts in multiple fandoms. This fandom migration results in similarities in both form and content across different fandoms" (194). Understandably, as issues of originality and idea ownership come up, creation takes place as a result of the tension between freedom and constraint, originality and intertextuality, leading to the merging of all possible forces from diverse sources and directions.

In *Wikia*, at first glance fans enjoy maximum levels of freedom due to the available tools. Indeed, a wide array of types of subjectivity can be developed. Given the tools that they are allowed to manipulate, the hypersocial fan can show enthusiasm over fan production, yet project maximum levels of self-promoting individuation in the role of the objective news reporter, critic, and fan text producer. Yet, how creative are they really? How free are fans to develop their content when the appropriation and sharing of media content lies under strict licensing terms? The material is sharable and can be redistributed freely, yet, by joining, users admit to the loss of complete power and control of that bit of information that they carry. Therefore, apart from technological, generic, and community constraints, fans have to create within the space and with the material that the industry provides them. As the examples of the *Star Wars* wiki creator suggest, when blurring the boundaries between fan and wiki roles, freedom remains a suspect notion as fans have to create under the strict licensing control of the manufacturer. While popular culture poses in and away from the hands of the fans, *Wikia* participation entails being away from but still so close to the control of the manufacturer.

Finally, being wired, connected, and synchronized with Facebook and Twitter accounts allows enhanced communication potential on wikis. Regular communication with other moderators and selected members as well as a more general contact with the online fan community is sustained. The speed of the wired connectivity that the Web allows and the wiki application facilitates enhances this false illusion of freedom and the sense of timelessness. As soon as an episode or live show is broadcast, reciprocal responses from fans start streaming in. "*Twitter* is not a *rival* technology," but it supports a raft of "supplementary or complementary activities" ("Twitter" 317-18, italics in original). Yet, it eats away part of the fan energy. As all fans are synchronized with their Twitter accounts, new worlds emerge outside the main story, potentially consuming all the fans' creativity. A study of the level of

tweeting around a source text could be indicative of data trafficking and fan activity. Admittedly, a new sharable fan glossy and immersive culture arises that needs further investigation.

Extending from Jenkins' distinction between "corporate and grassroots convergence," new more violent convergence tendencies are reportedly recognized, enabled by latest wiki-based smart and synchronized technology. This study has fostered a realist view of fandom rather than a romanticized vision of fans belonging in decentered subcultural contexts of a pre-commodified state, exercising resistance to corporate control. Taking into account latest technological, economic, and cultural variables, it has been suggested that after re-negotiations of roles, freedoms, and rights, the fan whole-heartedly succumbs to policies of the entertainment industry, unconsciously working for the promotion of its interests and products.

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