A Good-Enough Fan Within the Online Fan Community of Game of Thrones:

An E-Ethnographic Study

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Preface

My career as a student of Tilburg University is coming to an end. It was fun being a student and I enjoyed it very much. For me it is the end of an era of being a student and the beginning of a new period of my life, with a fulltime professional career maybe?

You may want to know why I wrote a master thesis about the fandom of Game of Thrones.

This report is the final product of my master thesis, which I carried out as part of the master program Communication- and Information Sciences, specialization Data Journalism. The road towards the point of graduation and completing this thesis was not easy. What made it challenging and fun for me was changing topic. My first topic was about social media that enables and provides fans a certain level of "backstage access" to their favorite artists. In other words, they have a direct line to their favorite artist. After abandoning this topic I switched to the question: what is a good-enough fan?

Being a fan of a cultural object is something I personally 'spread' around: I openly state that I am a fan of FC Barcelona, Game of Thrones, J.R.R. Tolkien, Marvel comics, New York Knicks, Dennis Bergkamp, Robin van Persie, Zinedine Zidane, Star Trek, and Back to the Future. I consider myself a fan of all of these mentioned 'cultural objects', but I am more a fan of FC Barcelona than I am a fan of Back to the Future for example. There is some kind of inherent hierarchy within my Self that makes this distinction. And that is what I see in Others as well. This was the starting point of this thesis.

The theory of *Enoughness* got a grip on me after I read all characteristic features an Irish pub should have to be considered an Irish pub. As a proud drinker of Guinness, which I consider a black liquid gold, and my name at the wall of my local Irish pub, I'd consider myself a good-enough fan of Irish pubs. Drinking a pint of Guinness could be explained as a fan activity that I undertook and continue doing. In the theory of Jenkins 'participatory culture' I would be called a prosumer, which is a word-aggregation of producer and consumer: telling people I like Guinness is considered producing word of mouth about the drink, while drinking it is considered consuming. This and other theories were used as the framework of the idea a member of an online fan community could be considered a good-enough fan.

Further, I would like to take this opportunity to thank several people who guided and supported me during my stay at Tilburg University.

Abstract

This master thesis focuses on the emergence of normative rules for Self and Others within the online fan community of Game of Thrones. In this thesis Self stands for the individual fan, Others is a reference to other fans and the fan community. Game of Thrones is a high fantasy television series which is based on the A Song of Ice and Fire, a novel series of George R.R. Martin. The main goal in the thesis is to show how *enoughness* and fan theories collaborate regarding fan activities, fluency, choice, *spreadability* and being considered a good-enough fan related to fan levels. *Spreadability* is a notion that describes the way (online) content circulates among websites, its users and fans. This thesis analyzes the normative rules set within the fan community of Game of Thrones on social media platform Tumblr, within an e-ethnographic framework combining insights and methods drawn from fan studies, e-ethnography and media studies. This thesis shows how politeness among members and higher levels of fan-being are key features within an online fan community.

Keywords: levels of fan-being, fan activities, good enough fan, *enoughness*, *spreadability*, Tumblr, fan studies, and e-ethnography.

Table of contents

List of figures

Chapter 1: Introduction

We all are fans of something (Sullivan, 2012) and we all have our opinions about those favorite cultural objects. Bourdieu (2008, first published in 1986) suggested that 'cultural object[s]' are living social institutions which are, at the same time, a materialistic object such as a novel and a work of art. Members are active within the social institution to protect the appearance of the cultural object. An example of this phenomenon is a fan quote of a Star Wars fan after The Walt Disney Company announced they were planning to make new Star Wars movies:

> "NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!" I don't want a new movie. Star Wars has had enough movies. And they can't cast new people to be Han, Leia and Luke. The original cast members are too old for this stuff, unless…this will be like Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull. No. Dear God. No. George Lucas, you are now officially the biggest sell-out in the universe."

> – James Earl Jones, played the role of *Darth Vader* (Proctor, 2013, p. 201).

According to Proctor (2013), this utterance originates from fan ownership of the cultural object (e.g. *Star Wars*): the fan disagrees with the intention of The Walt Disney Company to make new *Star Wars* movies and he blames the original creator (George Lucas) for it. This study looks at *Game of Thrones* as a cultural object. *Game of Thrones* is a high-fantasy television series produced by HBO. It is an adaptive version of the *A Song of Ice and Fire* (ASOIAF), a novel series of George R.R. Martin. This study briefly examined the online events within the online GoT fan community regarding George R.R. Martin's first three books of the ASOIAF novel series[1] and the first three season of HBO's Game of Thrones (2011-2013). The series follows the plot of the novels series. The main story of ASOIAF revolves around the quest of being/becoming the ruler of the Seven Kingdoms and being/becoming the King or Queen of the Iron Throne of the who fictional continent Westeros. There are several competing families to claim this title. There are also some parallel stories. The secondary story is about the danger represented by a Northern people called the Others; a third story focuses Daenerys Targaryen's adventures in Essos, the other continent. Daenerys Targaryen is still a young girl when she is married to a Dorthraki warrior by her older brother. Later her husband kills her brother and dies; Daenerys 'gives birth' to three dragons by walking out of a big fire, which made her 'Mother of Dragons' and 'Bride of Fire'.

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[1] First, book one *A Game of Thrones* (first published in 1996), second, book two *A Clash of Kings* (1999), and three, book three *A Storm of Swords* (2000).

In this the *Game of Thrones*-fandom, henceforth the GoT-fandom, covers all fan activities around ASOIAF and HBO's *Game of Thrones*. GoT, as an abbreviation, is used with other words such GoT-fan and GoT-knowledge.

1.1 Focus and aim

This master thesis explores the evolving emergence of normative behavior of fans within the online fandom of *Game of Thrones.* This study builds upon a long tradition of fan studies on fandom of inter alia *Star Trek* (i.e. Jenkins, 2012 first published in 1992), *Marvel Comics* (Potsch & Williams as cited in Bramlett, 2012; Dittmer, 2007), and Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* (i.e. Meers, 2006). Although fan studies is a populated field of study, only a few studies so far have focused on the fandom of *Game of Thrones*.

According to Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington (2007) we can distinguish between three waves of fan studies. Suida (2010) describes them as deviation wave (early 1930s), resistance wave (started in 1992), and mainstream wave (started around 2005-2007). Gray et al. describe the first wave was as a demonstration of fans and scholars proving being a fan is more than just the claim of being a fan of something. The first wave fan studies shared a main goal to be respected as fans and as part of popular and academic literature. The second wave of fan studies dealt with the movement of being acknowledged as a scientific topic concerning the analysis of individual fan consumption towards the analysis of the social dynamics within fan communities and its cultural patterns; in *The Cultural Economy of fandom* Fiske (1992) repeatedly writes about resistance to negative fan-stereotypes. The third wave of fan studies used the first and second wave as departure point and it focuses the role of being-a-fan plays in the everyday life and makes a division between evil and good fans (Jenkins, 2007). Booth (2013) identified a fourth wave of fan studies, implying that fans and aca-fans, best described as academic fans, should interact more in order to produce more fruitful collaborative work in the field of fan studies. This study contributes to the third and fourth waves, as it explores what the favorite cultural object means for the fans, what role it has in their daily life, and initiates a dialogue with the fans.

1.2 Research questions

This study is set upon theoretical contributions of Blommaert and Varis (2011, 2012) on *enoughness* and Jenkins' work (1992, 2006) on participatory culture and *spreadability*. While these concepts will be illustrated in the literature review below, here it suffices to stay with a short description: fans who are active in the participatory culture reach a higher level of *fan-enoughness*, *spreadability* is the circulation of online information among websites and its users. Within the GoT-fandom both fans and the author set norms and values for their

shared object. This study will focus on the following research question and three sub-questions:

What kind of evolving normative behavior regarding identification as a "good" fan is constructed in the GoT-fandom?

What is the role of the Internet regarding the evolution of fan communities?
How do people construct fandom-norms and –values within the online GoT-fandom regarding fan activities?

> How do people construct fandom-norms and –values for Self?
> How do people construct fandom-norms and –values for Others?
> How do people construct inclusion/exclusion within the online GoT-fandom?

How do fans construct a level of fan *enoughness*?

The research questions emerge from the literature review, as will be illustrated in the following chapters.

1.3 Thesis Outline

Chapter 1 introduced the main motivation for this thesis, focus and aim. It ends with the thesis outline, in which following chapters are briefly introduced.

Chapter 2 discusses the emergence of (normative) social norms within a fan community regarding enoughness (Blommaert & Varis, 2011, 2012) and participatory culture (Jenkins, 2012), fan activities and identity by Self and Others (Leppänen, Kytölä, Jousmäki, Peuronen, & Westinen, 2013). It ends with a theoretical framework model which includes all existing theoretical contributions that would lead towards defining a good-enough fan.

Chapter 3 addresses what ethnographic research methods are adopted in this study, namely methods are lurking, email-interview, and coding. The chapter concludes with a brief introduction of the respondents, and the illustration of the data gathering procedures.

Chapter 4 discusses *Game of Thrones* as a community of practice (CoP). It starts with the introduction of fantasy as a genre and then focuses on the history of *A Song of Ice and Fire* novel series and the *Game of Thrones* television series. Furthermore, it discusses online fan communities, the notion of Community of Practice (CoP), and the online fan community as a Community of Practice of Game of Thrones (CoP-GoT).

Chapter 5 presents the research results in four sections: Fans about online and offline, Self for Self, Self about Others, and Others about Self. Self indicates the fan, while Others stands for the fan community. Self and Others are explained by a fan for Self and the fan community for Others (Nevitt, 2012).

Chapter 6 discusses the theoretical contribution of this study to third and fourth wave fan studies, conclusions and discussion. Finally, chapter 7 explores the theoretical contribution of this study for e-ethnographic studies based on email-interviews, the limitations of this study, and includes recommendations for future research in fan studies.

Chapter 2: Conceptual framework

This chapter will address identity for both online, as a person and as a fan. Further, this section will discuss *enoughness*, cultural accents, participatory culture, *spreadability*, and fan types. This study's conceptual model will be introduced in section 2.4.

2.1 Identity on Web 2.0

In this study a twofold distinction is used to define the Internet and its social media websites. The Internet is a worldwide system of connected computer networks on which the Web is 'running' (Van Doren, Fechner, & Green-Adelsberger, 2000). After Tim Berners-Lee developed the foundations of the World Wide Web and its Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP) and Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) between 1979 and 1990, it became possible for ordinary people to surf the Internet (Van Doren, Fechner, & Green-Adelsberger, 2000). According to Lysloff (2003, pp. 258-9), the Internet has become the "virtual place for individuals to gather [and] to elaborate commodity exchange networks." Below paragraphs illustrate online identities of people on this virtual place.

According to Leppänen, Kytölä, Jousmäki, Peuronen, and Westinen (2013), online identity is constructed as a person's particular characteristic features. Leppänen et al. (2013) argue that online identification of users is related to features of Self-characterization of oneself and Others, and by features of external characterizations of oneself by others. The authors argue that an individual's Self-characterization involves a sense of perception regarding membership in a community and which role a member should occupy. At last, and in line with both Jenkins (2012) and Blommaert and Varis (2011, 2012), Leppänen et al. (2013) argue that commonality reflects a sense of belonging to a community. Jenkins, Ford and Green (2013) describes the role of the Internet for fan communities as the notion of "spreadability". *Spreadability* originates from Jenkins' notion of 'participatory culture', which reflects the content production and distribution by the community about their favorite cultural object. Jenkins et al. (2013) argues that *spreadability* means sharing content by fans for their own purposes; permission by right holders is not always requested or taken into account. The content that is shared the most is thus spread the most and 'sticks' on several content media sites (Gladwell, as cited in Jenkins et al., 2013).

This study relies on several theoretical conceptualizations about social media. First, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) argue that social media is a collection of online applications that allows participatory users to create, collaborate and exchange User Generated Content (UGC). Second, Parent, Plangger, and Bal (2011) claim that platforms allow users to collaborate and to generate content should be referred to as 'social media', or Web 2.0 (social networking) websites (SNS). Third, boyd and Ellison (2007) describe social network sites (SNS) as online services where individuals profile themselves, link themselves to other

users, and interact with their connections. Fourth, Baym (2011) correspondingly concludes users tend to connect with other users with the same interests and by doing so a hemophilic community arises, in other words a community of 'look-a-like' members who share the same interests. Fifth, Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, and Silvestre (2011) state social media employ interactive platforms which enables its users to share, (co)create and discuss content. Kietzmann et al. (2011) illustrate a honeycomb of social media in a set of blocks; by their strong bond they all affect the identity block:
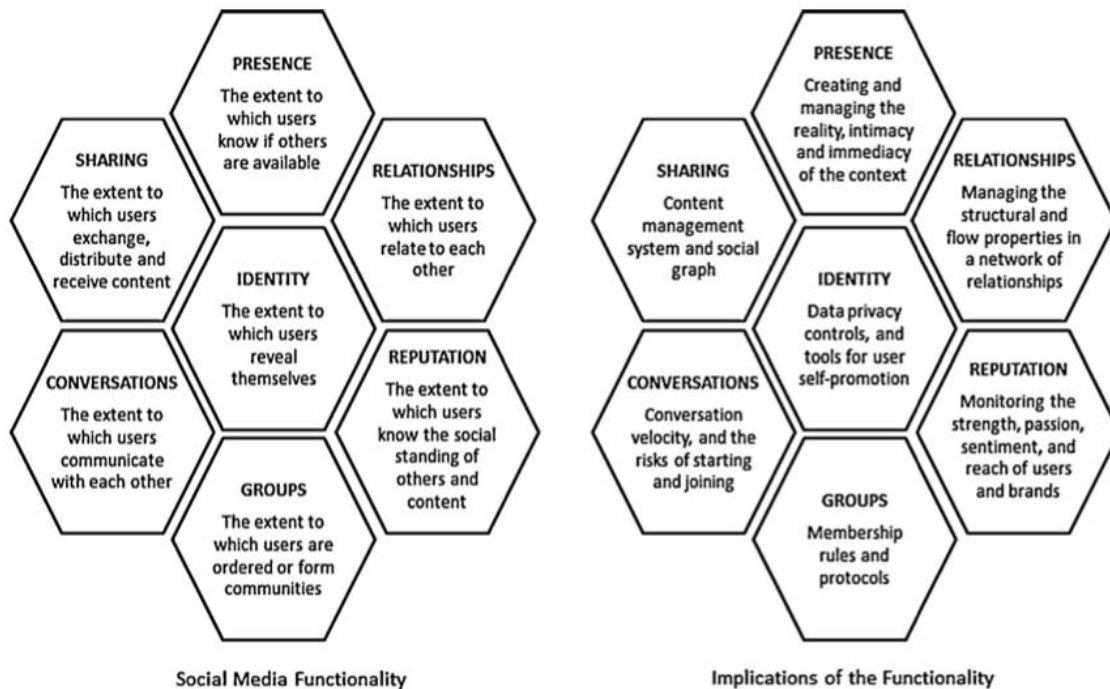
Figure 1. Honeycomb of social media. Reprinted from Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, (2011).

In order to explain the honeycomb, one should start from the identity block, which refers to what extent social media users reveal their identity, such as name, age, and gender. Next, the conversation block illustrates which users communicate with others, by tweets, posts, likes, and re-posting. Furthermore, the sharing block is about exchanging, distributing and receiving content between people-users. To continue, the presence block refers to the visibility of the accessibility of users by other users, such as checking in on Foursquare. In addition, the relationship block demonstrates the relations between users, such as a (shared) favorite cultural object. Finally, the reputation block "is the extent to which users can identify the standing of others, including themselves, in a social media setting" (p. 247). An example is the endorsement a user of LinkedIn can receive from his network. Last, the group block illustrates the forming of communities and sub-communities. Kietzman et al.'s (2011)

honeycomb of social media helps to focus on and organize online fan-behavior of fans and online fan communities in the GoT-fandom.

2.2 Identity and Fandom

Sandvoss (2005, p. 8) defines fandom as "the regular, emotionally involved consumption of a given popular narrative or text in the form of books, television shows, films or music […]", which indicates we are all fans of something (as cited in Sullivan, 2012). Baym's (2007) definition of fandom illustrates two characteristics: fandom is a collective of people, who share an appreciation of a (pop) culture object or objects. This study will adopt both definitions of fandom.

William Shatner acted as Captain Kirk in the *Star Trek - The Original Series* (TOS) for many years. He uttered the sentence 'get a life' on December 20, 1986 during a sketch in the *Saturday Night Live* (SNL) show. Shatner was referring to all Trekkies, a nickname for Star Trek fans (Kreski & Shatner, 1999). According to Jenkins (2012) a fan is not an individual who needs to 'get a life'. Jenkins argues the 'get a life' sentence uttered by William Shatner in *Saturday Night Live* represents the overall view about fans by scholars and society during the first wave of fan studies. Fiske (1992), an active fan, started the second wave of fan studies by introducing a resistance to such negative fan-stereotypes. As mentioned above, third and fourth wave of fan studies are identified by Jenkins (2007) and Booth (2013).These studies focus on fan-levels and fan-aca fan dialogue.

According to Busse (2013), fans determine a fan is 'good-enough' by standards they have themselves adopted. A fan is 'good-enough' when he or she knows enough trivia; conversely, when a fan does not know enough trivia he or she have not been a fan long enough to be a good fan. Hills (2005) puts emphasis on the inhabitation by fans of all, fanzines, fan forums, fan websites, fandom on social media websites. The hierarchy between fans is relevant if a fan believes he or she is a 'better' fan than a colleague-fan. Putnam illustrates this within *The Fan Engagement Spectrum* in which he describes four levels of being a fan: an engaged fan, an advocate fan, a purchasing fan, and a super fan. In line with Busse, Sullivan (2012) argues fandom is more than this so-called appreciation for a popular object. Sullivan demonstrates fandom as a collective interpretation of the popular objects that caused a strong feeling of group cohesion among its members. In the Internet era fans interact with their peers in a language of their own, in online chat groups, fan websites and social media pages dedicated to their object of appreciation (Sullivan, 2012). But, as Busse explained, a fan can perceive himself or herself a better fan than other fans.

According to Bandura (in Bryant & Oliver, 2008) people are proactive and self-reflecting, with a capacity for self-direction. In other words, people are active members of a participatory culture (Jenkins, 2012) that have a sense of inherent *self-enoughness*

15

(Blommaert & Varis, 2011, 2012) and share a need for commonality with others (Leppänen et al., 2013). In line with Jenkins' assumption that fans do not want to be considered as losers or geeks in a negative sense, Sjöberg (as cited in Busse, 2013) made a fan hierarchy model in which fans are bigger geeks than others (see figure 2).
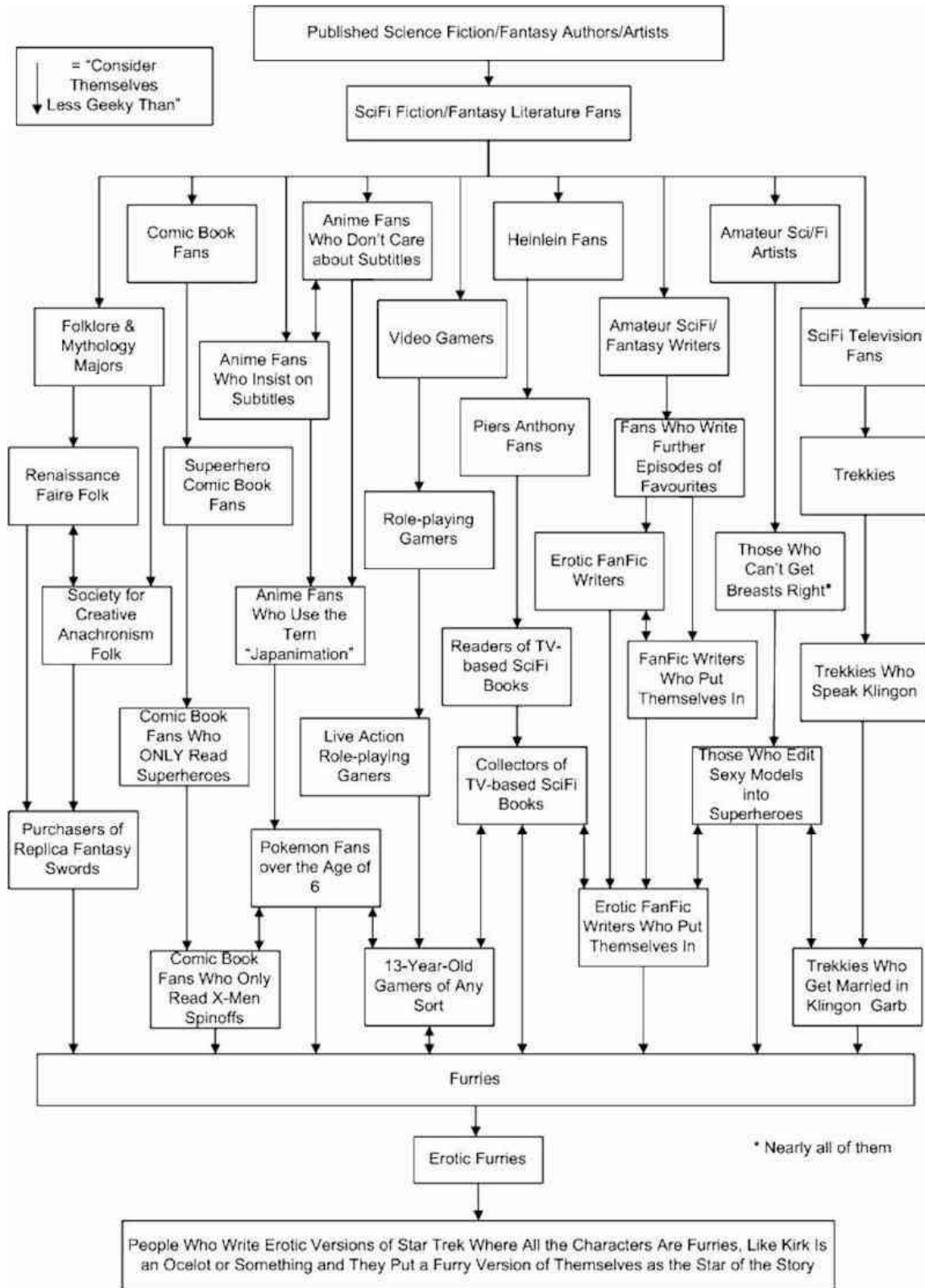
Figure 2. Geek hierarchy. Reprinted from Sjöberg (2002).

Fans may use Sjöberg's figure to determine if they are less geeky than other fans: a fan that reads solely superhero comic books is less geeky than a fan that only reads comic book of X-Men spin-offs. But a fan who solely reads superhero comic books is more geeky than a fan who reads all comic books. Finally, Sjöberg's figure should be seen as a manner for fans to determine to which fan community they (want to) belong; sequent, Busse reasons television series such as *The Big Bang Theory*[2] changed the depiction of geeks in modern day life, which reflects studies from the third wave fan studies.

2.3 Fan engagement regarding *enoughness*

According to Blommaert and Varis (2011), 'culture' provides meaning to both verbal and non-verbal communication that is "recognizable for others as productions of identities" (p.12). They argued that an individual is never a 'full' member due to the likelihood of change within the group dynamics because of the individual's lack of fluency. The level of communication skills as a member of the group explains fluency. In line with Blommaert and Varis, 'being fluent' is a predictive indication a member is 'good enough' to be part of the group he or she participates in. Jenkins (2012) defined 'a sense of belonging' as belonging to a community with common interest in a favored cultural object. A fan derives self-esteem, status and confidence from this sense of belonging (Jenkins, 2012; Palme, 2000). Further, sharing a common interest and exchanging ideas mean that a fan can recognize himself or herself in his or her (new) peers (Jenkins, 2012). According to Palme (2000), sharing interests is centralized in comradeship, and exchanging ideas should be seen as inspiration. According to Ferreday (2009), approval is met by normative rules within the community about (desired) behavior.

Blommaert and Varis (2011) define 'good enough' as *enoughness*. Thus, members of any community find this cultural ideal in a sense of conformity in consumption of products (Blommaert & Varis, 2012). The authors addressed *enoughness* and cultural accents within the borders of Jenkins' sense of belonging. In this study *enoughness* is explained by authenticity, fluency, and heritage. Authenticity is addressed by Blommaert and Varis (2011) as being original, in contradiction to empty gesturing, which means a person shows behavior without meaning. Blommaert (2013, p. 12) states that "people perform a […] form of interaction tailored towards a sense of commonness, articulated in a kind of symbolic rehearsal of emblematic features of 'authenticity' – emblematic word forms and meanings, registers and patterns of discourse." Further, fluency is the ability of a person to

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[2] In *The Big Bang Theory* the geeks are the stars by showing off their trivia-knowledge of science and appreciated popular cultural objects such as Dr. Sheldon Cooper's appreciation for Marvel's comic books and his idolatress of Leonard Nimoy who played Mr. Spock in *Star Trek*.

communicate, both verbal as non-verbal in speech and text, within the normative rules of the community's tone of voice of emblematic communication (Blommaert & Varis, 2011). Blommaert (2013) argues members are never full-members due they cannot be fully fluent "because the configurations of features are perpetually changing" (p.12). Finally, heritage is the shared common history of the community. In line with Etzioni (2004), Blommaert and Varis (2011) argue a community shares a common history with (cultural) objects, thus a heritage.

According to Blommaert and Varis (2012), similarly to the way in which, an (and every) Irish pub has to contain several characteristics to be accepted as an Irish pub, the standardization of cultural accents act to authenticity. In this model cultural accents are explained by choice, uniformity, social activity, and the already mentioned standardization. In the authors' view (2012), cultural accents must be interpreted as practices and statements – in the emblematic sense – of culture, rehearsing such accents by community members provides meaning to a recognizable identification by others. Further, the authors argue that social activity is more than rehearsal, as it coincides with learning processes and shifting normative meaning; sequent, community members have a choice to fulfill their expected emblematic rehearsal chores, but this could lead to conflict between individual norms and community norms. Thus, in the end a member conforms to a degree of choice (commitment, devotion, and feeling) related to agreed normative settings in the community, and this could lead to a cultural constraint which questions these settings and may or not may change the whole group dynamics leading to a possible new emblematic set of rules and requirements of being a good-enough (community) member.

Grudz et al. (2011, p. 1295) state community members "share sociability, support and a sense of identity". Hills (2002) and Williams (2008) contradict the existence of a true fan, being a fan of only one cultural object, as they prefer the term multi-fandoms. Hills (2002, p. 180) refers to (online) multi-fan communities as the "communities of imagination", which outlines an individual can be a fan of several cultural objects. Hills (2002, p. xi) claims "fandom itself 'is an identity which […] performs cultural work". Further, Hills (2002, p. xi) claims status as a fan community similarly performs cultural functions as "to say that something is or is not a community is to perform political work".

Blommaert and Varis' (2012) characteristic 'choice' should be considered in line with Marcuse's (1964) theory: choice is a form of uniformity by a culture or a community. Marcuse believed shared consumption was the foundation of social life of a culture.

In conclusion, claiming being a fan of any cultural object is restricted to a set of normative rules which are constructed by the fan community regarding fan activities and fan behavior, which coincides with respecting the heritage and a meaningful contribution to both the (heritage of) cultural object and its fan community or fandom.

2.4 Towards a conceptual model of the ideal fan

For this study a conceptual model was created regarding how fan communities create norms and values for their members and their Self (see figure 3). The model combines Palme's (2000) theoretical contributions of about group dynamics, of Jenkins (2012) about fan communities, and of Putnam about fan engagement (Putnam, 2011, para. The Fan Engagement Spectrum)[3]. These notions are combined with the theoretical contribution of Blommaert and Varis (2011, 2012) about *enoughness*, cultural accents, and cultural constraint.
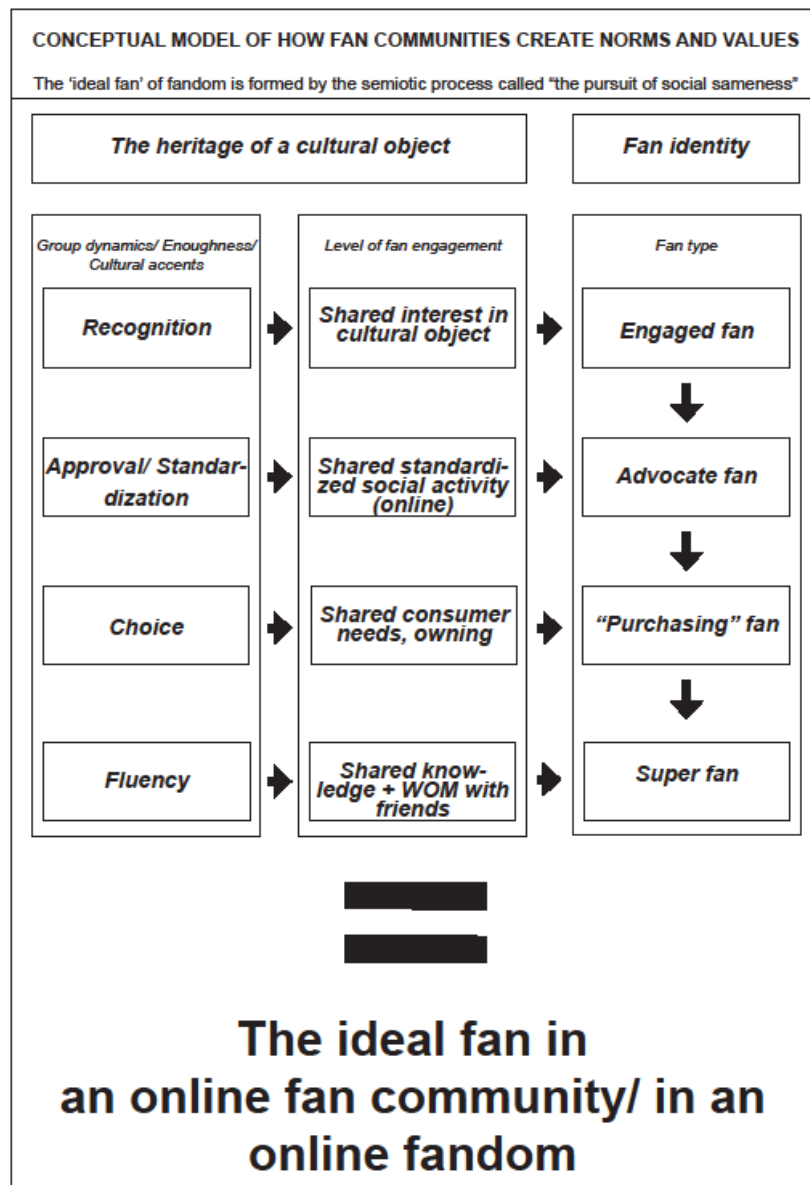

Figure 3. Conceptual model of normative behavior in fan communities

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[3] Retrieved from: http://www.moontoast.com/blog/blog/the-facebook-fan-engagement-spectrum

The model refers to four theories of normative behavior, group dynamics, *enoughness*, cultural accents, and constraint activity. In this model of fan community the emergence of normative behavior of individual members in its community leads to the assumed uniformity of normative behavior of the community as a whole. The arrow reflects this from-left-to-right movement. This means that for example an individual is an engaged fan when he or she identifies his or her personal interests with a cultural object, and recognizes this. The sentence in the model 'the ideal fan of a fandom is formed by the semiotic process called the pursuit of social sameness' is a collection of borrowed ideas of Blommaert (2013) and Hills (2013, first published in 2002). The ideal fan is somebody who masters all levels of fan types. The process of the model has a top-down direction: there is a cultural object which a person likes and in the end becomes the ideal fan. Multiple steps must be met in between. First, the person becomes an engaged fan by not only liking the cultural object, but also by recognizing Self in Others (Leppänen et al., 2013). This means a fan recognizes the same interest among other fans, they share the same interest about a cultural object. Next, fans become advocate fans when they share a (same) opinion about what the cultural object is or means, and what activities should be undertaken by fans. Therefore, the third fan level relates to choice: a fan conforms or conflicts with the standardized set of rules and norms. Purchasing fan in this order should not be considered solely as purchasing in a sense of buying, as it reflects what a fan consumes regarding knowledge, fan activities (behavior), and owning (physical) items such as books and DVD's. In addition, super fans are fan who are 'fluent' in the 'language' spoken within the fandom and among its fan members. What is important in this fan level is that fans talk about their favorite cultural object with others, not exclusively within the fan community. The shared knowledge about the cultural object, and thus heritage, should be 'preached' and spread around so it sticks and stays top-of-mind. Within the borders of this model fans are considered ideal fans when these conditions are met.

2.5 An 'ideal' fan

According to Busse (2013) a good-enough fan knows enough facts about his or her beloved and favorite cultural object, owns enough fan objects such as books and/or (fan) art, and had been a fan long enough. As mentioned, Blommaert (2013) distinguishes between members and full-members. According to Blommaert and Varis (2011, 2012), and this study's model, fans are given a choice whether they incorporate all standard rules into their fan behavior. What makes a fan a full-member, has to do with meaning and with the standardized normative rules. Collective knowledge and the word of mouth (WOM) about the cultural object could be connected to heritage (Jenkins, 2007; Moul, as cited in Dhar & Chang, 2009). Discussing it should be seen as social activity related to its heritage. Owning objects and knowing facts therefore contribute to the (assumed) uniformity within the fan community, the

emblematic representation of the fandom. In line with Etzioni (2004) fans share a common history, that is, all what is written and what is produced.

In conclusion, sharing content in a participatory culture, and its *spreadability* (Jenkins, 2012, 2013), within a fan culture, that originated by shared interest and recognition (Blommaert & Varis 2011, 2012), forms the foundation of the WOM about a cultural object. The theoretical contributions of Jenkins and Blommaert and Varis reflect the direction of this study's exploration to define what characteristics an ideal fan of Game of Thrones should exhibit. As mentioned above, Kietzmann et al.'s (2010) honeycomb of social media is used to describe how fan-membership works within the GoT-fandom. The contribution to third wave fan studies is found in the definition of a good (enough) GoT-fan. Besides that it analyzes fan-interaction between fans and aca-fan, as a contribution to Booth's (2013) identified fourth wave of fan studies.

Chapter 3: Research design

This study examines the use of Tumblr and other Internet websites by fans to understand what role these can play in the normative evolution of an online GOT-fandom. This fandom has a strong presence online, which means that a vast data collection of fan activities and ownership about both the books and the television series are available on the Internet. As explained in chapter 2; Internet is a reference to Tim Berners-Lee' World Wide Web, not to the system behind it.

In line with Castello and Moore (2007) this e-ethnographic study used two hermeneutic methods, namely lurking and email interviews. This study is centered around a research focus and three sub-questions:

What kind of evolving normative behavior regarding identification as a "good" fan is constructed in the GoT-fandom?

What is the role of the Internet regarding the evolution of fan communities?
How do people construct fandom-norms and –values within the online GoT-fandom regarding fan activities?

How do people construct fandom-norms and –values for Self?
How do people construct fandom-norms and –values for Others?
How do people construct inclusion/exclusion within the online GoT-fandom?
How do fans construct a level of fan *enoughness*?

3.1 Justifying online research

According to Costello and Moore (2007, p.128), using a "hermeneutic method, research tools and critical insights" come with a certain 'danger'. The authors imply audience activity within online fan communities lacks certainty about 'getting the complete truth from sources' and the interpretation of data by the researcher. In contrast, Kozinets (2010) notes the presence of advantages of online data harvesting over offline data harvesting regarding more complete website archives than far less complete (offline) field notes of the researcher. In line with Kozinets (2010), Nevitt (2012) implies research on online activities are undertaken to understand the complex online social worlds and its influence on everyday life. According to Nevitt (2012) potential negative effects of online ethnographic research are contradicted by the relevance and benefit of online research. Markham (2004, as cited in Nevitt 2012) states online research must be conducted in order to fully understand the new online social worlds. Further, scholars, such as Baym (2007, 2013), Tulloch and Jenkins (1995), and Fiske (1988), claim a study of Internet-use by fans gives a general idea of uses and gratification by these fans in an online environment apart from the real-world environment. According to Garcia et

al. (2009) the reduced difference between the online and offline worlds refers to merging realities, stating the offline life of a participant is not so different anymore from its online life. This study follows Kozinets' (2010) and Nevitt's (2012) approach to the advantages of online research to understand the complex online everyday life.

According to Jensen (2004) three features (accessibility, availability, and performativity) illustrate the use of Internet. Availability entails a practical issue; whether or not there are physical cables from the central server towards (remote) places, which make it possible to connect to the Internet (accessibility). When there is access to the Internet a user can perform on it. According to Jenkins (2007) participation and interacting by and among fans is no longer bound to the weekend, the emergence and convergence of fan response within real-life is 'faster', meaning television series' episodes can be discussed during and right after it is airing contrary to earlier fan response in the era before Internet-like communication (Guldenphennig, 2011). This implies that respondents can be approached at any time during the week, as the Internet is always available for any fan who has access to it.

3.2 Criteria for selection of (fan) websites and Tumblr-pages
Tumblr is a social media platform founded by David Karp in 2007, and is currently owned by Yahoo! Inc. More specifically, it is a micro-blogging platform and social network website. Users can post every kind of multimedia post (videos, texts, pictures) to their pages and create special 'boards'. Other users can follow these boards, re-post and like published posts from others.

Given that the (online) fandom of George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* book series and HBO's television series *Game of Thrones* intertwine generally, but not completely, this study conducted an Internet search to outline which websites were used by GoT-fans in the period November 2013-January 2014 to discuss what happened in the series and in the novels.

More than 200 Tumblr boards were selected covering GoT-related content, such as fan identification with GoT-characters. This study was conducted in a period of time the television series was not airing on HBO, nor was there any activity by George R.R. Martin related to his *A Song of Ice and Fire* novel series. In other words, Martin did not publish the sixth book of the series during this study. As a research requirement Tumblr boards had to be 'active' at least during the last six months of 2013 and in January and February of 2014 in order to be certain the GoT-fans used them. 251 Tumblr-boards were selected using key term research on Tumblr and the 'similar to'-tool, also described as 'tags' as mentioned in Hillman, Procyk, and Neustaedter (2014). After gathering all the relevant GoT-related boards, a further selection criterion was introduced: all boards had to be active in the last three months to be monitored further.

3.3 Methodology

In this study we relied on two qualitative research methods namely, lurking and email interviews. Lurking was used in order to understand the dynamics of fan activity online regarding the meaning of *enoughness*. Email interviews were used to understand why participants watch *Game of Thrones* and how they gain knowledge about the television series and the novel series, and how they become fans, what they consider a good and a bad fan, alongside what they consider important events of the series.

3.3.1 Lurking

In virtual settlements like social media an e-ethnographer is expected to be acquainted with the social norms and values of the community and its interface (Roberts, Smith, & Pollock, 2004), and to become one with it (Rybas & Gajjala, 2007). In this perspective, e-ethnography means that a group or community is studied by an ethnographer who describes observed norms and values by participating and therefore influencing the groups culture (Mackay, 2005); only online an e-ethnographer can be unnoticed while participating being a "fly on the wall" (Sveningsson, 2004). This concept is described as lurking (inter alia, Sveningsson, 2004).

In this study we distinguish between lurking and participation observation: while lurking entails monitoring a group on the Internet without any interference of the researcher, participant observation indicated monitoring a group on the Internet with (some) active participation on the part of the observer. This study availed itself of techniques of lurking as a method.

Lurking is a method that can only be implemented in the online environment, in that it takes advantage the "invisibility" afforded by the medium. As a lurker the researcher embarks in a complete new type of e-ethnography, which is best described as the unseen "fly on the wall" (Sveningsson, 2004). In e-ethnography a researcher has the opportunity to be unseen and can monitor online behavior in its purest form, in the sense that the online behavior of the observed group is not influenced or affected by the presence of the researcher. The method also allows the researcher to overcome time boundaries because of the automatically stored archives of websites, which provide "a near complete record of online social interactions […] far easier than the surreptitiously recorded field notes and fragmented recollections of the in-person ethnographer" (Kozinets, 2010, p. 72 as cited in Nevitt, 2012).

As for informed consent, a lurker has to approach the research's subjects after harvesting data and arranging his or her data collection. Informed consent stems from guidelines and ethical documents that protect the wellbeing of human participants (see Buchanan, 2004; Grimes, Fleischman, & Jaeger 2009; Sveningsson, 2004; and The American Psychological Association, 2002). According to boyd and Marwick (2011), their

data identified that participants "share information about themselves […] because they gain something from being visible". Kleinman (2004, as cited in Nevitt, 2012) argues that publicly accessible data needs no consent, while it would affect research findings. According to Bakardjieva and Feenberg (2000, pp. 7-10), "alienation" occurs when a researcher analyzes ethnographic data out of its context and alters its intended meaning (see Nevitt, 2012), in regards to neglect of confidentiality, privacy rights and the loss of self. Markham (as cited in Nevitt, 2012) points out that the online world is as real for individuals as the offline world; daily interaction with others contributes to a certain degree of recognition and identification with others.

3.3.2 Email-interviews

Participant observation is "the most common component of [ethnography], but interviews, conversational and discourse analysis, documentary analysis, film and photography all have their place in the ethnographer's repertoire" (Kozinets 2010, p. 59). According to Pullen (2006), fan interaction originates from their love for a particular text. Kaets (2009) describes three types of narrative texts; spoken (conversations), written (books), and visual texts (videotapes). In addition, online language is described as a fourth medium of speech after writing, speaking and singing by Crystal (2000, as cited in Thurlow, Engel, & Tomic 2004). According to Schneider and Passant (2013), researchers collect basic information about their data with the following so-called five W's-questions: who, to whom, for what reason, when and how (language). We argue that this study

In January and February 2014 Facebook-acquaintances of the researcher were approached to participate in an email-interview. The researcher's relationship with the approached participants was very formal and only exists online and contains highly accidental offline meetings. The Facebook-participants were approached via one fan that willingly approached three fans via direct messaging who were unknown to the researcher. A total of 22 fans gave their informed consent. The email exchange series started in February 2014 and ended in March 2014.

This text was shown online in January and February 2014 on the researcher's personal Tumblr board:

> Hi guys, I am a huge Game of Thrones fan like all of you are. I am even writing my master thesis about it. For this I could use some help of the fans in the form of an email-interview. If you are willing to participate please send me your e-mail via a DM. I will send you my questions by e-mail. Your privacy will be accepted, so your name will not be published or linked to your answers.
> Hope to hear from you soon!
> Tim

Tumblr-boards are referred to as blogs. Each blog that was found after a search on Tumblr regarding "Game of Thrones" was followed. This meant 251 blogs were monitored for five months (November 2013 – February 2014). In the last week of February 2014 a direct message (DM) was sent to every fourth blog of followed blogs:

> Hi (name blog),
> My name is Tim Staps and I am a student of Tilburg University, The Netherlands. For my master thesis I am conducting an ethnographic research on Tumblr's Game of Thrones fan community. During the last five months I've been monitoring Tumblr-blogs regarding posts about Game of Thrones (GoT). The aim of my research is to understand the dynamics of online fandoms regarding meaning and rules within an online community.
>
> I believe you are a perfect candidate and could help me understand what is encompasses to be a GoT-fan!
>
> That is why I would like to ask you to participate in my research. In a series of six emails from me to you I will ask you questions about you as a fan and about other GoT-fans. I strive for a three-day response time, which means you answer within three days after I have sent my question-email.
>
> Please send me your email-address and a link to your Tumblr-page to gameofthronesinterviews@gmail.com or just send me your email-address via a DM If you like to participate.
>
> Best regards,
> Tim

Part I: Shared interest in cultural object

A relationship of trust is not gained easily in online interviewing due to the lack of face-to-face interaction (Kivits, 2005). This research followed the example set in Kivits' online research. Kivits started building a trust relationship writing personal information about her, and that is what we did as well. The first part of the email interview is used to gain trust. Replies to the first email indicated a level of goodwill and honor of our respondents regarding their participation in this study[4]. After sending them an invitation-email one participant sent a reply email with a meme containing the words 'knowledge is power', which refers to a scene in the television series. The next email was used to gain trust and became the icebreaker questions (Kivits, 2005) and was sent to Tumblr informants and well as to Facebook informants:

> Dear (name),
>
> I greatly appreciate your intention to participate in my master thesis research about the characteristics of the online fandom of Game of Thrones (GoT). Welcome! The email exchange I hope you're signing up for will consist of a series of six emails from me to you, wherein I will ask you questions about you as a fan and about other GoT-fans. I strive for a three-day response time, which means you answer within three days after I have sent my question-email. Three of the six emails are questions and the other three are emails with

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[4] See Appendix 2: Theoretical contribution to e-ethnography.

follow up questions (questions – follow up questions x 3). This email contains the first question.

But before we begin, let me introduce myself to you. My name is Tim. I'm Dutch, 29 years old and I live in Tilburg; the sixth city of the Netherlands. I am in a relationship with a lovely lady. For fun I love to read (high) fantasy novels and watch series like Game of Thrones and Star Trek. Some of my favorite writers are JRR Tolkien, Robert Jordan, and of course George RR Martin. My personal favorite scene from the television series GoT is the scene where Tyrion slaps Joffrey in the face.

The first questions are in order to get to know *you.*
1. Tell me a little about yourself and your interests.
2. What defines you as a Game of Thrones fan?

Please reply within three days to be part of my research about the exciting fandom of Game of Thrones!
Your reply will be considered as your agreement of informed consent. If you are under 18 please make sure your parents agree that you participate in this research. Your answers will be kept anonymous.

Knowledge is power,
Tim

After receiving responses of my 14 respondents I was able to understand which events influenced them to become a fan among other things. They all received an individual follow-up email.

Part II: Shared standardized social activity
The second part of the email-interview focuses on the online activity of fans within the GoT-fandom. The follow up questions concerned questions about the number of posts, inclusion and exclusion. The second question-email was sent to all informants:

Dear (name),

Knowledge is power!
You have already helped me tremendously to understand what it means for you to be GoT-fan. The second part of our email-interview concerns the online activity of you and other fans. These are the next two questions:

1. How would you describe your fan activity and what rules do you follow when (re-)posting?
2. Do you think Internet changed the fandom culture?
3. When do you consider someone a good-enough fan or 'not-a-fan' at all?

Looking forward to hear from you! (Please reply within three days!)

Power is power,
Tim

Part III: Shared consumer needs and knowledge

The third part concerned the online community and the fluency of GoT-fans. The fluency of fans is another form of the inclusion/exclusion question and regards the intensification the online fandom.

> Dear (name),
> Knowledge is power!
> In the last email-exchanges you have told me what it means to be a fan. It gave me insider information of you as a fan and about you as a judge towards other fans. In this email I would like to ask you to answer two questions:
>
> 1. How do you interact and/or communicate with other GoT fans?
> 2. How do you prepare for the upcoming season four of Game of Thrones on HBO?
>
> Looking forward to hear from you! (Please reply within three days!)
> Power is power,
> Tim

After receiving the follow up reply-email all informants received an email thanking them for their corporation and were asked how they wanted to be referred to in the final product of this study:

> Dear (name),
>
> Knowledge is power!
> I would like to thank you for your corporation and thorough responses on all questions I have asked in the last weeks. Your information helped a lot in my quest to understand what it means to be a GoT-fan in the online GoT-fandom. For me it was great fun to read your answers. If you have any questions about my research please feel free to ask them. The only question I still want to ask is how you want to be called in my study: real name or pseudonym?
>
> Power is power,
> Tim

3.3.3 Coding

The interview was divided in three parts. Part one focuses on the shared interest in the cultural object (Game of Thrones). Part two focuses on the shared social activity and high lightens standardization and inclusion/exclusion. Part three focuses on shared consumer needs and knowledge. The questions were divided in three parts using the blocks of figure 4:

Part I: Shared interest in cultural object:
Becoming a fan/ Fan identification
Events
Favorite books/ TV shows/ genre

Part II: Shared standardized social activity:
Online fan activities
Time spent online on fan activities
Inclusion/exclusion

Fan fiction
Role of the Internet
Role of author

Part III: Shared consumer needs and knowledge:
Community
Intensification of fandom online
Fluency
Sources + Skills

Bach (2009) successfully used codes regarding fan activities, skills and the role of the Internet to identify fan engagement. The subjects are connected to features of this study's conceptual model regarding *enoughness.* These notions and concepts were coded as shown in figure 5.

Group dynamics	Level of fan engagement
Recognition	Shared interest in cultural object
Becoming a fan Events Multi-fandom	Fan identification
Approval / Standardization	Shared standardized social activity
Community Favorite books /TV shows /genre	Online fan activities Fan fiction Role of the Internet Role of author
Choice	Shared consumer needs, owning
Intensification of fandom online Inclusion /exclusion	Time spent online on fan activities
Fluency	Shared knowledge + WOM with friends
(Combination of all features)	Sources Skills

Figure 4. Interview guide.

Further, this study harmonized it with theories of Blommaert and Varis (2011, 2012), Jenkins (2012), Busse (2013), Palme (2000), Marwick and boyd (2010), Kozinets (2001), Grudz et al. (2011), and Putnam (2011). Following Blommaert and Varis this study used the whole notion of *enoughness* and cultural accents, meaning recognition, approval, choice, social activity, standardization, and fluency were incorporated in the email questions and were coded as such. Jenkins' (2012) notion of *sense of belonging* and *spreadability* were coded by comradeship (also seen in Palme, 2000), social activity, shared knowledge, creation of fan fiction and art, and (re)watching/(re)reading. Codes concerning the change in values in real life due to the cultural object (Marwick & boyd, 2010; Kozinets, 2001) coincide with the intensification of activities, thus choice, of Blommaert & Varis (2011, 2012). Grudz et al.'s (2011) and Putnam's (2011) fan levels were coded; they relate to a sense of identity and a in which a fan is treated as a consumer.

CODE BOOK				
Theory			**Data**	
Article	*#*	*Characteristics*	*Behavior description*	*Code*
Jenkins (2012)	1	Watch / re-watch (also reading)	Cultural object is read/watched more than once	J1
	2	Create fan-fiction	Fan creates new texts about the cultural object	J2
	3	Shared knowledge	Share facts/knowledge	J3
	4	Spreadability	Word of mouth	
Blommaert &Varis (2011, 2012)	5	Fluency (regarding authenticity and approval)	Fan is able to mimic the language of cultural object and community	BV1
	6	Standardization (regarding uniformity)	Fans have developed communication standards, a part of the fandom values.	BV2
	6.1	Choice I (conform)	Fan makes the choice to conform his/her behavior to fandom values.	BV3
	6.2	Choice II (conflict)	Fan's values conflict too much with the values of the fandom	BV4
Jenkins + Blommaert & Varis	7	Social activity	Fans are active online, activities: liking, posting, and commenting	JBV1
	8	Sense of belonging + Recognition (regarding heritage)	Fans recognize their own values and interests in other fans	JBV2
Busse (2013)	9	Owning items of cultural object	Possesses an item	B1
Jenkins + Palme (2000)	10	Comradeship in created community	Fans organize an online group/community	JP1
Marwick & boyd (2010) + Kozinets (2001)	11	Change in values due to cultural object	The affect of the cultural object on fan's daily lives.	MbK1
Grudz et al. (2011) + Putnam (2011)	12	Sense of identity: Engaged fan	1+9	GP1
	12	Sense of identity: Advocate fan	(1+9)+5+8	GP2
	14	Sense of identity: Purchasing fan	(1+9+5+8)+6/7+10-13	GP3
	15	Sense of identity: Superfan	(1,5-13)+2+3+4	GP4

Figure 5. Code book for lurking regarding *enoughness*

3.3.4 Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis with NVivo

Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) is often referred to as a tool for qualitative data research (Johnston, 2006). This study used NVivo for Mac beta, which enables its users to work with documents of any sort. NVivo for Mac beta was released in March 2014 with an open source license.

The key feature used for this study is simple coding of 14 Word-documents with nodes, often referred to as codes. As seen in figure 6 (left) a document with data of respondent Sophie is highlighted when coded and is accompanied by line coding.
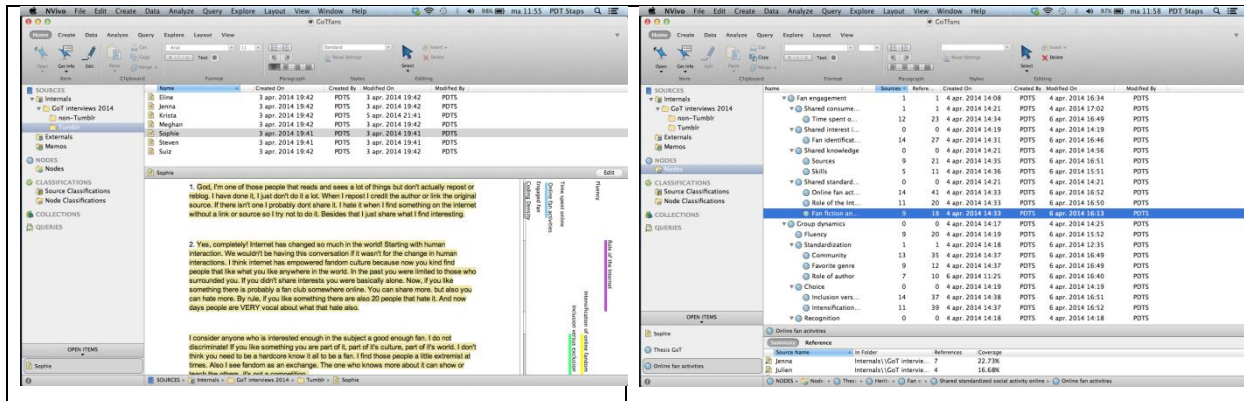
Figure 6. Screenshots of email-interview data using NVivo for Mac beta (left and right)

After completing coding all 14 sources NVivo for Mac beta enables its users to understand which nodes are coded most frequent, thus have most references, as it enables its user to understand which node is in which of sources via its 'summary' feature (as seen in figure 6, right).
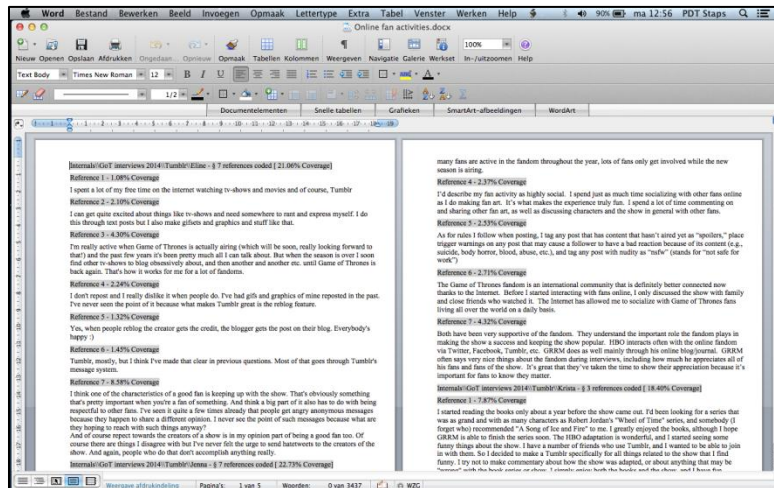
Figure 7. Screenshot automatically created Word-document from NVivo for Mac beta

Another feature of NVivo or Mac beta which was used is the 'export' feature. NVivo or Mac beta enables its user to automatically create new Word-documents containing all references regarding a certain node.

3.4 Respondents

The respondents (N=14, 7 Female, 7 Male) are from six countries: United States of America, Russian Federation, the Netherlands, Ecuador, and France. All respondents are above 18 years of age, with the average age of 26 years old (N=12).

This group was divided into two parts. First, a group of Tumblr persona's acted as respondents. As mentioned above 221 Tumblr blogs were monitored during the lurking stage of this study. Via a systematic selection of each fourth blog of 256 blogs, 64 blogs were selected and approached with the request becoming a respondent (see Appendix 2: Approached Tumblr blogs). Thirteen Tumblr blogs authors responded, of which seven completed the email-interview. Second, a group of non-Tumblr respondents who are active online on other social media websites were asked to participate. Nine respondents started the email-interview; seven completed the third part of the interview.

All respondents allowed the use of their first name (or pseudonym) as long it is not accompanied by their Tumblr blog avatar or surname.

Chapter 4: The online fan community of Game of Thrones

This study explored fan-behavior within the online GoT-fandom. The online GoT-fandom intertwines with different areas of fandom and the novel series finds its roots in literature. This chapter outlines a short history of high fantasy as a genre in literature. Further, it outlines the history of *A Song of ice and Fire (ASOIAF)*, and *Game of Thrones*. The last section will discuss notions on online fan communities, and the community of practice (CoP) of Game of Thrones.

4.1 Science fiction/ fantasy genre

Science fiction and fantasy are often referred to as one genre. This is wrong as they are in fact two separate genres with links to each other. The main difference between the two is best explained by Brooks Landon (2002, p. xviii), professor in English at the University of Iowa: "fantasy [is] anything unfamiliar [to reality], science fiction tends to make much more sense". According to Gamble & Yates (2008), fantasy[5] is divided in two major types: low and high fantasy. Storylines in low fantasy take place in the primary world (our world), in high fantasy the storyline takes place in an alternative world. Typical high fantasy norms are setting, narrative structure, characters, and language: these include elements such as fantasy worlds and figures (e.g. magical species), (newly) constructed languages (e.g. Dothraki language[6] in *ASOIAF*, often referred to as the new Klingon), and several narratives (Artan, 2013).

Further, Gamble & Yates outline features of high fantasy's alternative worlds. The narrative structure is based on a quest or voyage/return of the (main) hero of the story. Gamble & Yates (2008) distinguish three subtypes of high fantasy. First, a setting where the primary world does not exist. J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of The Rings* (LOTR) and George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* are representative examples of this high fantasy subtype. Second, the secondary/parallel world(s) is entered through a portal from the primary world. C.W. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia* and Lewis Caroll's[7] *Alice (Adventures) in Wonderland* are representative examples of this high fantasy subtype. Third, a distinct world-within-a-world as part of the primary world. J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* novel series and Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson (&the Olympians)* are representative examples of this high fantasy subtype.

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[5] According to Žižek (1991, in Storey, 2006) fantasy is the object of desire.

[6] George R.R. Martin did not create entire language like J.R.R. Tolkien did. Martin has chosen to come up with words for each language. For the release of the television series an accelerated development of the Dothraki language was undertaken. Other 'languages' of *ASOIAF* are: Old Tongue, Common Tongue (also referred to as Andal), High Valyrian, Low Valyrian (also refered to as Bastard Valyrian), Ghiscari, Language of Asshai, Lhazareen, Summer Tongue, The Trade Tongue, Other Languages (also referred to as Skroth), and True Tongue.

[7] A pseudonym for Charles Lutwidge Dodgson.

Game of Thrones is part of a long list of (high) fantasy television series and movies[8]. The impact of movies of Lord of the Rings, Harry Potter, and The Chronicles of Narnia resulted in an increased popularity of the fantasy genre (Kain, 2011, para. 5). Kain (2011, para. 5) identified the fantasy genre as mainstream pop culture media[9].

Busse (2013) concluded casual "viewers-turned-fans" watch and re-watch their favorite television series, talk about them, visit the community website and make contributions, and purchase related products. This enumeration reflects Blommaerts and Varis' enoughness.

Morgan, Shanahan, and Signorielli (2009) describe the status of television as society's primary storyteller, what "makes it the fundamental manifestation of the mainstream of our culture" (p. 41), and approach the possibilities of television in the Internet Era. They argue that the Internet is both a (new) source of information as a new possibility for dominant media corporations. Thus, Internet and television reinforce each other.

4.1.1 History of A Song of Ice and Fire

George R.R. Martin (Bayonne (NJ), September 20, 1948) is an American author of high fantasy (also referred as epic fantasy). He is the author of the novel series A Song of Ice and Fire and co-producer of HBO's[10] adaptive television series Game of Thrones. As a boy he sold short stories to other kids, was an admirer of J.R.R. Tolkien and an active comic book fan[11], but had critical notes about the storylines of the lifelines of the heroes. He wrote his first published stories in the 1970s and worked as a screenplay writer in the late 1980s until the early 1990s. Martin called his imagination the main reason his screenplays 'backfired'; reduced budgets could not enhance his imagination.

In several interviews Martin claimed he always wanted to write a high fantasy story after reading Tolkien's Lord of the Rings[12]. In retrospective he did not have any idea of the story that would become the ASOIAF-novel series. The plot of ASOIAF occurred to Martin's

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[8] See Appendix 3: Fantasy television series and movies.

[9] Jensen (2004) identified three degrees of (popular) media. Jensen's degrees illustrate biological and sociological characters such as verbal language and speech, the media of technical reproduction (also referred to by Emmanuel Kant), such as printed books, music records and television, and the shift of print towards electronic media such as personal computers, smart-phones and the Internet.

[10] HBO (Home Box Office) is an American television network, owned by Home Box Office Inc. (Time Warner) and was founded in 1972. It airs television series such as Game of Thrones, Boardwalk Empire and Deadwood.

[11] George R.R. Martin is a self-acclaimed Tolkien and Marvel-comic fan. Besides being a fan he also doubted the narrative storyline of both Tolkien's Lord of the Rings and Marvel Books' comic issues Fantastic Four #32 and Avengers #9. In an interview about his appreciation for Tolkien he admitted he felt Tolkien cheated by not killing Frodo and Gandalf. In a fan letter directed to Marvel, to Stan Lee and author Don Heck, Martin suggests a dismissal of characters (see Appendix 4: Letter from George R.R. Martin to Marvel Comics).

[12] J.R.R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings was not always a trilogy. Originally it consisted out of six books. Revised editions by Tolkien led to the trilogy we know now.

imagination with the idea of finding dire wolf pups and their dead parents[13]. The pups are given to every Stark sibling and Jon Snow. The first chapter of the *Songs of Ice and Fire* first book *Game of Thrones* was written by Martin when he was still working as a screenplay writer in 1991. Martin first *ASOIAF*-book was published in 1996. It received the Locus Award (1997) and Ignotus Award (2003) for Best Novel. The second book of the series, *A Clash of Kings* (1998), won the same awards in 1998 and 2004. The third book, *A Storm of Swords* (2000), won the awards in 2001 and 2006. The fourth book, *A Feast for Crows* (2005), was nominated for the Locus Award in 2006 but not win. The fifth book, A Dance with Dragons (2011), was nominated in 2012 but did not win the Locus Award. Book six, *The Winds of Winter*, and seven, *A Dream of Spring*, are forthcoming.

4.1.2 History of *Game of Thrones*

In 2010 HBO announced a new series based on George R.R. Martin's *ASOIAF*-series[14]. HBO's marketed the series through an online game called *Maester's Path Game*. The game consisted out of five puzzles fans could solve with hidden clues on the GoT Facebook-page. After solving each puzzle a brief insight was given about the announced television series (Kellie, 2012, para. 7).

The HBO-series was named *Game of Thrones* (GoT) and consisted in an adapted version of the first book in the novel series. During the first season HBO announced the second and third series. The second series was an adapted version based on *A Clash of Kings*. The third series was an adapted version of the first half of *A Storm of Swords*. The first episode of the fourth series is planned for April 2014. David Benioff, D.B. Weiss, Vanessa Taylor, Bryan Cogman, Jane Espenson, and George R.R. Martin wrote the adapted version of the ASOIAF novel-series. The storyline of the television series shows close resemblance to the original work of the novel series but shows differences as well, such as the major presence of a character in the novel series and its minor presence in the television series[15]. Unlike Tolkien's adapted filmic visual representation of *Lord of the Rings* (2001, 2002, 2003) and *The Hobbit* (2011, 2013, and forthcoming), the author of the books is present at the film set and fulfills an active role in the visualizations of his imagination. Similar

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[13] A dire wolf is wolf-species that is extinct. It was the largest giant wolf known in history.

[14] Kellie (2012, para. 1) illustrates statistics from the United States of America (USA) identifying that 19 percent of Americans started watching a TV series. They did so after reading about it on a social (media) network. According to Kellie (2012, para. 4) HBO's *Game of Thrones* is watched by 2.9 million fans and discussed by 158,000 fans, a fan engagement rate of 5.5 percent (*True Blood* has a fan engagement rate of 1.8 percent).

[15] See Appendix 5: Screen time per character per season.

to George R.R. Martin, Marvel Comics author Stan Lee has influence on the filmic representations of his imaginations[16].

4.2 Fan communities and the Internet

In *Community and the Internet* Kendall discusses four descriptions of communities (2011). Ridings & Gefen (2006, as cited in Kendall) argue that a virtual community includes shared interests or goals, a sense of permanence, and some sufficient degree of frequency of interaction. According to Etzioni (2004, as cited in Kendall) a community is based upon two elements: interconnected relationships that are affect-laden, and commitment to a set of shared values, norms, and meaning, and a shared history and identity. Feenberg and Bakardjieva (2004, as cited in Kendall) maintains five attributes of community: identification with symbols and ritual practices, acceptance of common rules, mutual aid, mutual respect, and authentic communication. In line with Feenberg and Bakardjieva, Porter (2004, as cited in Kendall) describes five attributes of community: purpose (content), place (extent of mediation), platform (system design), population interaction structure (pattern of interaction), and profit model.

McMillan and Chavis (1986, in Grudz et al., 2011) assert community members have to feel a certain membership, or the feeling they can influence the community; the community provides an integration and fulfillment of needs, and a shared emotional connection. Grudz et al. (2011, p. 1295) state community members "share sociability, support and a sense of identity".

Within the community its members are taught how to behave properly in moral issues, support desirable behavior both offline and online, and by doing so becoming perfect role models (Baym, 2007; Kozinets, 2001). Marwick & Boyd (2010) conclude the entertainment industry changed societal values and plays a central place into the daily life. Kozinets (2001) refers in this perspective to *Star Trek* that was watched for many years on Wednesday evening (Livingstone, 2003), and provided "perfect role models, exploration of moral issues, […] Western literacy references, […], fan writing and art and music, explorations of erotic desire, community and feelings of communitas and much more" (Kozinets, 2001, p. 73).

Jenkins (2012) outlines five shared characteristics of (all) fan communities: fans watch and re-watch films, create a meta-text of their subject of interest, are active consumers, create fan fiction and or art, and create an alternative social community. Thus, a member of a community needs approval of his or her behavior from peers within the community, he or she wants to belong to the community, where he or she seeks comradeship (or friendship), and he or she seeks recognition of his or her personal interests,

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[16] Fan opinions differ extensively whether the 'true' story is shown by the movie-house of Walt Disney. The *disneyfication* of the stories forms the main concern of fans.

norms and values (in line with Palme, 2000). Jacob Palme (2000) clearly outlined status and self-esteem, confidence, comradeship, inspiration, and generosity are the reasons individuals use computer mediated communication (CMC). According to Thurlow, Engel & Tomic (2004), a symbolic marker is an indication of self-presentation, self-awareness within a group and how an individual wants to be perceived.

4.3 Community of Practice

According to Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002, p. 5), a community of practice (CoP) is "a group of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis". Wenger et al. (2002) identify three CoP-characteristics: domain, community, and practice. The notion of CoP overlaps with the characteristics of Blommaert and Varis' *enoughness*. Heritage (of an object) should be connected to Wenger's notion of domain. Wenger et al. (2002) identify domain as the area of interest which plays an important role in the emergence of the group identity (also see Baym, 2011). It also overlaps with the definition of community of Jenkins (2012). Wenger (1998, as cited in Corso & Giacoppe 2005, p. 3) identifies community as the "learning social factory, this is a group of individuals who interact, learn together, build relationships" what in return leads to a sense of membership. Wenger et al. (2002 as cited in Corso & Giacobbe 2005, p. 3) describe practice as situated learning, which is defined as the shared repertoire of behavior among members: in their words "this repertory includes the knowledge created and shared in the past and allows for future learning, for trusted relationships and for circulation of explicit and tacit knowledge". This is in line with Jenkins (2012) definition of (online) social activities, and the theory of group dynamics of Palme (2000). According to Wenger et al. (2002) a CoP has a natural cycle of birth, growth and death. Corso & Giacobbe (2005) claim a CoP evolves and shows five stages of community development: potential, bonding, maturing, stewardship and transformation: individuals share a common interest, which leads to a construction of connections and band together into a community. The community grows and reaches maturity and stewardship as it transforms due to a cycle of high and low activity in which (shared) knowledge and practices are key for the development of the community.

4.4 Community of Practice in GoT-fandom

As mentioned above, *Game of Thrones* is a television series created for HBO Network by David Benioff and Daniel B. Weiss, and is an adaptive version of George R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* (ASOIAF) novel series. Book readers, more specifically the ASOIAF-readers were introduced to the storyline much earlier than viewers of HBO's Game of Thrones; the first ASOIAF-novel was released in 1996, the first Game of Thrones episode

was aired in 2011. The second (1998), third (2000), fourth (2005) and fifth (2010) novel were all released before the first television episode. GoT-fans collaborated online on several websites, such as westeros.org that found its existence in 1999. This implies the online GoT-fandom is a transforming community; since it transformed from the early stages of community development after the release of the novel series, towards a stage of transformation initiated by the immense popularity of the television series. This study explored the online community of GoT-fans active on Tumblr, regardless of fans had read the books or only watched the television series. Following Jenkins' (2006, 2012, 2013) notions of 'participatory culture' and *spreadability*, GoT-fans should include reading and watching the books and television series into their set of (online) fan activity chores to considered a fan. Game of Thrones, both referring to the novel series and television series, has an active online fan community on several social media platforms (Hillman, Procyk, & Neustaedter, 2014). The aim of this study is to explore to which extend individual GoT-fans are considered good-enough fans by the GoT-fandom. These so-called *fan-enoughness* of GoT-fans is built upon the notion of *enoughness* of Blommaert and Varis (2011, 2012). This means GoT-fans should follow a set of normative rules to be considered fans. Fans reach a higher fan-level when they add extracurricular chores, such as providing GoT-knowledge to others.

Chapter 5: Results

This chapter outlines the data gained from fourteen e-mail interviews. First, this chapter focuses on the determinants of a fan about his or her level of being a fan. This will be discussed in paragraph 5.1 Self about Self. Also, the building blocks of becoming a fan, fan identification, skills, events, and engaged fan will be further discussed in this paragraph. Second, this chapter focuses on the determinants of a fan about its community members, and what they think must be done as a fan by the standards of its community. This will be set out in paragraph 5.2 Self about Others and 5.3 Others about Self. In addition to that, paragraph 5.2 Self about Others data will be discussed regarding respondent's opinion about what a fan should do to be considered a fan of an online fan community. Building blocks community, fluency, owning, fan fiction/art, online activities, sources, time spent online, intensification of online activities, super fan, advocate fan, role of the Internet, favorite genre, and role of the author will be outlined. Paragraph 5.3, Others about Self, it specifies the same building blocks apart from favorite genre, role of the author, and role of the Internet which are not part of paragraph 5.3.

Figure 5 relates to figure 4 of chapter 3, in which theories about *enoughness* and fandom are combined in order to achieve coherency between the theories of Jenkins (2012) and Blommaert and Varis (2011, 2012), and shows how many times a building block is coded in the data of this study.

Node	Times found in Sources	Number of references	Node	Times found in Sources	Number of references	Node	Times found in Sources	Number of references
Group dynamics			Fan engagement			Fan type		
Recognition			**Shared interest**			**Engaged fan**	12	19
Becoming a fan	11	17	Fan identification	14	27			
Events	8	13						
Approval / standardization			**Shared standardization**			**Advocate fan**	12	25
Community	13	35	Online activities	14	41			
Favorite genre	9	12	Role of the Internet	11	20			
Role of author	7	10	Fan fiction and art	9	18			
Choice			**Shared needs**			**Purchas-ing fan**	3	5
Inclusion versus exclusion	14	37	Time spent online	12	23			
Intensification	11	39						
Fluency	9	20	**Shared knowledge**			**Superfan**	5	8
			Sources	9	21			
			Skills	5	11			

Figure 5. Shows how many times a building block is coded.

5.1 Fans about online and offline

Respondents talk about the role of the Internet. The respondents made it clear what influence they thought the Internet had on the emergence of online fan communities. Also, they briefly described their fan experience offline, in other word in real-life interactions with friends and family.

5.1.1 The role of the Internet

All respondents agreed the Internet changed fan community communication. They claim that the role of the Internet is part of the communication structure of contemporary fan communities. They strive on, and use it as if it's their digital highway for live streaming, worldwide spreadable communication about their favorite cultural object. Jensen's (2010) notion of Internet's accessibility, availability, and performativity are supported by this study. Suiz outlines Internet's availability and accessibility, as illustrated by the following quote:

> Absolutely. Early "nerdy" fandoms were confined to small gatherings and were such a rare sight tofind someone who'd even HEARD of what you liked, leave alone have a passion for it similar to yours. I speak from experience as I read the Lord of the Rings in high school and knew exactly 3 people in my whole high school that had even heard about the books. The Internet now allows you to connect with millions of fans instantly. Fans that are not just passive content consumers either, but content creators: fan art painters, gif makers, tee shirt designers, musicians, voice over actors. They come together to create a fully-fledged community of multi-faceted people in which you can participate or be a spectator of. It truly is an amazing organic structure. (Suiz)

Suiz describes his fan-being of LOTR as something extraordinary and not likely to be widespread at his high school (this was before 1996). In line with Jenkins et al. (2013), the Internet is thus a tool for *spreadability* of WOM about someone's favorite cultural object, and is thus utilized for its accessibility and performativity characteristics (Jensen, 2010), as shown in these quotes:

> I think [the Internet] definitely did because a lot more people have access to be part of the fandom now. First of all because you can watch all the TV-shows you want (whether legally or illegally) and second because it's easy to find other people online who also watch it. And the access to gifs and blogs and all that stuff can just really intensify the experience. (Eline)

> Absolutely. Internet, and social networks especially, give people an easy way to express their views, discuss the show, share sneak peeks, etc. with large numbers of other like-minded individuals. Even the show's directors have said that it's really interesting to have Twitter available, because they get to see live reactions while a new episode is airing. Before the internet, it would not have been possible to get reactions like that from all across the world. (Krista)

> Yes, completely! […] I think [the] Internet has empowered fandom culture because now you [can] find people that like what you like anywhere in the world. In the past you were limited to those who surrounded you. If you didn't share interests you were basically alone. Now, if you like something there is probably a fan club somewhere online. You can share more […]. (Sophie)

> I do believe internet has changed the fandom culture[; now] there are not only word-of-mouth advertising and advertisements on the television, [an individual] who is even a little bit active on social

media probably knows about GoT. […] Thanks to the Internet, one has infinite of things to be a fan of. (Daan)

Eline mentions the accessibility of information and other fans, which is indicated by Jensen's (2010) notion of accessibility of the Internet. Further, Krista and Sophie focus more on the interaction between fans worldwide, which reflects to the notion of WOM (Jenkins, 2007). Krista furthermore focusses on a feature concerning time: fans interact with other fans about a show that is airing or right after it was shown on TV. Daan shortly mentions the influence of social media and WOM. Jenkins' (2013) notion of *spreadability* related to fan activity on social media platform Tumblr is explained by Steven. He explains the importance of social media regarding the change of online fan activities and further utilization of social media websites for fan communication, as follows:

I've lived wholly in the Internet age of fan culture [and] I've observed a number of changes that websites like Tumblr have allowed fans to make in their celebration of fandom. Back then [in 2007], my options for discussing The Office online were three-fold. I could talk with friends about the show on AIM and MSN. I could watch a few clips and a bunch of fan-made music videos on Youtube. I could get news and tons of fan discussion on Officetally.com. Tumblr has become the singular destination for all of those things, plus way more, for every show you watch and every video game you've played and every book series you've read, [and it enables you] to share any content you want with so many people who share your interests. (Steven)

Steven explains the usage of Tumblr as the ideal social media website for the exposure of fan communication on a single platform. Fan news, fan discussions, fan fiction and art, gifs, and (music) videos are nowadays collected on Tumblr. This makes Tumblr an ideal social media website to discover fandoms and fan communications within online fan communities.

5.2.2 GoT-friends in- and outside the fandom

Fan activity, a key feature in Jenkins' (2012) 'participatory culture', is not limited to online discussion between fans; fans discuss fan topics offline as well. Julien, for example, talks both online as offline with friends about ASOIAF and GoT, as follows:

I don't interact much with other GoT fans, I mostly interact with friends of mine who are already fans, on Facebook most of the time. For fans I don't know personally, I read what they post on some forums, but I don't chat or post back on their publications. I go on forums to get information on things that are not clear or to get reminders […]. (Julien)

Fan interaction for Julien is not limited to discussions with fans within the fandom; he also discusses story-elements with friends from his daily life. However, he reads forum posts, yet he does not comment or give feedback on the posts when he does not know the publishing-fan in person. He concludes he uses those posts as a source of information, thus as knowledge.

People I've never met in person but know from Tumblr, I discuss it with them using Tumblr's Fanmail feature. I prefer that to sending Asks because there's no length limit to responses and you can send links that way. A select few of these people I've added on Skype, and very rarely I've talked about Game of Thrones with them through that as well. (Steven)

Contrary to Julien, Steven does discuss story-elements with other fans he does not know in person. 'Not knowing' somebody in person does not restrict Steven to evolve the friendship towards a level of 'personal' interaction via Skype.

A lot of people I know who watch GoT just watch it casually. They enjoy the show and keep up with it but are not as involved with it as some people on Tumblr are. (Eline)

[Online] I am a fan in silence [but] all my close friends know I watch GoT. In my case there is a big difference in behavior on the Internet and in real life, but that difference is always there, not only considering *Game of Thrones*. (Vivian)

Friends and family of Eline, and other respondents, are GoT-fans as well. They enjoy watching the television series and consider themselves fans. Overall we can say that a fan who claims to be a fan, is considered a fan as long he or she keeps up-to-date with the (television) series. This relates to Blommaerts' (2013) sense of commonness in the rehearsal of fan-chorus; fans are not considered fans anymore when they abandon being a fan by the simple act of not watching the (television) series anymore, or don't try to keep up-to-date.

5.2 Self for Self in relation to fandom

The respondents talk about their own identification as GoT-fans. They identified themselves as GoT-fans in different manners, attributing different characteristics. In other words we asked them about what they think they should do to be considered a GoT-fan. The group of respondents is a heterogeneous group, which means that they are not alike. They show some similarities, such as their liking of *Game of Thrones* and A *Song of Ice and Fire*, but this does not make them all fantasy-fans. A majority of respondents is either a student or is a graduated. Most respondents identify themselves with the humanly storyline created by George R.R. Martin,

The data found in this study argue with some degree of certainty about fan identification within the online GoT-fandom. GoT fans do not have a common naming as a fandom, like the Trekkies and Potterheads, but this does not mean they do not organize themselves as an online group. Several examples are briefly discussed in chapters two and five, which were affirmed by the respondents of the interviews as websites they regularly visit.

5.2.1 Respondents' own identification

As mentioned in the methodology chapter, 14 respondents from all over the world collaborated in this e-enquiry. All of 14 respondents claim they are a *Game of Thrones* fan. What follows is an introduction of the respondents' identity, and their fan identity, such as favorite genre and the role of the author.

Via systematic sampling 54 blogs were approached via a direct mail (Tumblr's fan-mail). Eline, Jenna, Krista, Meghan, Sophie, Steven, and Suiz form the group Tumblr-respondents. This sequence will be used to introduce the respondents.

Well, I'm Eline, 20 years old [student]. I spent a lot of my free time on the internet watching tv-shows and movies and of course, Tumblr. […] ASOIAF is the first high fantasy series I've read but I'm definitely open to trying more of its genre. Normally I stick with YA fantasy novels like the Hunger Games or Divergent. I always read in English, even though I am Dutch. My favorite GoT POV character is Sansa and my favorite non-pov is Jorah Mormont. (Eline)

Eline relates her identity first to her current education and her fan-being of Young Adult (YA) fantasy novels. Besides that she refers to *A Song of Ice and Fire* (ASOIAF) as a different fantasy genre, which in fact is part of the fantasy genre. For Eline high fantasy is different compared to YA fantasy. The reference to POV character: POV stands for point of view, a technical definition that entails from which 'eyes' or perspective a story is told. George R.R. Martin uses the POV-structure in his ASOIAF novel series for each chapter. POV-character Sansa (Stark) is the oldest daughter of Neddard and Catelyn Stark, sister of Robb Stark, Jon Snow (bastard son of Neddard Stark), Arya Stark, Bran Stark, and Rickon Stark. Jorah Mormont is a knight from Westeros, son of Jeor Mormont the Lord Commander of Night's Watch (also referred to as crows). Second respondent in line is Jenna:

I'm 25 years old and live in the USA (NC). I'm currently earning an MBA (master's degree in business administration). I like reading fantasy novels and watching TV series. Game of Thrones/ASoIaF is my favorite series of all time. My other hobbies include web design, creating fan-art and blogging. It's very hard to pick a favorite scene from Game of Thrones! Daenerys and Tyrion are my favorite characters so I enjoy their scenes the most. If I have to pick one, though, it is the scene where we get to see the dragons for the first time. (Jenna)

Jenna is a fantasy-fan who both reads fantasy-novels and watches television series within this genre. She uses a different style in referring to ASOIAF, besides referring to an overlap between the television series and the novel series. She finds it difficult to pick a favorite scene. Then we have Krista who states:

I'm 25 years old and I live in Sunnyvale, California, in the United States. I work in the tech industry in Silicon Valley, at an international company […]. My hobbies include archery, fencing, motorcycling, and a lot of reading. I generally read fantasy and sci-fi novels [...]. In fact, I was able to meet Robert Jordan before he passed away and I got my copy of "Knife of Dreams" signed by him. (Krista)

Krista's introduction is more related to her work and hobbies besides her fan-being. But, she admitted to read novels of (almost) all high fantasy authors and has even met Robert Jordan at a book signing. She included a picture of herself, her aunt, and Robert Jordan, to prove she was not joking. Due to privacy issues the picture will not be showed.

My name is Sophie. I am Ecuadorian [and a]ctually I JUST moved to Paris one week ago. I am married to the love of my life […]. I like fantasy quite a lot, but maybe I'm not a big connoisseur of the genre. I'm a fan of Harry Potter; I grew up reading Rowling's books. I also like LOTR, Star Wars, Firefly, The Hunger Games, etc. (Sophie)

Contrary to Eline, Sophie relates to fantasy as a genre including YA, science-fiction, and high fantasy all together. She does make a distinction within the sci-fi/fantasy genre. Sophie was one of two respondents who did not mention her age.

I'm Steve. I'm 21. I go to Virginia Tech and I'm majoring in Communication while looking into Comp[uter] Sci[ence] as a minor. I watch a lot of TV [series] - Game of Thrones, Breaking Bad, Adventure Time, How I Met Your Mother, Parks and Recreation, Community, Supernatural, Doctor Who, Gravity Falls, Modern Family, some anime - and recently I've taken it upon myself to play through the entire Super Mario and Legend of Zelda catalogues. (Steven)

Steven describes in later emails he runs a multi-fandom Tumblr-blog. That explains his reference to why he watches different television series. The mentioned television series do not belong to a specific genre, but there are two main categories: comedy and fantasy. *Game of Thrones*, *Breaking Bad*, *Supernatural*, *Doctor Who*, and *Gravity Fall* belong to fantasy. *Super Mario* and *Legend of Zelda* are video games created by Shigeru Miyamoto (Nintendo) that belong to the fantasy genre. All other series belong to the comedy category.

I'm a 35 year old system engineer […] from Quito, Ecuador, [and currently a master's degree student] in Software Engineering. My interests include video games, drawing and painting and programming. I have about a thousand video game ideas jotted down on my notebook but I've yet to program any of them. (Suiz)

I'm a 27 year old female, and in a relationship for the past 2 years with a wonderful man, with whom I currently live with. I work for a healthcare quality agency and have just begun work on my own master's degree in industrial and organizational psychology. (Meghan)

Suiz and Meghan do not mention any references to fan characteristics when asked to introduce themselves. They identify themselves by age followed by their relationship status for then flagging out their professional identities whether these are at work or whether they mean being students.

Apart from Tumblr, a Facebook-page was monitored and respondents who 'liked' the page were approached to become a respondent. Daan, George, Julien, Lucas, Rita, Vivian, and Yvo form the non-Tumblr group. This sequence will be used to introduce the respondents.

My name is Daan, 22 years old […]. As a child, I've […] read *East of Midnight* a.k.a. *Ten Oosten van Middernacht* by Tanith Lee, after which I definitely discovered that my interests were with the historical/fantasy-themed stories. […] It is a perfect way for me to 'send' myself into a different world and leave this one behind. Just for relaxation and to forget about everything that might bother me here. I really got caught by the *Death Gate Cycle* by Weiss & Hickman, which has a prominent spot in my small room now. At the moment, I'm reading *The Clash of Kings* from the *Song of Ice and Fire*-cycle. (Daan)

Daan is a typical fantasy fan who incorporates fantasy in his daily life with reading and playing video games. He does not prefer a subgenre of fantasy; he embraces all subdivisions of the science-fiction/fantasy genre. *East of Midnight* from Tanith Lee is categorized in the dark fantasy genre. The dark fantasy genre is centralized around a dark element. The story told in *Death Gate Cycle* novel series is more a collaboration between science fiction and time travelling fantasy. This is a not existing fantasy feature in the original fantasy novels of J.R.R. Tolkien. Daan also uses a different reference to ASOIAF; whether he forgot the A or not, Daan prefers to the long form and does not use the abbreviation.

My name is George. I'm Dutch, 28 years old and I live in Rotterdam. I'm single. My interests are watching/making movies and play videogames. (George)

George chooses to be short and to the point in his answers. He responds to the question asked and does not provide more information than needed. He does not identify himself as a fan of anything at this point. In later emails he admitted to be a fan of Marvel and GoT's humanly storyline.

My name is Julien, I'm French, 38 and single. I have developed a huge interest for movies since I was a young boy. And a huge interest for science fiction and fantasy in particular, being a Star Wars fan since 8 (like everybody except those … Trekkies ;-)). As a teenager I start reading Tolkien (like all of it) and most of Stephen King's work before I discover Philip K Dick. That's when I started to understand the true meaning of SF, looking at the world and society with another point of view, asking another type of question, more philosophical […]. (Julien)

Julien identifies himself as a lifetime fan of the science-fiction/fantasy genre. In the introduction text provided from the researcher to the respondents a reference was made to being a fan of Star Trek. Julien responded by claiming he is more a Star Wars fan, and thus not a Trekkie at all. This conversation was succeeded by a follow-up question referring to the utopian perspective of all science-fiction stories. He concludes with his personal interests.

I'm Lucas, 27 years old and a recent MA Asian Studies graduate from Leiden University. I'm Secretary of the Indonesia Nederland Youth Society, an NGO which aims to connect young Dutch and Indonesians to each other and to strengthen bilateral relations between Indonesia and the Netherlands from a youth level. My hobbies include reading, writing, watching my favorite series and movies, and of course, travelling. (Lucas)

Contrary to Julien, Lucas starts with an introduction of his professional life and company he works for, and concludes with his hobbies. He does not tell much about his fan-being when he is asked about his identity.

My name is Rita. I am 23. I live in Moscow. I am working as an Online-projects manager. I adore simple pleasures, sleeping, eating... Coca Cola runs through my veins instead of blood. My body consists of 70% of film. As for my interests, they vary greatly, but mostly they are connected to playing, watching, reading, fangirling over quality stories. Sci-fi, fantasy, or realism it does not matter for me much. They have to be captivating and contain at least one character I would root for. (Rita)

Rita is modest about her simple pleasures in life, but then makes two claims about what she adores: Coca Cola and films. The latter is related to a character she "would root for" which is typical in *fangirling*; a term used to describe extreme excitement over a certain fandom.

My name is Vivian. I am Dutch, 24 years old, I live in Amstelveen and I am in a relationship, [and I am a recent graduate in] Econometrics and Operations Research. I [have] all Game of Thrones books, but I also really like JRR Tolkien and Robert Jordan. Apart from fantasy I also like to read Dutch literature […] and books from authors I like[d] when I was a child (RL Stine, Darren Shane). I collect books and I am very proud of my own 'library'. I also like to watch movies/series, play the piano, go shopping, [and] play board games. (Vivian)

Vivian is proud of being a traveler, a graduate, and a proud owner of a book collection. She is a fan of (high) fantasy and Dutch literature. In later emails she admits she does not own a hard copy of the ASOIAF novel series due to she wants to buy the complete box collection when George R.R. Martin completed the novel series after book seven.

I'm Yvo, I'm a Recording Engineer / Record Producer / Studio Owner. My interests are mainly culture based like music, arts, cuisine and travel. I enjoy all kinds of series and movies, mostly non fantasy/sci-fi though. Some exceptions are *H2G2*, *Galactica*, *Star Trek*, GoT, and *Red Dwarf*. I usually don't go for this sort of thing much. I didn't get caught up in the whole LotR hype for instance. This one caught me firmly in its grip though. I wouldn't call myself a fan although I wouldn't want to miss it either. I enjoy it very much. (Yvo)

Yvo identifies himself by his interests in culture and as a music engineer. He admits he is not a typical science-fiction/fantasy fan, but he did watch at least five movies/series of the genre. Furthermore, he admits GoT is different than LOTR regarding having a grip on him.

5.2.2 Fan dynamics of identification and their fan engagement
In this study becoming a fan is defined as the process of liking a specific cultural object. Fan identification is defined as claiming you are a fan of the cultural object. This is in line with the events that caused a fan to become a fan and its identification as a fan. A fan who became a fan and claims to be a fan is an engaged fan (Putnam, 2011).

46

I've been a fan of Game of Thrones since it premiered in April 2011. However, I didn't really participate in the online fandom until I joined Tumblr in July 2011. Before getting involved with the GoT fandom on Tumblr, I had only interacted with fans offline, mainly close friends and family members who also enjoyed watching the show. […] I spend the majority of my time interacting with fans on Tumblr. There are many ways to participate in the GoT fandom, such as blogging about GoT on Tumblr or some other online platform, writing meta or fan-fiction, creating fan-art, […], buying collectibles and merchandise, and attending events […]. No one is required to participate in any of these activities to be considered a GoT fan, though. [W[hat really makes me a fan is the fact that I love watching the show. Anyone who loves the show is considered a fan. (Jenna)

Jenna is fairly active GoT-fan regarding fan-participation. She admits she interacts with other fans on Tumblr, but does not demand a similar level of fan-participation of other fans. She identifies as a GoT-fan because she loves watching the show, and claims everyone who loves the show is a fan.

I started reading the books only about a year before the show came out; […] somebody [had] recommended "A Song of Ice and Fire" to me. I greatly enjoyed the books, although I hope GRRM is able to finish the series soon. The HBO adaptation is wonderful, and I started seeing some funny things about the show. I have a number of friends who use Tumblr, and I wanted to be able to join in with them. So I decided to make a Tumblr specifically for all things related to the show that I find funny. I try not to make commentary about how the show was adapted, or about anything that may be "wrong" with the book series or show. I simply enjoy both the books and the show, and I have fun celebrating it with funny things. (Krista)

Krista knew the high fantasy genre via another high fantasy novel series before somebody recommended her to start reading George R.R. Martin's (GRRM) ASOIAF. She joined her friends on Tumblr and became an active member of the online GoT fan community. She does not take a stand on the television series adaption of the novel series.

I started watching Game of Thrones the day after it first aired. I'm not particularly sure what exactly about it drew my attention. I hadn't had much experience with the genre beforehand. […] I'd say the moment that hooked me was when I watched *A Golden Crown*, and then *You Win Or You Die*; that series of episodes, […] won me over. I excitedly engaged in fan discussion on the Internet at this point and had both Ned and Drogo's deaths spoiled for me, so. [A]t the expense of losing the element of surprise when watching the show, I read all the books over the course of the next three months so as to not have any more plot elements spoiled. […] At this point, watching Game of Thrones is a communal experience for me because of this, and this community with my friends is what being a Game of Thrones fan means to me. […] My friends can watch the show, using me as resident ~guru~ to remind them of certain plot points […]. (Steven)

Steven defines himself as a GoT-guru. He and Suiz do not like the event of spoilers on the Internet. Steven decided to first read all ASOIAF novels in order to not come across more spoilers in online fan discussions. In the episode *A Golden Crown* the brother of Daenerys, Viserys Targaryen was provided with a golden crown which was melted on his head with melted gold. He obviously died due to the event, which ended with a comment of Daenerys claiming 'fire cannot kill a dragon', suggesting Viserys was no real dragon referring to a main symbol of House Targaryen.

What defines me as a Game of Thrones fan is the interest in the different personalities in the characters, the love for the fantasy world in which it takes place. The fact that I've played the 'Game of Thrones Ascent' game on the internet for quite a while just as some addition to the topic I was reading by then in the book, and (not to forget) the fact that I've traveled 1,5 hours to obtain the three bus-stop-posters for Season 3 of Daenerys, Tyrion and Melisandre. (Daan)

While not being of my favorite genre, GoT hooked me up for the […] characters. Never before had a TV-show featured so many quality kick-ass heroes and actors portraying them on screen. Not one or two, like it usually happens in my case, but literally fingers on my hands won't be enough to count them. […] This aspect of Mr. Martin's work, in my opinion, is what really makes the story to stand out. Not crafty plot twists, but the fates of men and women. It is what makes me tune in into the show every time and heatedly discuss every episode with my friends. (Rita)

Like other respondents of this study, Daan and Rita like the storylines of betrayal and the different personalities in the characters. Knowledge is another characteristic that plays a role in defining oneself as a GoT-fan:

I would say that my defining characteristic as a GoT fan would be my desire to know as much as possible about the storyline - I started watching the series when it first aired, and then immediately went back and read all of the books. I couldn't watch the show without knowing the intricacies and relationships that connect each character. (Meghan)

Meghan's fan-being is reflected by watching the series and reading all books with knowledge. Knowledge about her favorite cultural object is in Meghan's fan-being important, in order to be a good fan or like the favorite cultural object more. Fans also reflect the effect of the entrance of a cultural object in their fan-life in a quote about the importance of how the novels are read after being introduced to the ASOIAF-novel series:

I [am a fan because ASOAIF changed me as a reader]: after having finished reading the 4th book of a Song of Fire and Ice, I read a book out of Raymond E. Feist's Riftwar Cycle, another of my favorite series of books. But reading it right after finishing Martin's 4th book made the book a lot more boring and childish than it actually is. […] When reading another novel […] the villains are more or less easy to recognize and fairly straightforward in a story that has clear good and evil sides, it felt a bit silly actually. (Lucas)

In 2009 a working friend of mine [introduced me to] "A Game Of Thrones", […] and I never could stop reading until George RR Martin stopped feeding me... now I'm waiting for the [W]inds of [W]inter to come. When the TV show started I was anxious and very excited at the same time; […] but what's truly great for me is that the show is completing all the black spot I ha[d] reading the book[s]. […] I'm totally addicted, I want to know what's next and I know Jon is not dead. (Julien)

However, Vivian may have answered the question 'what defines you as a GoT-fan?' in a very typical manner:

I define myself as an (active) Game of Thrones fan, because I can't wait for the new series to start, because I talk about it with my friends (sometimes for hours), because I motive other people to read and watch the series, because I've read all the books and can't wait for the new book. And because of the fact that my boyfriend has a huge poster of Dany above his bed and I don't mind ;). (Vivian)

She does not answer directly what made her become a GoT-fan immediately, but the quote outlines other characteristics. Vivian identifies herself as a GoT-fan because she is committed to the television series (can't wait for the new series to start), talks about her favorite cultural object which refers to spread-ability (as seen in Jenkins, 2006), has read all the books (as seen in Jenkins, 2012), and allows her boyfriend to own a poster of a POV-character of GoT.

5.3 Self about Others

The respondents' fan activity is constructed onto their beliefs regarding what they think they should do as an advocate fan and the normative rules set by the community. The grey area between the fandom rules and their own rules is best illustrated by quotes of Eline, Jenna, Julien, and Krista. Sources of information, e.g. online friendships, are also included in these quotes:

I think one of the characteristics of a good fan is keeping up with the show. That's obviously something that's pretty important when you're a fan of something. And think a big part of it also has to do with being respectful to other fans. (Eline)

Eline indicates a set of characteristics for a good fan, that could be identified as chores of rehearsal (Blommaert, 2013) or as duties (Bahtia, 2000). By doing so she does not exclude anybody who claims to be a fan, which could be identified as a right (Bahtia, 2000). However, she points out a main rule for GoT-fans: a fan should be respectful (to other fans).

My fan activity is most done on social networks. I go to fandom forums essentially to read theories or to get files about characters I can't replace (they're just too much of them to remember) but I never post anything there. What I post on social networks (Facebook, Twitter, SensCritique[17]) is most of the time comments on what I read or watched pics or meme if I find them funny or pertinent, critics or theories I read. I think I do that for two principal reasons, first to exchange views with other fans, and to find who those other fans are in my friend's circle. Second to make publicity about things I like, cause if the number of people who like the same things I like grow, the conversations about them will happen more often and the number of points of views will grow either. […] Well there is one rule I always observe: "No spoilers" or if I do because I have to, I always warn first with simples [spoiler] or [spoiler alert]. (Julien)

In 6.1.2 Jenna already mentioned she socializes a lot with other fans, comments on shares and discusses characters and the show in general. This is in line with the conversation building block of Kietzmann et al. (2011). Another main rule is therefore: fans participate at will and understanding; Jenkins (2012) main duty or chore for fans is that they participate, but participate at their own will and based on their own interpretation. Julien supports this claim and adds another rule: no spoilers.

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[17] SensCritique is the French equivalent of IMDb.

As seen above becoming a fan is not related to a specific favorite genre, some respondents claim they are not a typical fantasy-fan, and that Game of Thrones is one their first introductions to the fantasy genre. The introduction with ASOIAF and GoT is divided by starting to watch the television series and start reading the books. Julien and Krista belong to the respondents who start reading the novel series after somebody recommended the ASOIAF novel series. Other respondents did not read the novel series at all, and started watching the television series without ever having read any chapter of ASOIAF.

5.4 Others about self

Normative rules of Others for Self (Leppänen et al., 2013) are rules of the fan community that are incorporated in the fan behavior of all fans (also see Bahtia, 2000). GoT-fans strive towards mutual communal 'polite behavior' in the GoT-fandom; as described by Bargiela-Chiappini (2003, p. 1466) in the words "what [behavior] is owed to the individual, […] is owed to the group". The normative rules active within the online community of GoT-fans are best illustrated by quotes about fan activity and community rules.

5.3.1 Posting

The simple fan behavior of posting a fan-related message is bound to certain rules. A fan-post cannot be disrespectful towards other fans and lose 'face', due to impoliteness and possibly harmful behavior. Posts are often tagged, an example is given by Jenna:

As for rules I follow when posting, I tag any post that has content that hasn't aired yet as "spoilers," place trigger warnings on any post that may cause a follower to have a bad reaction because of its content (e.g., suicide, body horror, blood, abuse, etc.), and tag any post with nudity as "nsfw" (stands for "not safe for work"). (Jenna)

For posting, I try to come up with funny stuff, like the GoT-themed Valentine's cards. Most of what's on my Tumblr is reposted content, and I always make an attempt to credit the source of where I found it. The only "rules" I follow is that I try to only have funny content that is Game of Thrones related, and that I always try to credit the source if I didn't create it. (Krista)

Jenna explains posting a fan-post is more than just posting content online. A fan has to follow certain rules, such as tagging, point out there could be a spoiler, and could be harmful for other fans. Krista even tries to post 'funny stuff' exclusively.

5.4.1 Reposting and reblogging

Tumblr enables its users to either like a post by clicking on the heart shape or by reblogging the post. Reposting is different than reblogging. When a Tumblr user reposts a blog he or she (unintentionally) creates a new post on his or her own blog. The original creator is thus not credited.

I don't repost and I really dislike it when people do. I've had gifs and graphics of mine reposted in the past. I've never seen the point of it because what makes Tumblr great is the reblog feature. (Eline)

Online, reblogging fan posts is pretty much always good. When I make stuff, I want people to reblog it. Reblogging is good. Reposting, i.e. saving images and posting them on their own blog. I run a multi-fandom blog so I generally try to avoid too much of one type of post in a row, since people who follow me like a ton of different things, with the exception of episode airings. After an episode airs, I'll make gifs of it for as many moments as I want to. Most days I look to publish at most one post per day per fandom. (Steven)

Eline's and Steven's quotes illustrate that they share the believe fans should not repost a post. This means a person contributes a post as if it's his or her own creation, without credentials towards the creator of the original post. Reblogging, sharing a blog with full credentials towards the creator on your own blog, is considered to be more polite.

When I repost I credit the author or link the original source. If there isn't one I probably don't share it. I hate it when I find something on the internet without a link or source so I try not to do it. (Sophie)

The importance of crediting the author is maybe best illustrated by Sophie; she does not repost (share) the content when she cannot find the original source. She has a strong personal dislike of content (on Tumblr) that has no reference to a link or source.

5.4.2 No spoilers please

No spoilers is mentioned multiple times already by several respondents. They do not post any content without making an effort to warn their followers their message may contain a spoiler. That was explained as a rule they made for the fan community, the Others. Besides this variant of the no spoilers rule there is a rule of the community towards possible spoilers.

So, generally speaking, if I've watched an episode the night it aired, and I'm online after that, I won't share any "spoilers"...maybe a generic "whoa!" Or "holy shit!", but if I'm talking in detail about the episode I won't do that till probably the next evening - I feel it's polite, I suppose. Well, I think there's an element of suspense and surprise that comes from reading books or watching the show. It's hugely participatory, so if someone told me exactly how the story/plot line was going to play out, it sort of defeats the purpose of doing it yourself. If you know a basic storyline for a character, that's one thing. It's another entirely if someone tells you how and when the storyline reaches its climax, it deflates it. Or, that's how I view it. (Meghan)

Meghan explicitly does not share any possible content that could contain a spoiler for her followers. She continues by explaining she would only construct her message with vague terms such as "whoa!". What is interesting about her comment is the time frame; she will not talk about an episode in detail until after a certain time period, because she 'feel[s] it's polite'.

Everyone has the right to announce spoilers. Spoil responsibly though...tag, warn or otherwise announce you're about to spoil something before you do. That way you allow the person to CHOOSE whether he wants the story spoiled or not. (Suiz)

Contrary to Meghan, Suiz believes everyone is free to announce spoilers. He means content should be announced with a spoiler-tag when it contains a possible spoiler. He argues a spoiler-tag gives other fans a choice to watch/read the content or not.

[…] I'm afraid to [read a spoiler] since I know there are people around that know more about the story than I do. […] I hate spoilers (I don't even dare to watch the trailers for the next season), that is something I would try not to do for other people. (Daan)

Daan claims he avoids online fan activities because he is afraid to read a spoiler about events of ASOIAF which already happened in parts of the story he did not read yet. And thus he does not watch new trailers of season four. He is very clear he does not want to share any spoilers for other fans either.

Well there is one rule I always observe: "No spoilers" or if I do because I have to, I always warn first with simple [spoiler] or [spoiler alert]. Well I don't even know what kind of rules they can follow, apart from forum rules, like no insult, having a good behavior, trying to write well, no texting language… those rules I follow too (most of the time) but they are not mine or them, they are the forum ones. (Julien)

The no spoilers rule is best summarized and outlined by Julien: warn other fans and be polite to each other. The rules of a forum or website are mentioned, but these rules are also mentioned by other respondents without the reference to 'website rules'.

5.4.3 Spreading the word

A fan could be seen as a street preacher spreading the word of God. Related to ASOIAF the most obvious God is George R.R. Martin (GRRM) as the only creator of the GoT-Bible, in this perspective the *A Song of Ice and Fire* novel series and the *Dunk an Egg* novellas[18]. Spreading knowledge about these novellas and the novel series is accompanied by encouraging other fans to read the books and watch the television series.

I would describe my fan activity as follows: just last week I convinced one of my friends to buy the first book, even though he was not that enthusiastic about the TV-series. I am sure the book itself will change his mind. I am also encouraging my roommate to hurry up reading all the books (he is at book 3 now) so that we can finally discuss who the next major character that is going to die will be. (Lucas)

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[18] *Dunk and Egg* is the prequel trilogy of three, so far, (short) novellas written by GRRM and originates with the story about Ser Duncan the Tall (*The Hegde Knight)* and his squire Egg. The story is set 89 years before the events of ASOIAF. The novellas are known across the respondents and are read as well.

Lucas may not be a typical active GoT-fan online, he is a very active fan offline: he convinces friends to buy a book about a television series the person is not that enthusiastic about and he pushes another friend to pace up his reading in order to discuss the plot of the story. What Lucas does offline other respondents do online: they enthuse other fans to upgrade their fan-being level.

5.4.4 Fluent in the GoT-language

As seen above a fan is bound to a set of normative rules he or she has to adopt in his or her fan activity used in the community of practice of Game of Thrones (CoP-GoT). Whether a fan wants to fully adopt, and thus include these set of normative rules or not is discussed by the respondents of this study as well. Being fluent in a language is referred to as a characteristic of being part of a culture. As said, the respondents of this study gave their opinion on what is important regarding communication within the online GoT fan community; fluency and standardization were mentioned.

Tagging posts is a norm in pretty much every fandom. It's the courteous thing to do and many fans appreciate it because it always them to follow someone without having to worry about seeing certain content. Tagging is important in the Game of Thrones fandom because of the many characters, controversial scenes, pairings, etc. that fans may not want to see. (Eline)

I mainly communicate with GoT fans through the messaging feature on Tumblr and by writing short comments as tags on posts. I only talk with several fans I have known for years via email. I used to tweet other fans but I haven't been active on Twitter in over a year because I get most of my GoT news from Tumblr now. I often answer fans' questions about characters, the ASoIaF books and the show, as well as questions about where to find the latest interviews with the cast, new trailers and other promotional material. I also recommend or promote other GoT-related blogs when asked to. (Eline)

Eline perfectly outlines what fluency means among GoT-fan community members: A full-member is a fan who understands what activities must be undertaken and what set of rules regarding these activities should be considered 'natural behavior'. This is a fan who is polite, does not share spoilers unwarned and/or unnecessarily, is active online in several manners, and, above all, spreads the word.

5.5 The good-enough fan

When asked what this study's respondents consider a good-enough fan within the online fan community of *Game of Thrones* they often replied with answers such as 'we don't judge' and 'everyone is a fan when they say they are a fan'. In other words, GoT-fans do not exclude other fans. The respondents claim that fans are engaged fans when they have enjoyed watching the series (Putnam, 2011), as these quotes illustrate:

My view of being a fan is binary. You're a ~true~ fan of a show if you enjoy having watched it, and you're excited about it. Even if you just caught the pilot episode and no others, and you say "I like Game of Thrones. That was really cool," then that's good enough for me. It's pretty dependent on whether someone says for his or herself whether he or she is a fan of the show. They get to decide. That's how I see it. (Steven)

Yes, I think, that anybody who likes a show is a fan. There can be different categorization- like those who read books, or buy hundreds of dollars' worth of toys and props, but I came to believe, that as long as you follow the show and like it- you are a fan. (Rita)

Personally I don't think there is something like a 'true' fan. [But t]here is definitely a distinction to be made when it comes to how much of a fan a person is. A lot of people I know who watch GoT just watch it casually. They enjoy the show and keep up with it but are not as involved with it as some people on Tumblr are. Watching tv-shows is a hobby for me and my blog is part of that. But for a lot of people it's just a way to pass the time and that's totally fine. (Eline)

Eline admits she does have an opinion about fans who claim to be fans, but in fact are not entitled to a 'full-membership card', a definition first identified by Blommaert (2013). She refers to a distinction of 'how much of a fan a person is'. As said, most respondents stated they did not judge other fans. Jenna's reply explains how she, as a fan, thinks about the commitment of other fans, and which set of normative rules should be met by (almost) all fans. She also refers to discrimination of fans by other fans:

Anyone who loves the show is considered a fan. I believe someone just has to love the show to be a good-enough fan but not everyone feels this way. Some people only consider others to be true Game of Thrones fans if they spend a significant amount of time participating in the fandom, buy merchandise, attend official events, etc. They may consider people who only participate once in a while to not be "real" fans. There are certainly different views of what makes a good-enough fan. Because we have such diverse backgrounds, we see the show in different ways. It is interesting to hear what elements of the show people like and don't like based on their different beliefs, values, etc. Fans also seem to be more willing to express their true feelings about the show online which has led to a lot of heated debates in the fandom. For example, although many fans love the scene of Tyrion slapping Joffrey, there are tons of fans who detest the scene because they consider it to be child abuse. Game of Thrones contains many controversial scenes. Lots of fans use the Internet anonymously to voice their opinions about the show without fear. (Jenna)

Jenna explains she considers anyone a fan who loves the show: An engaged fan is a fan who feels a strong attraction to a cultural object (Putnam, 2011). Furthermore, she explains she is familiar with other fans who discriminate against other fans when they do not "spend a significant amount of time participating" in the perspective of the discriminating fans, in the fandom. She continues with an explanation of differences between fans:

There are some notable differences between fans.
        First, some fans focus only on the show because not every fan has read the A Song of Ice and Fire book series that the show is based on. These fans try to avoid "spoilers" as much as possible. Other fans focus on the books either because they do not watch the show or they prefer them to the TV adaptation. Many fans, such as myself, focus on both the books and show.
        Second, fans can be divided by the Houses of Westeros or be a stan of a certain character or pairing. For instance, some fans only interact with other fans that support the same house. It is not uncommon to see House Lannister fans mainly interact with other Lannister fans. As another example, many Daenerys stans tend to only interact with other Daenerys fans. Similarly, stans of the

Jaime/Cersei pairing often avoid stans of the Jaime/Brienne pairing because it is their least favorite pairing (also known as their "notp[19]"). Although fans can be divided in these ways, lots of fans like many different houses, characters and pairings, so they interact with all sorts of other fans.

       Third, fans differ by their level of participation in the fandom. Many fans participate in the fandom on a daily basis, while other fans participate once per week, once per month, etc. Additionally, even though many fans are active in the fandom throughout the year, lots of fans only get involved while the new season is airing. (Jenna)

Jenna makes a first distinction between fans that have read the ASOIAF novel series and have seen the television series, and fans who have not read the novel series. She believes avoiding spoilers is relevant for fans that have not read the novel series or are not finished reading all existing parts. Jenna explains there is a second distinction between fans, regarding favorite characters. And third, she believes fans differ by their level of fan activity. The latter distinction is supported by Krista:

To me, being a fan simply means that you enjoy the show or books. If someone watches or reads the series but doesn't enjoy it, then I wouldn't consider them a fan. I don't have any other criteria on top of that, although I do recognize that some people are more of a fan than others (i.e. they remember far more specifics, know a lot of background information or history of the houses, etc.). I feel like the level of fandom correlates to the level of activity someone has that goes just beyond reading or watching - this could be on social network sites or with face-to-face conversations with other people. Being a fan also doesn't mean they must discuss their fandom with other people in some way - I think there are fans out there who are more shy and express their fandom in other ways as well (decorating their room a certain way is one example that doesn't require talking to other people.) (Krista)

Someone who is more of a fan spends a lot more time thinking and talking about their fandom, which means that they naturally tend to remember more specifics than people who don't spend as much time thinking about the fandom. However, I don't believe that a "more fan" is required to remember more specifics; since I feel like the level of someone's fandom is based on how much time/effort they use to express their fandom. (Krista)

Krista believes a fan in a higher level of their fan-being has more knowledge on background information. This idea is contradicted by other respondents who claim more knowledge about the novel series does not imply an emblem of 'a better fan' than fans who possess less knowledge about it.

Finally, I don't know that I would ever consider someone not a fan, or a good enough fan...I suppose someone who read the books vs didn't read the books would be able to add more depth to a conversation, and therefore would probably be "more" of a fan, but I think that's about as far as I would qualify it. I don't know if I would say there's a "true" fan...it implies that someone isn't a fan if they're not on the same level as you. I think you can be as involved in a story or show as you choose to be, but there's something to be said for being SO interested in a story that you want to know all the backstories too. (Meghan)

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[19] NOTP is the abbreviation of: NOT True Pairing. Meaning the least favorite combination of characters in a fandom.

Knowledge about the storyline gained by reading the complete ASOIAF novel series is something Meghan considers a tool for "add[ing] more depth to a [fan] conversation". Sophie explains this difference in knowledge as a tool for fan discussion:

I consider anyone who is interested enough in the subject a good enough fan. I do not discriminate! If you like something you are part of it, part of its culture, part of its world. I don't think you need to be a hardcore know-it-all to be a fan. I find those people a little extremist at times. Also I see fandom as an exchange. The one who knows more about it can show or teach the others, it's not a competition. (Sophie)

Knowledge about the storyline is also explained as being eager to know more about your favorite cultural object:

For aSoIaF I think a good enough fan is someone who read the books. You can't be a real fan if you have just watched the show. You can't even know what GoT is 'talking' about if you haven't read it. It's a very good show, one of the best, but you miss just too much if you didn't. But that doesn't make them "not-a-fan" at all. They can be fans of the show. But if you are a true fan, tell me how you can wait a year while everything is written somewhere and you just have to open a book to know what's going to happen? True fans want to know everything, and they want to know now!!! Knowledge is power, isn't it? (Julien)

Julien explains he believes a more enthusiastic fan is eager to know how the story continues. He points towards fans that have only watched the television series until the latest aired episode and do not know more about the future storyline because they do not feel the urge to read the books, or read online fan discussions.

Following chapter 6 discusses above findings in more detail. In short, a good-enough GoT-fan is a fan who participates in the GoT-fandom, watches the television series and keeps up-to-date, and talks about the show with others.

Chapter 6: Overview and discussion

This chapter discusses the research results and provides recommendations for future research. First, the overview outlines the research questions. Second, the discussion outlines the sections used in chapter 5: fans about online and offline, Self for Self in relation to fandom, Self about Others, Others about Self, and the good-enough fan. Third, the discussion outlines the identity of the GoT-fan, the GoT-CoP, and the fluency of the ideal GoT-fan. Finally, recommendations are given for future research in the field of fan studies.

6.1 Overview

This study explored the evolving emergence of normative behavior of fans within the online fandom of *Game of Thrones*, concerning the notion of Blommaert and Varis (2011, 2012) on *enoughness* and Jenkins' (2012, 2013) notions on participatory culture and *spreadability*. This study contributes to third and fourth wave fan studies, as it explored what the favorite cultural object means for the fans, what role it has in a daily life, and initiated dialogues with the fans. What follows is a summary of:

> *What kind of evolving normative behavior regarding identification as a "good" fan is constructed in the GoT-fandom? (1)*
> *How do fans construct a level of fan enoughness? (4)*

In short, fans construct fan activities that relate to a set of normative rules. In line with Jenkins' (1992) sense of belonging regarding the cultural object is met by feelings of liking and recognition (Blommaert & Varis, 2012) of shared interests. Further, choice is important for GoT-fans regarding the set of standardized rules incorporated into their fan-being. In other words, they choose which standardized rules they follow and accept these at their own will and interpretation of a good-enough fan. More specifically, GoT-fans do not exclude other fans who claim to be a fan, but they do distinguish between levels of *fan enoughness*, which are identified by this study as *levels of fan-being*. In conclusion, there is a form of hierarchy between GoT-fans and within the GoT-fan community. *Fan enoughness* is constructed by the repetition of chores and duties (Blommaert, 2013; Bahtia, 2000).

> *What is the role of the Internet regarding the evolution of fan communities? (2)*
> *How do people construct fandom-norms and –values within the online GoT-fandom regarding fan activities? (3)*
> > *How do people construct fandom-norms and –values for Self?*
> > *How do people construct fandom-norms and –values for Others?*
> > *How do people construct inclusion/exclusion within the online GoT-fandom?*

GoT-fans construct fandom-norms and –values based on fan experience. An important norm within the GoT-fan community concerns 'no spoilers'. The spoiler-alert is a well-known and respected tag on online websites such as Tumblr. Tagging online content became a norm within the online GoT-fan community. The idea behind tagging messages originates from not ruining the *fan experience* of a fan that is not aware of all the events happening in 'future' storylines, whether in the *ASOIAF*-novel series or in the latest *GoT*-television episode. Among the respondents of this study there was not a single respondent who claimed Others should be aware of all the events of the novel series, and 'own' all GoT-knowledge, to be called a GoT-fan. During the lurking stage of this study there were some individuals who claimed GoT-spoilers did not exist due to the fact the ASOAIF-novel series were written a long time ago, and that thus every fan should have GoT-knowledge. This was not supported by the rest of data collection and analysis.

These concluding comments are based on following sections.

6.1.1 Fans about online and offline fandom
GoT-fans do not only discuss GoT-related topics online, they share their thoughts and ideas about GoT offline as well. The respondents are unanimous about the role of the Internet regarding the evolution of online fandom. A typical reply of this study's respondents comes from Eline who includes access, word of mouth (WOM), and intensification.

Overall, the respondents, first, describe their fan-being as something special which they want to express worldwide. They acknowledge the Internet supports them the opportunity to interact with other fans on a worldwide level, without any time or location boundaries. In line with Jenkins (2013), they state the Internet is a useful tool for *spreadability* of WOM about GoT. Furthermore, the respondents outline Internet's constant accessibility feature (Jensen, 2004), which enables fans to gain knowledge about GoT. Last, they explain the importance of social media website regarding fan-WOM and its evolvement surrounded by the change of fan activities. This study's data supports the claim fans share, comment and discuss everything about a cultural object. Contrary to Jenkins' (1992) notion that fans should always participate in their fan community, the respondents of this study share the idea fans should participate at their own will and understanding.

Offline fan-WOM concerns daily talks with friends and family. Fans share their ideas and thoughts about story-elements and story occurrences of *A Song of Ice and Fire* (ASOIAF) and episodes of *Game of Thrones* (GoT). Some respondents claim they are consulted by friends after or during a GoT-episode, or just in general when a friend is reading a ASOIAF-novel.

6.1.2 Fans about Self and Others

First, this section describes what sub-conclusions are made about *sense of belonging* and *enoughess*. Next, it describes what sub-conclusion are made about normative rules and values by GoT-fans regarding Self and Others. These section outlines identification and fan identity, fan engagement, and normative rules about content sharing and fluency: posting, reposting and re-blogging, no spoilers please, and spreading the word.

Identification and fan identity

The respondents described their identity using their personal characteristics such as (current) education and profession, and their fan-being. Personal characteristics were first described by their current (professional) position in society, with a division between student and professionals. Marital status was only mentioned by few respondents.

Identification as a fan of a cultural object was another part of the identity. A majority of respondents quickly stated they were not only fans of Game of Thrones but were fans of other cultural objects as well. A key feature of fan identity is genre. Respondents of this study claimed Game of Thrones is not exclusively a typical cultural object among (high) fantasy fans; GoT is liked by many other fans, also by individuals who do not fancy the general fantasy genre. Another genre feature is the distinction many fans made between the different sub-genres of fantasy. Science fiction and fantasy are often referred to as one single genre, but this claim is not supported by the respondents of this study. They are more content with a greater division of subgenres within the fantasy genre. Young Adult (YA) is not by any chance considered high fantasy for example. This finding supports Sjöberg's (2002) figure in which he claims fans want to less or more geeky than other fans. It outlines why this division of fan-being is needed to show how fans label their Self and what labels they give others regarding the overall general fan-being that transcends individual fandoms and are thus more related to *multi-fandomism*. The data of this study support that *multi-fandomism*, other than *fandomism*, is a notion that describes fan activities of an individual fan active within multiple fan communities of different cultural objects.

Such activities include reading novels of different authors and watching television series of all kind of genres. In other words, the GoT-fan who is only a fan of *Game of Thrones* and/or *A Song of Ice and Fire*, and is not a fan of any other cultural object, was not found in this study. Thus, all GoT-fans share their *fan-ness*, fan activities and commitment, with other cultural objects.

The incorporation of fan activities into daily life is illustrated by the respondents of this study. This supports Marwick & boyd (2010) claim the entertainment industry changed societal values in daily life regarding reading novels and watching television episodes, or

consciously avoiding spoilers that might 'ruin' the fan experience. Further, this study's respondents support Marwick & boyd claim regarding playing video games, which became a part of an individual's daily activities. Respondents claim to be active members of the GoT-fan community. They emphasize the level of fan participation is an open-ended normative rule for every single member, so all members decides for themselves what level of fan participation they adopt. In line with Putnam's (2011) notion of an engaged fan the respondents describe themselves as GoT-fans that recognize themselves in Others within the online GoT-fandom. They describe events that introduced them to either A Song of Ice and Fire novel series or Game of Thrones television series of HBO. According to Žižek (2014), an event is everything that can occur regarding daily activities; an Event (in this study referred to as event) is i.e. an intense experience such as falling in love. In other words, it is a life event that shatters ordinary life and should be regarded a life mark. A common event concerning the first introduction to the cultural object of GoT, the collection of *ASOAIF* and *GoT* together, is the recommendation of a (daily) friend or acquaintance to read or watch the novel series or television series.

Content sharing: posting, reposting and re-blogging, and spoilers
According to the respondents of this study, fans follow certain rules regarding posting a new message on Tumblr, and other (social media) websites. This concerns tagging, crediting and finding the original source or creator of a post.

When posting a message on a (social media) website, in particular on Tumblr, all respondents follow a mix of normative rules. According to the respondents a post must be credited if the content is not theirs. In other words, GoT-fans use a self-acclaimed form of 'copyright'. Second, a post should be tagged when it contains explicit content, such as nudity, violence, and sexual harassment. An example of such fan-behavior regarding warning other fans for upcoming explicit content is adding a '#nsfw'-tag, which is the abbreviation of 'not safe for work'. Another use of tags is warning other fans for upcoming spoilers. Warning other fans for content which might be containing content unknown for the website visitor is considered a form of politeness regarding the visitor's fan experience. In addition, a spoiler-tag is therefore used as a tool to warn other fans and provide the choice to see content with a possible spoiler.

According to the respondents of this study reposting and re-blogging are not considered the same as posting an already existing post; reposting is posting an already existing post without naming the original source and/or creator of that post, re-blogging is sharing an already existing post with indicating the original source and/or creator of that post. The respondents emphasize reposting is not polite and should be avoided at all times. A

suggestion towards the original source should be made and if this is not possible a fan should avoid posting the new blog-post.

Fluency: spreadability and WOM

As mentioned earlier, GoT-fans convince other fans to read or watch *A Song of Ice and Fire* and *Game of Thrones.* Spreading word of mouth (WOM) about the cultural heritage of GoT was found in the data of this study in a twofold manner: either fans were introduced to the GoT-heritage or they introduce others to GoT. Encouragement of other fans to read the novel series or watch the latest episode is a common feature regarding *spreadability*. Therefore, an event such as Lucas convincing his friend to start reading the novel series, relates to Jenkins' *spreadability* of fan-content, but also to WOM about the cultural object and 'stickiness' of GoT-knowledge (Gladwell, as cited in Jenkins, 2013).

6.1.3 Level of enoughness regarding fan-being

The respondents of this study emphasized they do not exclude Others from their fan community; individuals who claim to like GoT are considered fans. Although they do not exclude, they support the notion of a *level of enoughness regarding fan-being*. Contrary, this study is not focused on a new fan typology (Palme, 2000) as it is its aim to explore the evolving emergence of normative behavior of fans within the online fandom of *Game of Thrones.* In addition, the respondents argue differences between GoT-fans exist. They claim there are *levels of fan-being* among the fans of the GoT-fan community.

The respondents claim that there is no true GoT-fan. In other words, the ideal fan does not exist. This notion is supported by all respondents: the will and understanding of fan participation is related to individual interpretation. Rather, a good-enough GoT-fan is an individual who is an active member of the GoT-fan community and respects the normative rules of the fandom. However, according to the respondents there is a little gap within the acceptance of all individuals as fans and the consideration of granting everybody a 'full-membership card'.

Data of this study support the notion of distinction of 'how much of a fan an individual is' regarding fan commitment and fan activity. First, the respondents claim fan activity concerning reading and watching GoT-related media is a key feature a basic fan should undertake regularly. Further, they claim fans should feel connected and drawn towards to the cultural object i.e. a fan should feel the urge to read all ASOIAF-novels regarding gaining knowledge instead of waiting for the television series to show new events. In other words, there is fan-division between fans who have read the ASOIAF-novel series and fans that did not, latter group must be related to the rule of 'no spoilers please'. In addition, the respondents claim GoT-fans of higher level of fan-being have more GoT-knowledge than regular fans. Next, a fan-division between is made regarding favorite characters: a fan of

House Stark of Winterfell would hate a fan of House *Lannister of Casterly Rock* in a figurative sense. According to the respondents of this study, fans of different houses believe they are better than the fans of rival houses. Accordingly this claim is in line with *fandomism*, which is a notion that explains why fans dislike other fan communities. GoT-fans of different houses are therefore labeled as subdivision within the GoT-fan community. Finally, the respondents claim a level of higher fan-being related to fan activity: a fan who is more active is labeled as a fan in a higher level.

6.2 Discussion

This section discusses the theoretical contribution of this study's model, Further, it discusses support to existing theoretical contributions of i.e. Jenkins (1992, 2013) and Blommaert & Varis (2011, 2012). In addition, section 6.2.1 theoretical contribution discusses notions regarding fan-being and fandom. Next, section 6.2.2 fan identity of ideal fan discusses Self and Others notions regarding culture, hierarchy and community, and identity.

6.2.1 Theoretical contribution to fan studies

First, this study contributes to Booth's (2013) fourth wave of fan studies. Fourth wave fan studies explore how fans think about their favorite cultural object and what role it occupies in daily life. Within fourth wave fan studies mutual trust and a constant dialogue between respondent-fans and aca-fan is a key factor that contributes to fruitful data. In other words, scholars in fan studies, aca-fans, transfer the ideas and thoughts of fans into the academic field of fan studies. The fourth wave fan studies uses the foundations of all previous waves, but defines itself by a higher level of interaction between fan and scholar.

Second, a new manner of fan typology is created regarding fan-being. Palme's (2010) theoretical contribution is a typical typology, in line with many other fan-typologies, in which a fan is described as a consumer of a product. Within the border of this study's *good-enough fan* or ideal fan, such fan is described based on Self and Other. Thus, this 'fan-typology' of a good-enough (GoT) fan is not a marketing tool, rather it is a new notion of fan-being. In addition, it built upon Sandvoss' (2005) and Baym's (2007) notions of fandom. According to Sandvoss, and in line with Jenkins (1992, 2013) fandom involves consumption of a cultural object, which is explained by reading of watching and its emotional outcome regarding fan activity. This study supports Sandvoss' and Jenkins' notions about fan activity regarding watching and reading, and participatory culture. Also, this study supports Baym's notion a fan community is a collective of people who share a level of appreciation for a cultural object. Moreover, this study supports Busse's (2013) notion fans can perceive themselves better than other fans, as is also described as *fandomism*. Contrary to *fandomism*, this study claims

the notion of *multi-fandomism*, in which an individual fan is a good-enough fan, for Self and Others, and active in several fan communities of different cultural objects.

Third, this study explains what normative rules and behavior is expected within an online fan community for Self and by Others. In other words, there is an active *set of fandom-rules* in the GoT-fan community, and, according to the respondents of this study, there is an active *set of fandom-rules* in every fan community.

Fourth, this study introduces a new conceptual model of fan-being regarding normative behavior in fan communities and the semiotic process called 'the pursuit of social sameness' is a collection of borrowed ideas of Blommaert (2013), Blommaert and Varis (2011,2012), Hills (2013), Jenkins (1992, 2013), and Palme (2000). This model is explained in previous chapter 2, section 2.4 (pp. 17-19). As said in the explanation of the model in section 2.4, a purchasing fan is not solely a consumer of products. The respondents of this study do think when GoT-fans read the ASOAIF novel series they should own a non-digital copy, but they do not claim all GoT-fans should own a copy. Rather, purchasing fans are fans who choose which fan activities they adopt. In other words, what they put in their *fan-shopping bag*, in a figurative sense referring to a fan-typology of marketing. Regarding Blommaert and Varis' choice GoT-fans support the notion of enoughness' choice, in which (full) members are free to choose if they conform to or conflict with the active *set of fandom-rules*.

6.2.2 Fan identity of ideal fan

Section 6.2.2 discusses the theoretical contribution of this model related to existing notions about culture in fandom, hierarchy in fandom, Community of Practice of GoT and fan-identity of a GoT-fan.

Culture in fandom

According to Williams (1977) the word 'culture' means both 'a whole way of life' (anthropological sense) and the forms of signification (novels, films, television) that circulate within a cultural society. Williams (1961, pp 57-70 in Storey 2006) states that there are three general categories of culture: first, the 'ideal' refers to human perfection as absolute goal, second, the 'documentary' refers to the body of intellectual and imaginative work, in which human thought and experience is recorded, and third, the 'social' refers to the clarification of meaning and values implicit and explicit in a particular culture. Further, Williams argues literature is "the process and the result of formal compositions within the social and formal properties of a language". Williams describes reactions on and about literature as criticism. He defines it as 'commentaries' on literature, and in a minor manner as taste. Williams

concludes that these notions are "forms of a class specialization and control of a general social practice, and of a class limitation of the questions which it might raise" (p.49).

In contrast to Williams (1977), Blommaert and Varis (2011) outline culture as a level of meaning to both verbal and non-verbal communication regarding recognizable identities of community members. They proceed their theoretical contribution with the introduction of the notion of *enoughness*. In addition, Jenkins (2012) explores standardized characteristics of fan communities regarding participatory culture, in other words fan activity. One of the main similarities between Jenkins's notion of participatory culture and Blommaert and Varis' *enoughness* is how they describe a set of rules. They both describe what defines a cultural object as regarding *enoughness*: e.g. Jenkins' fan characteristics differ less from Blommaert and Varis' (2012) cultural accents. Therefore, a full member is something or somebody with full fluency regarding the heritage of the cultural object. Regarding the notion of fan-being, individual are good-enough or ideal fans when they conform themselves to a, partial or complete, *set of fandom-rules.* A lack of fluency as described by the respondents of this study as a level of fan-being, meaning fans adopt too few rules, almost automatically means fans are classified in a lower level of fan-being, but are not excluded as fans. This supports the notion of being fluent within the notion of Blommaert and Varis about 'being fluent' and its predictive indication if members are 'good enough' to be part of the group they participate in. Next, in Jenkins' (1992) notion 'a sense of belonging' fans feel and are part of a fan community. Further, Jenkins (2012) claims sharing a common interest and exchanging ideas means fans can recognize themselves in their (new) peers, approval therefore is met by a normative *set of fandom-rules* within the fan community about desired fan-behavior (Ferreday, 2009). The respondents of this study support both notions of Jenkins (2012) and Ferreday (2009) regarding the online fandom of Game of Thrones on Tumblr. In addition, these notions argue there is a certain level of emotional identification.

The theoretical contribution of Feenberg and Bakardjieva (2004) resembles best what the respondents of this study emphasized regarding the normative *set of fandom-rules* for the online fandom of Game of Thrones on Tumblr. The notion of Feenberg and Bakardjieva (2004) explores five attributes of community: identification with symbols and ritual practices, acceptance of common rules, mutual aid, mutual respect, and authentic communication. Latter attribute, authentic communication, also addressed as authenticity by Blommaert and Varis (2011), is supported by the respondents of this study regarding content sharing and knowledge about the heritage of the cultural object. The respondents claim normative rules concerning posting, reblogging, and no spoilers. Therefore, the explored attributes of accepting common rules and mutuality within the online fan community (Feenberg & Bakardjieva, 2004) are supported, in the sense GoT-fans do not post new blog post without pointing out a source and they use tags that are used are emblematic communication tools

for warning Others for upcoming spoilers and not safe for work (nsfw) content. In line with Blommaert & Varis (2011) and Jenkins (2013), the respondents of this study support the notion social activity is more than rehearsal and *spreadability*: online fan community members make a choice to fulfill their expected emblematic rehearsal chores such as reading the *ASOIAF* novel series and watching episodes of *Game of Thrones*, and interact about it with fan-peers.

Marx & Engels (1970, p.64 in Storey 2006) briefly discuss the idea of the ruling class; this is the upper class of society. In other words, they claim there is a ruling class in society who makes and distributes ideas, and that this class should be considered the intellectual class. Marx & Engels subsequently claim the ruling class is in control of mental production, consciousness, and thinking. Thus, this makes the ruling class the producers of ideas and discourse. In addition, Foucault (1981, in Storey 2006) argues power comes from below, which mean rulers and ruled ones intertwine about the ideas and thus thinking.

In conclusion, Marx & Engels and Foucault claim a certain degree of class and power. This claim is supported by the respondents of this study regarding *levels of fan-being*. Consequently, this study supports the notion of Hills (2002) regarding the existence of a true fan, being a fan of only one cultural object, as they prefer the term multi-fandoms. Hills' (2002, p. 180) notion of "communities of imagination" is supported by the notion of this study about *muli-fandomism*.

Community of Practice and identity in fandom
According to Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) a community of practice (CoP) is an interactive (fan) community with a normative set of rules and shared interest in a cultural object. Hence, the online community of practice of Game of Thrones (CoP-GoT) is best explained by fan community member Jenna:

> The Game of Thrones fandom is an international community that is definitely better connected now thanks to the Internet. Before I started interacting with fans online, I only discussed the show with family and close friends who watched it. The Internet has allowed me to socialize with Game of Thrones fans living all over the world on a daily basis. Because we have such diverse backgrounds, we see the show in different ways. It is interesting to hear what elements of the show people like and don't like based on their different beliefs, values, etc. Fans also seem to be more willing to express their true feelings about the show online which has led to a lot of heated debates in the fandom. For example, although many fans love the scene of Tyrion slapping Joffrey, there are tons of fans who detest the scene because they consider it to be child abuse. Game of Thrones contains many controversial scenes. Lots of fans use the Internet anonymously to voice their opinions about the show without fear. Additionally, the Internet has made it easier to obtain the latest news on the show and its cast members very quickly. Most of the fans I interact with are active on multiple social media networking sites, such as Twitter, Tumblr and Facebook. It doesn't take long for news to spread once fans start sharing the information by tweeting it, posting it on their blogs, etc. I think many fans, including myself, are now aware of the important role we play in promoting the show, too. (Jenna)

In other words, the community of practice of the online Game of Thrones fandom is a well-connected international community that: interacts with fans online and interacts with family and friends offline, on a daily basis, share different opinions about the cultural object, express their true feeling about the television show, fans are active on multiple social media websites, content spreads easy and fast, and fans are aware of their important role in promoting the cultural object. This supports Pullen (2006) who claims fan interaction originates from their love for a particular text. Further, the honeycomb of social media by Kietzamann et al. (2011) can be explained by the community of practice (CoP) of Game of Thrones. First, fan identity of GoT-fans and conversations between GoT-fans are described as claiming to be a fan online and offline regarding to the extent to which users reveal themselves and to the extent users communicate with each other. Further, sharing content within the online GoT-fan community is described by the normative *set of fandom-rules* concerning posting, reblogging and tagging. Next, asynchronous conversations on Tumblr and other social media website explore a timeless presence of GoT-fans regarding to the extent to which users know if others are available. In addition, relationships between fans are built individually within the online GoT-fan community. There is not a certain rule that is followed concerning new friendships. Reputation and group, the last two building block of the honeycomb of Kietzmann et al. (2011) relate to *enoughness* and *levels of fan-being*. This is supported by claims of this study about subdivision within the GoT-fan community and fan participation regarding the rehearsal of fan chorus such as watching (new) episodes of Game of Thrones.

In retrospect, liking a cultural object and claiming a level of fan-being regarding a cultural object in media or literature is first mentioned by i.e. Adorno. According to Adorno (1941, in Storey 2006) listening to popular music is an activity used to escape boredom. Adorno argues objects of culture perform as substitutes for novelty regarding cultural emergence. Raymond Williams (1977) addressed cultural emergence within a society as a threefold process. According to Williams there is something new, not necessarily novel: it does not represent the original novelty anymore, and therefore is reset to its original framework. Using Williams' (1977) theory for *Star Trek: The Original Series* is the novelty, the main *Star Trek* canon[20] until 2009 explored the boundaries of the framework set by *Star Trek: The Original Series* and returned to its original framework in 2009's film *Stark Trek* and

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[20] Television series: *The Orginal Series (1967-69), The Animated Series (1973-74), The Next Generation (1987-94), Deep Space Nine (1993-99), Voyager (1995-2001),* and *Enterprise (2001-2005)*. Films: *The Motion Picture (1979), The Wrath of Khan (1982), The Search of Spock (1984), The Voyage Home (1986), The Final Frontier (1989), The Undiscovered Country (1991), Generations (1994), First Contact (1996), Insurrection (1998), Nemisis (2002), Star Trek (2009), Into Darkness (2013),* and a long list of novels and comics.

2013's sequel *Into the Darkness*. Contrary to Star Wars fans and Trekkies, Tolkien fans did not show such resistance to Peter Jackson's film adaption of both *The Lord of the Rings (1954-55)* and *The Hobbit (1937)* trilogies (Meers, 2006). According to Meers, Jackson's negotiation approach to Tolkien-fans helped reduce the resistance and strengthened the feeling of ownership by these fans of the filmic representation of their appreciated popular culture object. Similar to Tolkien fan, GoT-fans interact with the co-producer of the HBO television series of their beloved object, George R.R. Martin (GRRM) is both the author of the book series he is also co-producing the television series. Fans of Martin's official fan club *Brotherhood Without Banners* discuss his actions on the forum of Westeros.org and on social media websites. On *Not a Blog*[21] Martin often writes he is opposed to fan fiction. Respondents of this study supported GRMM's view on fan-influence, meaning they are aware of their importance but do not demand any influence in the emerging process of the ongoing ASOIAF novels series and its adaptive television series.

6.3 Recommendations for future research

First, findings regarding online fan communities cannot be generalized because this study only focused on respondents from Tumblr, and did not include respondents from other social media websites or fan websites. For future fan studies the use of multiple social media websites and fan websites are advised. This makes it easier to generalize findings and it enables scholars to find correlations between fan communities.

Second, the sample selection of Tumblr blogs was formed by few criteria. When multiple social media websites and fan websites are chosen a selection of its users should be made carefully and respecting certain general standards. Scholars should think of questions concerning why users are monitored and approached as possible respondents; e.g. what content is posted and what content is reliable, how many followers does a user have, when is a respondent 'let go'.

Third, the period of lurking was relatively short and was followed by email-interviews. In other words, the scholar did not participate in the online fan community as participant observer, which might had given more inside information to the scholar.

Recommendations for future fan studies are twofold. To begin with, future fan studies regarding *enoughness* are strongly advised to monitor more than one fan community of more than one cultural object, it provides the opportunity of further exploration of the notion of *multi-fandomism*.

To continue, the fourth wave of fan studies is based upon fan-fan interactions and dialogue between a fan and a aca-fan. Therefore, scholars should choose cultural objects of

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[21] www.grrm.livejournal.com

their favorite interest. Fans of a cultural object distinguish empty communication from authentic communication in an instant.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Theoretical contribution to e-ethnography

The respondents of this study did not only simply reply with answers, they also replied other comments and remarks about the email-interview. As said, all respondents were approached online. This was accompanied by several comments of the respondents.

Level of goodwill and honor

Besides establishing a level of mutual trust between respondents and researcher, as mentioned by Kievits (2005), this study claims a *level of goodwill* and a *level of honor*. The *level of goodwill* is explained as the goodwill of individual fans to participate in a study, and the goodwill to help another person. The level of goodwill is therefore divided into two sublevels. The quotes of Meghan and Daan emphasize a level of goodwill: they are glad to help a scholar with finalizing a graduate degree. Vivian, among other respondents, offered to acquire more respondents if needed, as illustrated by the following quotes:

I'm glad to participate and help you with research for your master thesis! (Meghan)

I'd gladly participate in this research. (Daan)

Nice to hear from you. I would like to help you with your master thesis […] If you do not have enough respon[dents], please let me know: a lot of my friends are also Game of Thrones fans and might be able to help you as well. (Vivian)

I'd be happy to help, and am honored that you reached out to me. (Krista)

I would be delighted to participate in your research. (Sophie)

The *level of honor* is explained as a feeling of honor by respondents regarding being approached to share their ideas and thoughts about a topic. According to the respondents of this study fans are very delighted to express their ideas and thoughts about their favorite cultural object. This is best expressed by Krista who even uses the exact wording, while all other respondents frame reaching out to them to participate as a delightful event.

Reassurance language proficiency

Many respondents were non-native English speakers, which was the reason for two respondents to question their contribution and/or participation for this study. Expression yourself in a language other than your mother tongue may cause a border in the level of mutual understanding, as follows:

I need you to know the following: […] English is not my native language so I might have some problems expressing my thoughts or with my spelling / grammar. […] If th[is] [is]n't a problem then yes I would love to participate. (Anonymous 1)

Respondents like Anonymous 1 explain why they believe their English proficiency may cause a diversion in understanding of the questions, the answers given, and each other. This study supports the claim all respondents are able to express themselves if there is mutual trust and mutual will to ask and provide clarification, as illustrated by the following quotes:

p.s.: Apologies if I made some grammar errors. (Anonymous 2)
Thank you for the reassurance. (Anonymous 2)

Reassurance of language proficiency insecurities, of respondents by a scholar, is another scholar-tool that should be used in e-ethnography. This study claims reassurance of language proficiency leads to a higher *level of goodwill* and mutual trust.

Time and personal

Time frames were used in this study in order to keep up pace regarding graduation deadlines. Respondents were aware of the time agreement, as shown by this quote:

Congratulations on working on your master thesis research, and I'll try to continue responding within 3 days of each email. (Krista)

Krista confirmed her will to respond within three days and acted accordingly. Other respondents confirmed their will to reply within three days in similar ways, but many of them extended the three-days-agreement. Extending the three-day-agreement must be considered a simple rule that was treated by the respondents as something important. In fact, a lot of them were really unpleased with extending the three days and thus breaking the agreement. Following quotes are made anonymous for privacy reasons:

I hope this helps. Sorry again for the late response and I hope you are well. (Anonymous 1)

Apologies for the late reply! The previous two days have been absolutely-no-internet-days, I hope it's not [that much] of a problem, I will reply sooner next times. (Anonymous 2)

Breaking the agreement was almost always accompanied with some kind of apology and/or excuse. Other respondents failed responding within three days in a consequent manner.

Hi!! Hope I'm not late; I hadn't much time to answer. (Anonymous 3)
Hi Tim, sorry I'm late... and didn't have much time to answer so I'll be short. (Anonymous 3)

As Anonymous 3 mentioned answers will be short, this time. Respondents like Anonymous 3 and 4 were not thanked for their time and effort after the first time, nor after the second time, they failed to answer within the three days after a sent e-mail. These respondents supported

that much relevant information for this study, denying them further access would be unwise regarding thick data harvesting.

Noooo I forgooooot. It was spring break and I stopped checking my school e-mail. I'm back in school now so I'm up for catching up to these responses same-day if you still want to fit me in, but otherwise I understand. I messed up. (Anonymous 4)

Hey Tim! How are you doing? I got a little time today so this are my answers! (Anonymous 1)

Replies with a personal undertone of Anonymous 1 were not uncommon; the respondents were a part of this study for extension of a minimal of approximately three weeks. This meant a somewhat personal mix of research-questions and personal-questions and answers were sent, still with conformity towards a formal relationship between scholar and respondent. Besides a personal touch there can be discovered a sense of effortless in above quotes; the respondents contributed to this study by reserving spare time.

Copying behavior

The respondents of this study copied or referred to the aca-fan reference of 'knowlegde is power' as a signing off quote used in every question-email, as follows:

True fans want to know everything, and they wanna know now!!!
Knowledge is power, isn't it? (Julien)

Strength through balance (Daan)

Flower is Power, Yvo (Yvo)

Julien referred to the end quote as part of his own answer about the characteristics of good-enough fan. Daan and Yvo used their own signing off quotes; Daan referred to a quote of Game of Thrones, Yvo trolled it with 'flower is power'.

Appedix 2: Approached Tumblr-accounts

glenn-rhee-pizzaboy, casterlyjaime, thefrenchrover, waldafrey, mancerayder, cerseihouselannister, targxryen, starkeddard-moved, bashangouleme, silasbenjamins, thereignofcastamere, ladysansaholmes, cerseilannistor, kingslyers, jamielannistre, theillusivewoman, princetyrion, notyouraverageharlot, ascendingreality, cerceis-lannister, thespoonmissioner, ohthisphotoshoot, sophieonthedge, lord-snow, snow-blind, blo0delf, cykees, elvishness, aegontargaryen, winryrockbells, higgayden, wildlinging, crestas, blurrymelancholy, jaimescersei, justinchan, lady-arryn, suizdejinn, songsofwolves, withfireandblood, aryastarks, favor757, krispusha, capsofthrones, gameoflaughs, got-tyrion, game-of-black-and-white, wicnet, rubyredwisp, fuckyeahgotcast, prettygameofthronesgifs, inappropriateredweddingjokes, gameofthrones-fanart, gameofthrones.

Appendix 3: Fantasy television series and movies

Movies, mini series, and television series in the high fantasy genre. Movies: *The NeverEnding Story* (1984)*, The Black Cualdron* (1985, animated)*, Legend* (1985)*, Willow* (1988)*, The NeverEnding Story II: The Next Chapter* (1990)*, The NeverEnding Story III* (1994)*, Dungeons & Dragons* (2000), *Harry Potter and the Philopher's Stone* (2001), *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (2001), *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (2002), *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (2002), *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (2003), *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (2004), *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (2005), *Dungeons & Dragons: Wrathe of the Dragon God* (2005), *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2005), *Eragon* (2006), *Arthur and the Invisibles* (2006), *The Golden Compass* (2007), *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2007), *The Seeker* (2007), *Stardust* (2007), *The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian* (2008), *Inkheart* (2008), *The Spiderwick Chronicles* (2008), *Arthur and the Revenge of Maltazard* (2009), *The Secret of Moonacre* (2009), *Alice in Wonderland* (2010), *Arthur 3: The War of the Two Worlds* (2010), *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (2010), *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows – Part 1* (2010), *Percy Jackson & the Olympians: The Lightning Thief* (2010), *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows – Part 2* (2011), *Dungeons & Dragons: The Book of Vile Darkness* (2012), *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* (2012), *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug* (2013), *Percy Jackson: Sea of Monsters* (2013), and forthcoming: *The Hobbit: There and Back Again* (2014), *Seventh Son* (2015), and *Warcraft* (2016). Mini series: *Neverwhere* (1996, six episodes), *Gormenghast* (2000, four episodes), *Earthsea* (2004, two episodes), *Terry Pratchett's Hogfather* (2006, two episodes), *Terry Pratchett's The Colour of Magic* (2008, two episodes), *Terry Pratchett's Going Postal* (2010, two episodes), and forthcoming *Terry Pratchetts's Unseen Academicals* (TBA, two episodes). Television series: *Tales from the NeverEnding Story* (2000-2002), *Legend of the Seeker* (2008-2010), *Once Upon a Time* (2011-Present), *Game of Thrones* (2011-Present), and forthcoming *American Gods* (TBA).

Appendix 4: Letter from George R.R. Martin to Marvel Comics

enough!" We say "Nuff said!" You haven't been reading Brand X on the sly, have you, pal?

Dear Stan and Don,

After receiving and reading my subscription copies of FF #32 and AVENGERS #9, I have finally come to the decision to have both mounted in bronze and set on a pedestal in the center of my living room. Although the F.F. is "The World's Greatest Comic Magazine", I must admit that on this occasion AVENGERS #9 was slightly the better of the two. This is not to say that F.F wasn't up to par, but rather that the Avengers was—er—breathtaking, shall we say? What a story! It was beyond words; the fast-paced action, solid characterization, and that terrific ending all gave it that extra oomph and catapulted it into the *great* class. Stan, old boy, you can put another notch in your pen for this masterpiece. And that art! I've always liked Don Heck's work but on this occasion he outdid himself. You've just gotta make the Heck-Ayers team the permanent artists on the AVERNGERS. A few surplus comments on various tidbits—you ask which villains you should return. Well, I feel that the only foes the F.F. has worthy of becoming regulars are Namor, Doc Doom, the Hulk and the Red Ghost. A few others, like the Hate Monger and the Molecule Man, were great in their first appearance but still not worthy of returns, as a comeback would destroy the effect of the first tale. Some others like the Thinker, the Puppet Master, the Moleman and Diablo have definitely deserved eternal exile. These four are probably four of the poorest villains you have ever introduced, and it is somewhat ironic that all four should have been presented in F.F., your best mag. While it is true that all four have starred in some great tales, this is due entirely to Stan's marvelous writing skill which can provide good stories even with poor villains. Please, whatever else you do, do not bring back these chaps. Instead, I'd love to see the F.F. fight villains from your other books like the Blob, Doc Ock, Sandman, and the Mandarin.

George R.R. Martin, 36 E. First St.
Bayonne, N.J. 07002

NOW you tell us, Georgie! We've already brought back three of the four you mentioned! In fact, Diablo is the

Appendix 5: Screen time per character per season

Total screentime (Appearance in season, number of episode appearances)	Season 1 (in minutes)	Season 2	Season 3
1. Tyrion Lannister – 166:15 (1,2,3; 28)	1. Eddard Stark – 94:35	1. Tyrion Lannister - 64:24	1. Tyrion Lannister – 49:03
2. Daenerys Targaryen – 127:35 (1,2,3; 25)	2. Jon Snow – 59:35	2. Theon Greyjoy – 41:48	2. Jaime Lannister - 36:34
3. Jon Snow - 126:41 (1,2,3; 24)	3. Daenerys Targaryen – 57:00	3. Daenerys Targaryen – 38:58	3. Jon Snow – 35:46
4. Arya Stark - 100:11 (1,2,3; 27)	4. Tyrion Lannister – 52:48	4. Cersei Lannister – 38:46	4. Daenerys Targaryen - 31:37
5. Eddard Stark – 94:35 (1; 9)	5. Catelyn Stark – 47:40	5. Arya Stark - 38:06	5. Sansa Stark – 31:07
6. Catelyn Stark – 91:14 (1,2,3; 25)	6. Arya Stark – 33:47	6. Jon Snow – 33:20	6. Robb Stark – 28:40
7. Cersei Lannister – 90:02 (1,2,3; 27)	7. Jorah Mormont – 31:13	7. Robb Stark – 30:14	7. Arya Stark – 28:18
8. Robb Stark - 89:16 (1,2,3; 22)	8. Robert Baratheon – 29:38	8. Sansa Stark – 28:15	8. Samwell Tarly – 27:17
9. Sansa Stark - 85:42 (1,2,3; 24)	9. Petyr Baelish – 28:53	9. Catelyn Stark – 23:36	9. Ygritte – 26:32
10. Theon Greyjoy – 84:11 (1,2,3; 23)	10. Robb Stark – 28:18	10. Davos Seaworth – 21:30	10. Cersei Lannister – 23:13
11. Jorah Mormont – 72:18 (1,2,3; 24)	11. Cersei Lannister – 28:03	11. Petyr Baelish – 20:51	11. Theon Greyjoy – 23:01
12. Jaime Lannister – 71:25 (1,2,3; 19)	12. Bran Stark – 27:02	12. Stannis Baratheon – 19:59	12. Tywin Lannister – 22:57
13. Samwell Tarly - 61:48 (1,2,3; 19)	13. Sansa Stark – 26:20	13. Joffrey Baratheon – 19:07	13. Margaery Tyrell - 22:51
14. Petyr Baelish - 60:00 (1,2,3; 19)	14. Khal Drogo – 25:15	14. Brienne of Tarth – 18:51	14. Gendry – 22:41
15. Bran Stark - 57:56 (1,2,3; 21)	15. Varys – 22:47	15. Jorah Mormont – 18:33	15. Jorah Mormont – 22:32
16. Varys - 57:17 (1,2,3; 18)	16. Samwell Tarly – 22:24	16. Shae – 17:22	16. Davos Seaworth – 22:30
17. Joffrey Baratheon - 54:22 (1,2,3; 23)	17. Viserys Targaryen – 20:15	17. Tywin Lannister -17:17	17. Brienne of Tarth – 20:47
18. Tywin Lannister - 49:39 (1,2,3; 19)	18. Jaime Lannister – 19:56	18 .Varys - 16:25	18. Catelyn Stark – 19:58
19. Davos Seaworth – 44:00 (2,3; 10)	19. Theon Greyjoy – 19:22	19. Ygritte – 16:23	19. Melisandre – 19:41
20. Ygritte – 42:55 (2,3; 12)	20. Joffrey Baratheon – 17:41	20. Maester Luwin – 16:13	20. Talisa Maegyr – 18:36
21. Shae – 40:45 (1,2,3; 16)	21. Grand Maester Pycelle – 16:20	21. Jaime Lannister – 14:55	21. Varys – 18:05
22. Brienne of Tarth - 39:38 (2,3; 14)	22. Bronn – 15:58	22. Bran Stark – 13:52	22. Joffrey Baratheon – 17:34
23. Gendry – 39:14 (1,2,3; 17)	23. Rodrik Cassel – 14:13	23. Talisa Maegyr – 13:49	23. Bran Stark – 17:02
24. Sandor Clegane – 39:03 (1,2,3; 21)	24. Renly Baratheon – 11:42	24. Bronn - 13:45	24. Stannis Baratheon – 16:46
25. Bronn – 36:54 (1,2,3; 16)	25. Jeor Mormont – 10:37	25. Renly Baratheon – 13:44	25. Sandor Clegane – 16:24
26. Stannis Baratheon – 36:45 (2,3; 12)	26. Barristan Selmy – 10:33	26. Gendry – 13:42	26. Thoros of Myr – 15:35
27. Margaery Tyrell – 32:51 (2,3; 10)	27. Tywin Lannister – 9:25	27. Sandor Clegane – 13:17	27. Barristan Selmy – 15:10
28. Talisa Maegyr – 32:25 (2,3; 12)	28. Sandor Clegane – 9:22	28. Melisandre – 12:41	28. Gilly – 15:08
29. Melisandre – 32:22 (2,3; 10)	29. Shae – 8:40	29. Samwell Tarly – 12:05	28. Olenna Tyrell – 14:54
30. Osha –30:53 (1,2,3; 14)	30. Ros – 8:20	30. Osha – 10:56	29. Shae – 14:43
31. Robert Baratheon – 29:38 (1; 7)	31. Maester Luwin – 8:09	31. Ros – 10:22	30. Ramsay Snow – 13:43
32. Grand Maester Pycelle – 28:38 (1,2,3; 15)	32. Osha – 8:07	32. Margaery Tyrell – 10:00	31. Edmure Tully – 13:08
33. Khal Drogo – 27:20 (1,2; 10)	33. Yoren – 7:20	33. Hot Pie – 9:35	32. Brynden Tully – 12:00
34. Barristan Selmy – 25:43 (1,3; 13)	34. Lysa Arryn – 7:03	34. Loras Tyrell – 9:30	33. Missandei – 11:39

35. Renly Baratheon – 25:26 (1,2; 8)
36. Maester Luwin – 24:22 (1,2; 14)
37. Jeor Mormont – 23:42 (1,2,3; 12)
38. Ros – 22:12 (1,2,3; 15)
39. Loras Tyrell – 21:54 (1,2,3; 11)
40. Viserys Targaryen – 20:15 (1; 5)
41. Gilly – 18:08 (2,3; 9)
42. Rodrik Cassel – 16:46 (1,2; 12)
43. Hot Pie – 15:47 (1,2,3; 10)
44. Thoros of Myr – 15:35 (3; 6)
45. Olenna Tyrell – 14:54 (3; 5)
46. Yoren – 13:48 (1,2; 7)
47. Ramsay Snow – 13:43 (3; 6)
48. Roose Bolton – 13:41 (2,3; 11)
49. Edmure Tully – 13:08 (3; 5)
50. Walder Frey - 12:26 (1,3; 3)
51. Brynden Tully – 12:00 (3; 5)
52. Yara Greyjoy – 11:50 (2,3; 5)
53. Missandei – 11:39 (3; 8)
54. Beric Dondarion – 11:07 (1,3; 5)
55. Tormund Giantsbane – 10:27 (3; 7)
56. Daario Naharis – 10:12 (3; 3)
57. Jaqen H'qhar – 8:15 (1,2; 7)
58. Balon Greyjoy – 7:58 (2;3; 3)
59. Qyburn – 7:16 (3; 4)
60. Lysa Arryn – 7:03 (1; 4)
61. Benjen Stark – 7:00 (1; 3)
62. Maester Aemon – 6:49 (1,3; 4)
63. Mance Rayder – 6:22 (3; 3)
64. Syrio Forel - 6:15 (1; 3)
65. Robin Arryn – 4:37 (1; 4)

35. Benjen Stark – 7:00
36. Syrio Forel - 6:15
37. Maester Aemon – 5:21
38. Loras Tyrell – 5:13
39. Robin Arryn – 4:37
40. Walder Frey - 3:09
41. Gendry – 2:51
42. Hot Pie - 1:10
43. Beric Dondarion – 0:31 *
44. Jaqen H'qhar – 0:17 *

35. Yara Greyjoy – 9:20
36. Grand Maester Pycelle – 8:19
37. Jaqen H'qhar – 7:58
38. Jeor Mormont – 7:44
39. Balon Greyjoy – 5:41
40. Yoren – 5:28
41. Roose Bolton – 3:59
42. Gilly – 3:00
42. Rodrik Cassel – 2:33
43. Khal Drogo – 2:05

34. Osha – 11:10
35. Beric Dondarion – 10:36
36. Tormund Giantsbane – 10:27
37. Petyr Baelish – 10:16
38. Daario Naharis – 10:12
39. Roose Bolton – 9:42
40. Walder Frey – 9:17
41. Qyburn – 7:16
42. Bronn – 7:11
43. Loras Tyrell – 7:11
44. Mance Rayder – 6:22
45. Jeor Mormont – 5:21
46. Hot Pie – 5:02
47. Grand Maester Pycelle – 3:59
48. Ros – 3:30
49. Yara Greyjoy – 2:30
50. Balon Greyjoy – 2:17
51. Maester Aemon – 1:28

*Character is being played by an extra or different actor

(Retrieved from: Retrieved May 17, 2014, from http://asoiaf.westeros.org/index.php/topic/94295-a-game-of-screentime/