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Game of Thrones fandom. Power and culture in fan communities

Abstract

Fans represent a shift in media consumption, and their patterns of behaviour are increasingly visible outside their communities, in other groups. With the observed shift towards a network society, of which fandoms are an emanation, the field of social conflict begins to operate within culture. Cultural power over media products no longer belongs only to the creators, but is also influenced by the users, who cease to passively consume products, creatively interpreting them and engaging in their development. The aim of the article was to show this process on the example of content analysis of internet entries created within the environment of the Game of Thrones fandom, including speculations which the fans of the brand carried out in the context of the plot development.

Keywords: fan, fandom, *Game of Thrones*, cultural studies

Introduction

Culture and the societies that make it up are constantly being transformed¹². One of the most important changes, which researchers such as Jan Van Dijk or Manuel Castells describe, is the replacement of mass society by a model, characterized by the term network society, based on other types of human communities³. These groups are at the same time unprecedentedly large in scale (thanks to processes of globalization and improved virtual communication) and reduced in size (through the shrinking of the individual's local environment – smaller families, local communities and workplaces)⁴. Moreover, the fields of social conflict moving from the workplace to the cultural sphere have also changed, with social movements attempting to change existing paradigms⁵.

¹ J. van Dijk, *Społeczne aspekty nowych mediów*, transl. J. Konieczny, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warsaw 2010.

² F. Stadler, *Manuel Castells. A Theory of Network Society*, transl. M. Król, Jagiellonian University Publishing House, Krakow, 2012.

³ J. van Dijk, *Social aspects of...*, p. 55.

⁴ F. Stadler, *Manuel Castells...*, p. 103.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 99.

There is also a progressive change in individuals, more specifically in the processes of creating one's own identity, i.e. "the selective internalization and transformation of social values on the basis of which individuals distinguish themselves from others, as well as situate themselves in a broader social context"⁶. In the network model of society, "as a result of the process of individualization, the basic unit of the network society has now become the individual functioning in different networks"⁷. This possibility is provided by information and communication technologies, which allow for direct communication, for example between people located on two sides of the globe, thus crossing the boundaries of time and space, while at the same time elevating the position of direct communication as the most important one, although necessarily "limited" by its virtuality. This not only creates new forms of communication and ways of organization, but also changes the identity of the individual significantly, experiencing a kind of bifurcation⁸. The same individual, thanks to new forms of communication such as, for example, "chat rooms and instant messaging, virtual teams working on projects or virtual communities of people united by interests", can play many more roles. The question of identity becomes more malleable in the face of ICT. At the same time, these changes have not happened suddenly⁹. Groups organized along the lines of networked communities were already in place during the mass society era and it is these groups that can be considered as precursors to today's shape and organization of society.

This paper is an attempt to analyze the ways in which one social group communicates and functions, which, through its unique characteristics, strongly shapes the identity of the individuals moving within it¹⁰. The aim of the paper is to look at the activity of fans centered around a media brand and their claims in their relationship with creators in the context of symbolic power over the media product^{11,12}.

Fans

Every media viewer is a fan from time to time, because "certain literary, film or television texts capture our attention, provoke a desire to discuss, re-watch or re-read"¹³. As Henry Jenkins put it, borrowing a metaphor from Michel de Certeau, fans resemble textual poachers who creatively reinterpret media content and create their own cultural contribution from it. They are also inextricably linked to media products, and it is difficult

⁶ J. van Dijk, *Social aspects of...*, p. 55.

⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 56-57.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 57.

⁹ M. Lisowska-Magdziarz, *Fandom for beginners part 1 – community and knowledge*, ToC Publishing House, Kraków 2017, p. 43.

¹⁰ A. Lipińska, *Fenomen współczesnych seriali. On the social impact of television series*, 'Konteksty Kultury', no. 13, z. 3, p. 302.

¹¹ M. Duffett, *Understanding Fandom. An Introduction to the Study of Media Fan Culture*, Bloomsbury Academic, New York-London 2013, p. 2.

¹² M. Lisowska-Magdziarz, *Fandom for beginners...*, p. 62.

¹³ H. Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, ed. 2, Routledge, New York-London 2013.

to talk about them without using the context of media culture¹⁴¹⁵. Being an element, even an active creator, of the off-screen life of the media product, they see artistry in the objects of their worship, often in spite of all the canons of what is traditionally considered art¹⁶. At the same time, they form a large social group, as they can be counted as one of the ten per cent of the most active media users “with a tendency to increase this proportion as the model of participation becomes more widespread and people’s proficiency in using technological tools increases” . Thus, this is a group that is increasing in size and spreading media use patterns beyond its own inner circle, thus changing contemporary culture and media¹⁷.

At the same time, as Henry Jenkins points out, there is no clear line of demarcation between fans and other audiences for a given media good – the transition from ‘mere’ passive viewer to active fan is a fluid process. Along the way, it is distinguished by, among other things, a strong emotional attachment, by some even defined by such strong emotions as love – hence interchangeable terms such as admirer or fan¹⁸. The process of becoming a fan is genuine, unintentional, unplanned, and the awareness itself comes once you are already one.

The path to becoming a fan of a media product starts with being a media consumer. There also needs to be a strong commitment to the media product, a fascination with it, making it one of your most important objects of interest¹⁹. It is not just a matter of interacting with the media product in question (watching a series, a film, reading a book, etc.), but of giving it your full attention, committing yourself to regular, repeated and intense contact with it²⁰. This stage is crucial to the whole process, and successful transition depends on the intensity of the emotional and intellectual sensations associated with the object of fascination and on the fulfilment of the pleasure and entertainment needs of the individual²¹. Once this level is reached, the next stage may also occur – socialization, driven by the desire to share and bond with others who feel similar emotions. This most often takes the form of participating in fan practices such as discussions, analysis or creativity centered in wider fan communities²². After all, one does not “become a fan of a particular media product by accident or even because friends recommend it to us, but because we have found something in a ‘cult’ text that resonates with our needs in an important way and can be used not only to construct an identity, but also to build our own image among others”.

¹⁴ M. Lisowska-Magdziarz, *Sherlock. Playing with fandom and harnessing the potential of convergence*, *Zeszyty prasoznawcze* 2016, vol. 59, no. 1 (225), p. 197.

¹⁵ H. Jenkins, *Textual Poachers...*, p. 17.

¹⁶ M. Lisowska-Magdziarz, *Fandom for beginners...*, p. 63.

¹⁷ H. Jenkins, *Textual Poachers...*, p. 54.

¹⁸ M. Duffett, *Understanding Fandom...*, p. 154.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

²⁰ M. Roszczyńska, *Świat wartości fanów fantasy w świetle ich praktyki (para) literackich. Perspektywy badawcze* [in:] *Oblicza nowych mediów*, ed. A. Ogonowska, Kraków 2011, Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Zarządzania i Bankowości w Krakowie, p. 187.

²¹ M. Lisowska-Magdziarz, *Fandom for beginners...*, p. 21.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 157.

Cultural aspects of fan activities

Personal engagement with media content is the source of the formation of a new cognitive disposition among fans²³. It assumes that “reception becomes a kind of default setting, a readiness to communicate about, analyze and transform cultural material”²⁴. Among other things, the ways in which people familiarize themselves with and interact with new issues change, to the extent that fans assimilate and organize newly acquired knowledge in a different way than people who remain outside the fan group in the media context.

Thus, the concept of culture as understood by a fan is something different from culture as understood by a non-fan and often refers to a completely different dimension of culture. The fan’s interpretation of media texts is active and often extremely different from the originally assumed version, making it part of popular culture. This in turn, considered part of commercial culture, evokes strong emotional responses in the audience and contains elements that resonate with the audience’s world and beliefs²⁵. The classification of a given media good into the concept of popular culture so understood is based on the ways in which the audience participates around the content under analysis.

Moreover, fan media use can be understood multidimensionally – as receiving, broadcasting and using media messages in a way that is significantly different from other social groups²⁶. The aforementioned dimensions of this model are shaped by constant communication, involving the exchange of knowledge, ordering and analyzing resources, providing (beyond the mere pleasure of watching) sources of collective entertainment, fulfilling the need for contact with like-minded people or, finally, shaping a community-specific linguistic code based on knowledge not only of the product, but also of the community itself, and consequently creating a specific media discourse²⁷. The described model of media uses “is at the heart of a gigantic [...] shift in the ways in which culture is used socially: from broadcasting/receiving to social cultural practice”.

Fandom

Following the trail of cultural practice, it is worth leaning into fan communities, or fandoms. Fans are highly socially competent, eager to network, share their knowledge with others and seek collective experiences. The individual pleasure derived from interacting with a product usually sooner or later turns into a need to share their observations²⁸. For a fan focused “on a topic, specialized analysis of material becomes

²³ *Ibid*, p. 116.

²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 63.

²⁵ M. Duffett, *Understanding Fandom...*, pp. 62-63.

²⁶ M. Lisowska-Magdziarz, *Fandom for beginners...*, pp. 25-27.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 25.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 18.

much more meaningful and enjoyable if one's own analyses can be compared with others". It is through the collectivity they form that the collective power of fans is most strongly realized²⁹. Fandoms, and therefore the groups they form, can be understood by media scholars as "a media practice – a sub-practice in the set of diverse social practices that people indulge in in capitalist, consumerist mediatized societies".

Fandom is pioneering against the background of contemporary social groups in many areas³⁰. One of these is the changing relationship between fans and the creators of cultural goods observed by the field of fan studies, allowing power relations between the two groups to be observed³¹. These, in turn, in the context of the cultural product are multidimensional, although an increasing democratization in power relations can be observed, where the series "not only influences its viewer, but the viewer (or rather the group of viewers – fans) increasingly influences the series".

Fans have ceased to be just another group of recipients of cultural texts³². With the advent of new media (Web 2.0), the creative, and even production, activities of fans have become so visible that one can speak of the construction and dissemination of authorial interpretations of media products³³. Furthermore, following Lesley Goodman, producers do not have full creative control over the fictional universe, which is far more important than any individual creator. Today, therefore, the universe of a story and its narrative are created not only in film studios, but also online, at conventions and in homes.

However, the attitude towards fan activities in the entertainment industry is still ambiguous³⁴. On the one hand, they are provocateurs of transformations within the cultural marketplace, "perpetuating a model of engaged reception and creative relation to media products [...] yielding both media and social gains for stakeholders"³⁵. On the other hand, they may be seen as a weaker, exploited group by producers, whose fruits of labor, including ideas and data, are exploited for free. Interestingly, fans are often aware of the aforementioned dependency³⁶. They are able to simultaneously perceive artistry in commercial products and remain aware of the forces that govern capitalist society. It is worth emphasizing, however, that the relationship between producers and fans is somewhat secondary – fans are primarily caught up in a relationship with the brand they adore rather than with the people who create it, which is why the power relations between the two entities are so complex and ambiguous³⁷.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

³⁰ M. Duffett, *Understanding Fandom...*, p. 3.

³¹ A. Lipinska, *Phenomenon of contemporary...*, pp. 301-302.

³² H. Jenkins, *Textual Poachers...*, p. 24.

³³ L. Goodman, *Disappointing Fans: Fandom, Fictional Theory, and the Death of the Author*, 'The Journal of Popular Culture' 2015, vol. 48, no. 4, p. 672.

³⁴ M. Lisowska-Magdziarz, *Fandom for beginners...*, p. 164.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ L. Goodman, *Disappointing Fans...*, p. 672.

³⁷ G. Castleberry, *Game(s) of Fandom. The Hyperlink Labyrinths That Paratextualize Game of Thrones Fandom* [in:] *Television, Social Media, and Fan Culture*, eds. D. Givens-Carroll, A. J. Narro, A. Slade, Lexington Books, Lanham 2015, p. 132.

“Game of Thrones”

Over the last decade or so, with the buoyant growth of quality television, the prestige of serials in the fan community has been growing – more and more people have been attracted to productions that keep the viewing phase longer and more intense than film productions (as these are a ‘one-off’ pleasure, while a traditional serial season lasts several to several weeks) and reduce the waiting time between episodes, to the extent of a week’s interval, or about a six-month gap between two seasons.

This was the spirit in which *Game of Thrones* fandom grew, a production that can be considered unprecedented in many ways. The series is one of the most recognizable television productions of recent years created by the American broadcaster HBO, based on the books by author George R.R. Martin. Through features such as genre broadening to appeal to new audiences or its ease in relating political and historical events, it has become one of the most popular productions in modern television history. As a result of its immense popularity, it is possible to distinguish many stages of fan involvement in the series brand³⁸. Thus, there are devotees who “watch and like [*Game of Thrones*], post ‘Game of Thrones’ memes on Facebook and Instagram or post videos on YouTube, and maybe even look up theories about what will happen next”. There are also people who spend hours on online forums, discussing the events of the last episode, creating fan stories, and so creatively contributing to the active development of the community. This particular fandom is thus, like the story at its center, many times complex to the extent that it is difficult to speak of a single group. In addition to the aforementioned ‘types’ of fans, it is also possible to distinguish, using the simplest distinction of book fans, series fans and fans of both products. The complexity of this group is influenced by the intricacy of the wider environment and the relationships within it.

Game of Thrones fandom functions most intensively in the online space³⁹. This form is considered a manifestation of a grassroots participatory culture – social networking sites, newsgroups, online forums, chat rooms and other communication platforms are used by fans to contact each other to such an extent that this has become a common and almost natural practice of most fan communities. However, the architecture of the internet means that fandoms are also fractured communities – there are many sites where traces of *Game of Thrones* fandom can be found, while at the same time it would be an extremely difficult task to find all the platforms *GoT* fans use to communicate with each other, especially as most of them are not exclusively dedicated to the series. The aforementioned conditions are one of the main reasons for the difficulties posed by the study of fan communities – when undertaking such a task, it becomes necessary to choose a platform that covers a possibly wide representation of a given fandom.

The study focuses on one of the most popular online platforms for *Game of Thrones* fans, which at the same time is also a platform dedicated solely to communication within

³⁸ M. Lisowska-Magdziarz, *Fandom for beginners...*, p. 99.

³⁹ R. Szczepaniak, “*Tribes of the web*”. – *Internet as a social and cultural medium*, “Zeszyty Prasoznawcze” 2015, vol. 58, no. 1, p. 206.

the fandom, the online forum [westeros.org](http://www.westeros.org)⁴⁰. It has been operating under the given domain since 1999 and is described as the platform that brings together the largest online fan community of this universe. The discussion platform is neatly structured – it is divided into five main categories – technical information about the operation and rules of the forum, threads exclusively about the literary series, threads exclusively about the TV adaptation, related projects, i.e. threads about the aforementioned wiki pages or about organizing rallies, i.e. about the social life of the fans, and threads called “miscellaneous”, where discussion between fans takes place on topics completely unrelated to the beloved products.

Methodology

The aim of the study was to analyze fan activity and its potential impact on the power relations of the *Game of Thrones* media brand, during the interval between the finale of the sixth and the premiere of the seventh season of the TV adaptation, with a particular focus on speculation about plot developments in the seventh instalment of *Game of Thrones*. The highlighted research period was therefore between 26 June 2016 (the date of the world premiere of the tenth episode of the sixth season of *Game of Thrones* on HBO) and 16 July 2017 (the date of the world premiere of the first episode of the seventh season of *Game of Thrones* on HBO). Due to the focus on the TV adaptation, thematic threads located in the category relating exclusively to the *Game of Thrones* series were included in the analysis. Furthermore, given the internal division of the aforementioned category into seasons, a general section (*General GoT*), an open discussion section (*Open Discussion*) and a section called *Dothraki* dedicated exclusively to the analysis of the artificial language created for the series, threads from only the general section (*General GoT*) were included in the analysis by way of eliminating threads irrelevant to the original, original fan speculation on plot development.

The study was based on the content analysis method, and the categorization key used to conduct the study on the highlighted individual forum posts consisted of six broad coding categories – ‘basic information about the post’, ‘basic information about the user-author’, ‘details about the post’, ‘predictions’, ‘original theories’ and ‘polemics’. Each of these broad categories contained smaller subcategories that detailed the nature and content of the post being analyzed. The most relevant category from the point of view of the article, i.e. ‘original theories’, was partly open – some subcategories had a closed cafeteria (relevance, emotional attitude) and others were open, depending on the content of the post (protagonists, authors, brief description of the theory).

The research assumptions included topics related to fan activity during the least stimulated period between seasons by TV adaptation producers⁴¹. Typically, this time

⁴⁰ About, ‘Westeros. The ‘A Song of Ice and Fire’ Domain” 2018, <http://www.westeros.org/About/> (accessed 24.05.2018).

⁴¹ P. Siuda, *Cultures of prosumption: on the impossibility of global and supra-national fan communities*, Oficyna Wydawnicza ASPRA-JR, Warsaw 2012.

is characterized by a decline in media brand interest among audiences⁴². An element of particular relevance in the study was speculation perceived as a result of the unremitting suspense of quality television almost provoking intense pondering of further plot developments. It is therefore a natural phenomenon that such behavior is intensifying in fandom⁴³.

Consequently, the study's focus on speculation solely authored by fans was intended to show not only the degree of familiarity with a given media brand manifested in the correct prediction of the events of the next season, but also to demonstrate the convergence and potential influence of fans on the actual content of the unfinished (the shooting period of the seventh season was between the end of August 2016 and mid-February 2017), at the time analyzed, television material.

Findings

In the analyzed part of the forum (*General GoT*), a total of 384 thematic threads were highlighted in the less than thirteen months covered by the study, with the highest number in July 2016, when as many as 132 new threads were created, and the lowest in December 2016, when only 7 were created.

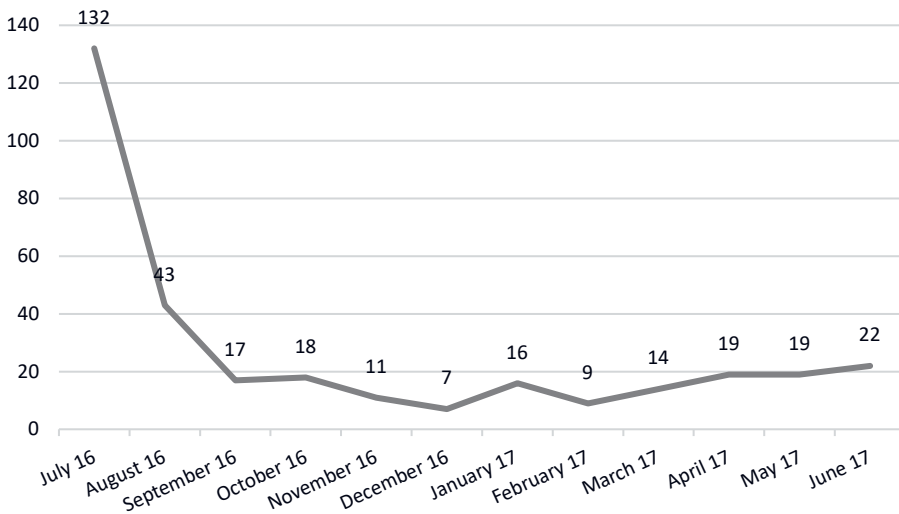


Figure 1: Number of newly created forum threads appearing in the *General GoT* Section Source.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 148.

⁴³ *Season 7*, "Game of Thrones. Wikia" 2018, http://gameofthrones.wikia.com/wiki/Season_7 (accessed 24.05.2018).

Figure 1 does not include incomplete months – that is, June 2016, where 43 new topic threads were created, and July 2017, where there were 14 new topic posts. It is worth noting that the data presented may indicate a decline in engagement in discussions between fans manifested in a decreasing number of newly created forum threads. However, two factors should be taken into account – firstly, interest never completely disappeared, with new topic threads appearing every month of the year, and secondly, the fact that threads did not appear did not mean a complete lack of activity on the forum as a whole, members being able to comment on existing topics without the need to create new ones.

General thematic categories were then distinguished, into which all the themes covered in the study were classified.

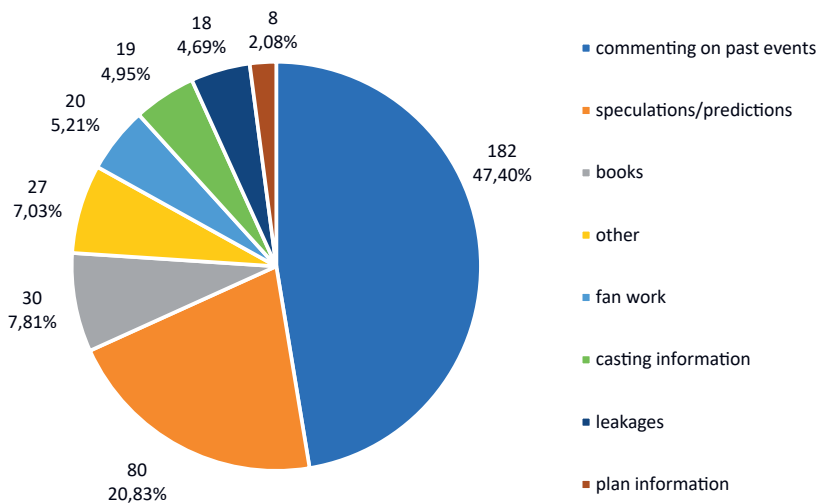


Figure 2: Thematic categories of the threads covered by the survey
Source: own study.

The second graph shows the percentage of each thematic category in the content analyzed. The most extensive category, comprising almost half of all threads, was commenting on past events that have taken place in the TV adaptation. In second place was the speculation and predictions category – on average, one in five threads was devoted to topics related to the potential plot development of the series. The next two categories – books and other (which included threads related to, for example, the 2016 Emmy Awards, film set locations or events such as concerts, conventions etc.) each covered seven per cent of the total number of threads. This was followed by the categories of fan creativity, cast information, and unconfirmed information from the set. The final category was official information from the set.

Such a breakdown indicates, firstly, what fans were occupied with during the hiatus period when they could not discuss new material, and secondly, the degree of interest

in particular topics. And while commenting on the storyline so far was clearly the dominant category, it is worth noting that speculating was the second most important activity for *Game of Thrones* fans to do during the break between seasons.

Among the 384 topic threads eligible for the overall research sample, 80 were highlighted that dealt with speculation, predictions and theories relating to plot developments in the seventh season of *Game of Thrones*. All 80 threads, in turn, recorded 3,420 individual entries, giving an average of 42.75 entries per topic thread. For the purpose of the in-depth analysis of single entries, those thematic threads that were the most general and contained no possible limitation in their title were singled out. This meant that the topic of speculation was decided each time by the author of a single entry himself. There were a total of six such general threads and they contained 314 entries, i.e. an average of 52.33 entries per thread, indicating a slight intensification of considerations compared to the average number of entries per thread in general in all threads containing speculation. The remaining 74 threads contained limitations in their subject matter, for example, as to the character the speculation concerned or the location and events that fans expected to see in the anticipated episodes. The 314 posts indicated were analyzed for the presence of any predictions or theories.

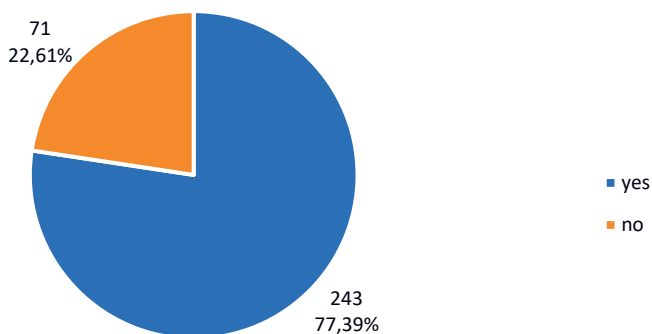


Figure 3: Number of entries containing at least one speculation
Source: own study.

As Figure 3 shows, as many as 243 entries, i.e. 77.39%, contained at least one theory as to further plot development. It is noteworthy that among these entries, there were as many as 120 that contained only original theories, i.e. uninspired by earlier entries, while there were only slightly fewer entries dealing exclusively with polemics – 96 such cases were recorded. There were 27 entries of a hybrid nature – these included references to earlier theories, but also proposed new plot developments.

At the same time, a count was made of how many individual theories (both original theories and responses to the speculations of others) the analyzed entries contained. It turned out that there were a total of 615 such theories, including 461 original theories and 154 polemics with other entries. This combination made it possible to conclude

that, on average, there were 3.29 own theories per user and 1.08 responses to theories of others. It is worth noting, however, that here, too, there was considerable fluctuation among users – from one original theory to as many as eleven in a single entry. Similarly, the case was with polemics; there were entries that referred to only one theory described earlier, but one could also find entries that polemicized six separate theories.

One of the most significant elements of the study was to look at original theories, i.e. theories that did not refer to earlier entries. Their analysis focused primarily on the degree of consistency and relevance to the final form of season seven. The first element was an analysis of the consistency with which the author of the entry developed their theories, i.e. how they constructed a possible plot development of the *Game of Thrones* universe.

When analysing the original theories of the participants in the discussion, consideration was given to both their consistency among themselves – when an author developed more than one theory in a single post – and the internal consistency of the theories, i.e. whether the authors' suggested speculations contained an uninterrupted sequence of events. Figure 4 was based on 147 posts that contained original theories within them (so 120 posts containing only such theories and 27 hybrid posts). As found, more than two-thirds, i.e. the majority, of the original theories were completely consistent both with each other and internally. In second place, with 17.69% of all entries with original theories, was the category capturing mutually exclusive entries, i.e. those that contained logical errors in the speculative sequence. Last was the category of alternative theories collecting speculations that were consciously developed by the authors so as to propose different possible plot solutions – such entries were found in a total of 21, which amounts to 14.29% of the entries. The hindsight analysis made it possible to examine the extent to which *Game of Thrones* fans were able to predict what would happen in the seventh season of the series.

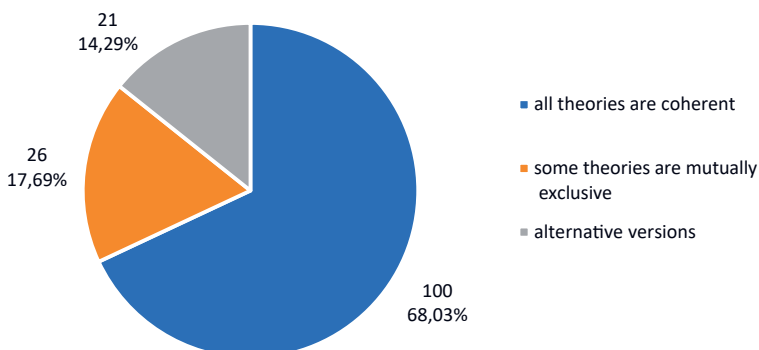


Figure 4: Coherence of original theories
Source: own study.

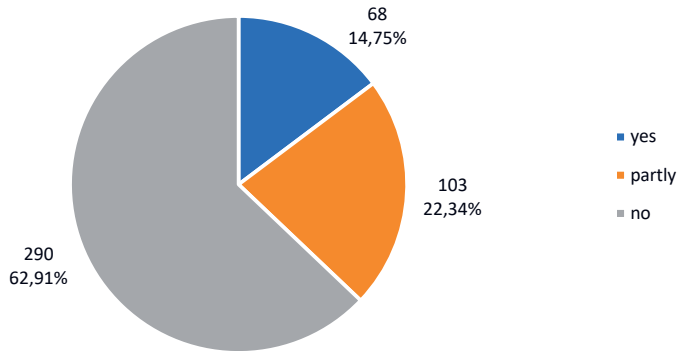


Figure 5. accuracy of original theories in predicting the plot of the seventh season of Game of Thrones

Source: own study.

The analysis of the accuracy of the predictions was based on the categorization of each of the 461 original theories that appeared in the thematic threads analyzed against the actual events of the series. While the largest category was theories that did not find their reflection in the actual events of the seventh season, it is worth noting that nearly 15% of all theories suggested by fans found their confirmation in full, and another 22.34% were partially reflected in the seventh season. Thus, it can be said that nearly 40% of all theories were at least partially confirmed by the storyline. Such a result is well beyond the margin of statistical error of a few per cent, which could suggest the impossibility of predicting the plot and the lack of any fan influence on the world depicted in the series.

Summary

The study, which consisted of a classification of thematic strands, with a particular focus on speculation about the seventh season of *Game of Thrones*, showed what fans of this media brand are involved in during the break between seasons and to what extent they can influence its shape.

From an analysis of the topic threads alone, it can be seen that fans were nevertheless strongly focused on the center of their fandom, i.e. on the story being developed. Moreover, forum activity corresponded to a rather strong drop in interest around two months after the premiere of the final episode of the sixth season, through a tipping point at the turn of the calendar year, when the creation of new topic threads dropped to single-digit numbers, to rebound and grow steadily in the spring of 2017, i.e. a few months before the expected premiere of the seventh season. Nevertheless, juxtaposing this alleged drop in forum interest with the average viewing figures for the sixth and seventh seasons respectively, and bearing in mind theories about the composition of a media brand's audience (around 10% of the most active audience is assumed to be fans), one can actually see an increase in overall interest in *Game of Thrones*.

The analysis of the 314 forum posts made it possible to determine, first and foremost, the degree of predictability of plot developments, as well as the controversial nature of the various theories espoused by fans. It also opened up, to some extent, the possibility of penetrating into fan structures and attempting to understand the mechanisms that shape the functioning of this community – the discussion patterns in force on the forum, the important thematic areas, and the degree of involvement in the object of worship were demonstrated.

One of the most interesting observations turned out to be the percentage of predictability of the plot – almost 40% of all entries containing speculation about the seventh season of the series turned out to be at least partially correct. Furthermore, as many as 15% (just under half of all partially correct entries), or 20 full theories, were fully reflected in the reality of the series. Such a result allows for a renewed slant on the issue of power in media branding, especially given that as many as 20 of these theories were developed before filming of the series even began⁴⁴. Following Lisowska-Magdziarz's lead, from "the point of view of the media scholar, fan activities can be seen as a specific media practice – a sub-practice in the set of various social practices that people indulge in in capitalist, consumerist, mediatized societies", where this media practice, i.e. a particular kind of media use by fans, not only changes the ways in which other social groups use media, but also transforms the media branding professional communities^{45 46}. Authors such as Mark Duffett, Kevin Roberts, Matthew Hills and Henry Jenkins have already speculated about this interdependence, addressing it virtually at two opposite ends of the scale – from those willing to grant fans at least some if not all of the power over media branding, to those characterizing fans as a 'powerless elite'. Nonetheless, the result of the survey allows for a convergence between what fans write and what appears in the next season's storyline.

Moreover, the similarities are so great that they cannot be considered to be within the bounds of statistical error. Thus, there is a dual relationship – on the one hand, there is the possibility that the creators of the series are inspired without the fans' knowledge by their entries, which contain expectations about the development of the plot. At the same time, the other possible explanation also becomes the extensive and deep knowledge of *Game of Thrones* fans, which makes it possible to predict the plot even before it has been developed. The question then becomes whether fans are able to predict such detailed events as, for example, the final scenes of the season finale, which has not yet been created, or the complex intrigues taking place between characters⁴⁷. In the recent history of series creation, a few isolated cases can be pointed out where directors and producers have openly used and admitted to drawing inspiration from fan creations, but in the case of *Game of Thrones* no such official information exists,

⁴⁴ M. Lisowska-Magdziarz, *Fandom for beginners...*, p. 25.

⁴⁵ K. Roberts, *Lovemarks: The Future beyond Brands*, New York 2005, p. 74.

⁴⁶ See, inter alia, H. Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participator Culture*, NYU Press, New York 2006, p. 138; P. Siuda, *Cultures of Prosumption...*, pp. 140-141.

⁴⁷ M. Duffett, *Understanding Fandom ...*

which does not mean at the same time that such processes do not occur, but only points to the still existing wall between the audience and the creators of media content.

Fans represent a shift in media consumption, but their patterns and patterns of action are increasingly visible outside fandom, in other social settings. In other words, the usual attitude that fans only change the way media is consumed and used, influencing other, receiving social groups, may not be sufficient, as it ignores the possibility of fans actively exerting pressure on producers, who are responsible for creating media goods⁴⁸. Contemporary fandom can be seen through the prism of the development of mass culture, media and communication technologies, but it can also be based on a progressive media convergence in which all groups involved in the production, reception and use of media content participate. This process is also having an increasingly strong impact on the blurring of the boundaries between the three dimensions mentioned above, with the result that the boundary between producer and fan is becoming less and less clear, and at the same time more and more malleable and thin. Of course, it is difficult to prove outright that fans are causal agents in the context of the development of events in a series if its creators do not openly admit this, but the regularities shown in the study seem to suggest the existence of such a relationship, at least to some extent. It is difficult to ignore the convergences shown, which should at least motivate further, in-depth research in this direction, which would include, for example, interviews with the other side of this relationship, namely the media content creation community.

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⁴⁸ M. Lisowska-Magdziarz, *Fandom for beginners...*, p. 35.

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