

# **The Ties That Bind**

**A blog project about the meaning of fandom**

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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June 11, 2021

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## **Abstract**

Fandoms, or fan communities; groups of enthusiasts or ‘fans’ that have come together through their shared love of some kind of media, have been around for a long time in a number of different forms around the world, though in small numbers. When comic books became popular, those groups increased, and once again as movies became more commonplace. These communities and cultures are reliant on information technology, and the technology reliant on them, in a symbiotic relationship. It is my objective to research, analyze and observe fandoms and the culture related to the associated communities of fans within, and how they have formed, communicated and interacted, both prior to the development of modern information technology and after, as well as their continued growth on established and upcoming platforms. My actual project consists of a set of blog posts, or ‘mini-essays’, on Tumblr, around one hundred words per post, perhaps more, with ten posts in total. [Tumblr](#)

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## Introduction

Fandoms, or fan communities; groups of enthusiasts or ‘fans’ that have come together through their shared love of some kind of media, have been around for a long time in a number of different forms around the world, though in small numbers. When comic books became popular, those groups increased, and once again as movies became more commonplace. On and on through the decades, people began to form their own communities or groups surrounding the stories, games or activities that connected them. Especially in the last two to three decades as the internet and social media advanced, fandoms grew exponentially and many diverse people could now all communicate and interact with one another, with at least one thing all connecting them; their shared love of a story.

This study is aimed to focus on the social impact of growing entertainment technology, and show a part of society — fandom— that is present in the lives of millions of people. To bring about the perspectives of so many people and what they love and enjoy, not unlike that of sports fans; something that is often shown in mainstream media. Additional goals of this study are to create a blog that includes blog posts that address the following topics:

- Show the diversity and unity of fandom members
- Normalize the enjoyment of certain movies, games and books without the stereotypes of nerds and geeks
- Communicate how many members have embraced these terms (nerd & geek)
- Show the connection of entertainment media and digital technology with growing Fandom communities

## **Project Questions**

How do fans participate on online platforms?

What does this mean to them (fans, media outlets, and social platforms)?

What role do fandoms have in the distribution of media?

What is an effective way to share my experience about fandoms?

## Literature Review

The growth of the phenomenon known as ‘fandoms’ is directly correlated by the advancements made in media and information technology. The literature to be reviewed and summarized in this document presents data surrounding the history and formation of fandoms and fandom culture, as well as exploring just what fandom culture is, what fans are, and what they do. These documents are made up of scholarly journals, published books of journalists and researchers, and electronic articles from the fields of social sciences and communications, published within the last twenty years. Within this literature, it becomes clear that media and information technology coincides with fandoms in an almost symbiotic relationship. While fandoms and fandom culture had small beginnings, they have grown to the point of normalcy, a ‘take over of geek culture’ as it is sometimes referred to.

Gray, Sandvoss & Harrington (2017), along with a number of other contributors, discuss the broader aspects of fandom and its relationship with the media. Diving into the multiple aspects of fandom culture and actions, they begin to analyze its impact on society and the media fandom is often inspired by. Fandom is not relegated to simply science fiction or fantasy themed films or television, but to all aspects of media that people indulge themselves in such as sports, novels, and music. There is greater discussion on how fandoms interact within and without, and the many different actions that fall under fandom participation. For example; collecting toys and other merchandise as an adult, writing fan fiction and the impact fan made works have on Copyright law, and the rights of the creators, or even the discussion of relevant social and/or political issues presented in the focused media. Each part and section of this publication is

unique in topic and approach, each written at the discretion of the contributor. This dissection of fandom is not unlike an analysis of our own cultures, seeing as these are real communities, with their own quirks, and the greater impact they have in our daily lives.

Duffet (2015) builds upon the research of professor Mark Hills, and the personal accounts of other researchers and journalists. Much of his writing focuses on the tangibility of fandoms, how the communities function and what drives a person into becoming a fan, and subsequently what drives them to become part of a fandom. Yet he also questions the tangibility of these communities; are they something real or just a sense of shared interest and enjoyment? It is why he delves into the stereotypes and representation of fans and fandoms, to discuss how they are perceived from the outside, while also researching the pathology of fans, what they do in the fandom, and how they tackle real issues such as gender and sexual identification, just as any community would.

Booth (2018) takes a similar role to the other publications we have reviewed so far, taking this opportunity to build upon fan studies and analyze what fandoms are and what they do, with a few new perspectives. Though this publication has one of the best ways to classify what a fandom is, and that it is a part of participatory culture, an antithesis to consumer culture, in which individuals also act as producers and contributors, rather than simply consumers. While fandom members are indeed consumers of whatever it is they are fans of, they also put much of their own time into creating something(s) for other fans to enjoy as well, even if it is simply discussion.

Barton and Malcolm (2014) presents their topics with more of a twist. They start to delve into more of the intricacies of fandom culture with this collection of personal essays by themselves and other

contributors, each reflecting on their own experiences with fandom and using examples of fandom participation from a number of different fandoms, all in an effort to explain just what some of the things fandoms do and have done over the course of the 21st century.

With Lewis (2003) we can begin diving into a mindset surrounding the preconceptions of fandoms. Right off the bat with the first essay of the book, *'Fandom as Pathology,'* written by Joli Jensen, we are introduced to the concept of fans and fandoms being filled with degenerates and hooligans, 'fanatics' from which the words 'fan' and 'fandom' derive, though this is an opinion mostly seen in the mid 1900s- late 1900s, before 'geek culture' became more of a thing. Certainly before the idea of fans and fandoms became normal. The essay continues to explain the pathology behind fandom, building off the pathologies of community and why fans were seen in such a negative light.

One aspect of fandom culture that has often been seen as taboo to others, is the concept of fan fiction. There is a stigma that fan fiction is solely created for perverse and pornographic reasons, regardless of audience and subject. However, this isn't true, or at least not entirely. While it is true that there are some forms of pornographic fanfiction, most written fiction is simply a fan's way of expressing their love for the subject, with focuses on alternate versions of the story, an exploration of a character other than the main character, or perhaps an inclusion of an original character or OC. Hellekson and Busses (2006) works to explain away the negative stigma that often surrounds the concept of fan fiction by delving deeper into the relationship between the audiences and the media they consume, and subsequently, write about. These women contributed to the creation of the fan fiction archive known as Archive Of Our Own, or

AO3. They wished to promote fanfiction as a collaboration or ‘work in progress’ as a means of expression over a means of making money.

Given the topic of fan fiction, and its place in fandom culture, let's explore a bit more about fandom's relationship with information technologies and how they can be of benefit to those who wish to learn and progress certain skills. Jenkins (2019) brings about the topic by introducing us to Archive of Our Own and its history, and what it meant for fans to have a place of their own to produce their works in progress, safe from corporate meddling; either taking down the content, or exploiting it for monetary gain and recognition. Fan fiction is meant to be both a means of self expression, and an effort of community contributions and communication. Yet this work also has implications of learning opportunities. Fan fiction could be a means of encouraging people to write and improve their skills and literacy, along with help from Beta-writers, veteran writers who can check the writings for errors and correct them. This kind of participatory culture has the ability to encourage improvement and learning.

Perhaps the learning opportunities could go beyond writing in fandom communities. Fiesler, Morrison, Shapiro, and Bruckman (2017) discusses the fact that fandom communities are just as much a place to improve on a number of communicational, technical and artistic skills through the creation and sharing of fanworks, (fan fiction and fan art), as it is a place to discuss and acquaint yourself with like minded fellows. Online archives such as AO3 and a number of other social media platforms offer these spaces and opportunities for sharing these works to their communities. However there is also the fact that most people would end up being self taught, or

seek out others who are much the same as them, leaving these individuals without many experts of these skills within the community.

Much of this could not be accomplished without the emergence of digital media. Pearson (2010) explores the concept and theory that “fans have always been at the forefront of media industry transformations,” and that there are wider implications of the changing relationship between consumers and producers. Now that there are much greater means of communication through social media and other digital technologies, audiences and fans can have a much greater effect on the content that the source produces. The actions of the fandom can now have consequences, for good or ill. Often it is related to the concept itself, perhaps reception to new stories or promotionalization, even the direction a show or movie might take. Of course the creators have control over what it is that they put out, but now it is much more visible to the world what the reactions of the fans might be.

Tying this all together is a thesis essay, written by Gooch (2008). They describe the ways in which fandoms thrive through communication and that they have had an effect on the changes of the science fiction and fantasy genre. It ties back to discussing the impact that fandoms have on the lives of its participants, and the content that they can generate in response to the valued source material they all know and love. Fan culture and fandoms are now directly tied with the continued existence of the Sci-Fi and Fantasy genres, through their own participation and communication methods.

Most, if not all of these publications are linked in their shared exploration of fandoms, fan culture and fan studies, observing how they operate and why. Yet buried within, you can see how much information and digital technology has an influence on the growth of these cultures, by making it possible for better communication and understanding, presenting the opportunity for creation of unique works related to the subject they love and sharing that with each other.

Beyond that, the adaptations and evolution of information technologies has made many of the films, animated series, and television shows possible, especially with CGI and 3D modeling. It is reasonable to say that, had information and digital technologies developed differently or to a far lesser extent, the growth these fandoms have experienced would be far less, or at the very least, quite different.

## **Methodology**

When one wishes to study culture, and understand the ways of its people, they must immerse themselves in that environment, and learn directly from the people they talk to, and the interactions they observe. While there are many things that can be learned from books, such as language, dates, and popular interests, they do not provide the necessary experiences that can be garnered from direct interaction or observation. Studying fandoms and fan culture, and the information technology they use to interact, is no different. These communities and cultures are reliant on information technology, and the technology reliant on them, in a symbiotic relationship. Fandoms are provided their means of wide spread communication, as well as their shared media interest, through information technology, and the greater interest and numbers of the communities means more support for the platforms utilized and the creation of new ones.

In order to find answers to my questions, and gain a greater understanding so that I might share them through my project, my plan is to immerse myself in these fandoms. To go on to these platforms such as Tumblr, Twitter, YouTube, etc. and observe how people interact or function in these communities. I am already a part of a number of fandoms as well, providing myself a great starting point. I am using Henry Jenkins Fandom Theory (Jenkins – Fandom Theory, 2019); that fandoms, and fans in particular, play a key role in the development and distribution of media, existing and new, so that I might conduct this research in a different light, as opposed to being another fan browsing through my feed. This observational plan I have, is based on my own desire to understand the fandoms I am a part of, this participatory culture that

so many take part of, and really see the effect these communities can have on media and information technologies, such as web series, blogs, video, and websites.

There are hundreds, if not thousands of fandoms out in the world, so in order to significantly decrease the scope of my project, I will be focusing on the fandoms surrounding media developed by RoosterTeeth, a media entertainment company based out of Austin, Texas, and how the interactions of the community and company can better the relationship between them, and how that can lead to further media and technology development. My research was mostly observational and focused on seeing how others interacted, and in what ways. Though I did not conduct interviews with particular questions, none of my work links information to individuals, either by indirect means or directly stating names or user names.

## **Digital Artifact**

My actual project consists of a set of blog posts, or ‘mini-essays’, on Tumblr, around one hundred words per post, perhaps more, with ten posts in total. Tumblr is a highly popular social blog site that is a hot spot for fandom activity and participation. Though my motivation for this project is mostly for me to personally explore this subject, I would be remiss to not share this as well to any that happen by, as is the way of fans and participatory culture; to create something not for monetary gain or fame, but because of the desire to share it with other like minded individuals. This is the digital artifact I shall develop, alongside the necessary written papers. It is possible that I may consult other bloggers for their opinion about how to create my posts, perhaps which methods might best capture attention and keep things readable. I have also found a very interesting article/journal by Sara Kjellberg (2010) about why some researchers are using scholarly blogs, or making blog posts to contribute to their research and/or distribute their findings. I hope to reference this as well so that I might gain a greater understanding of how I might share my findings and thoughts on this subject.

Prior to the creation of this artifact, I anticipated that reviewing and observing six to eight blogs dedicated to Rooster Teeth content can allow me to gain a sense of how my own profile and posts should be written and designed. While Tumblr lacks a certain amount of creative design, it does allow for a number of media elements to be posted together, as well as text color changing. Going through these blogs in depth can also allow me to explore more connected profiles and observe the interactions between fans, especially centered around fan created materials and projects.

## Research and Project Outcomes

The following screenshots present how this blog has been presented and designed.

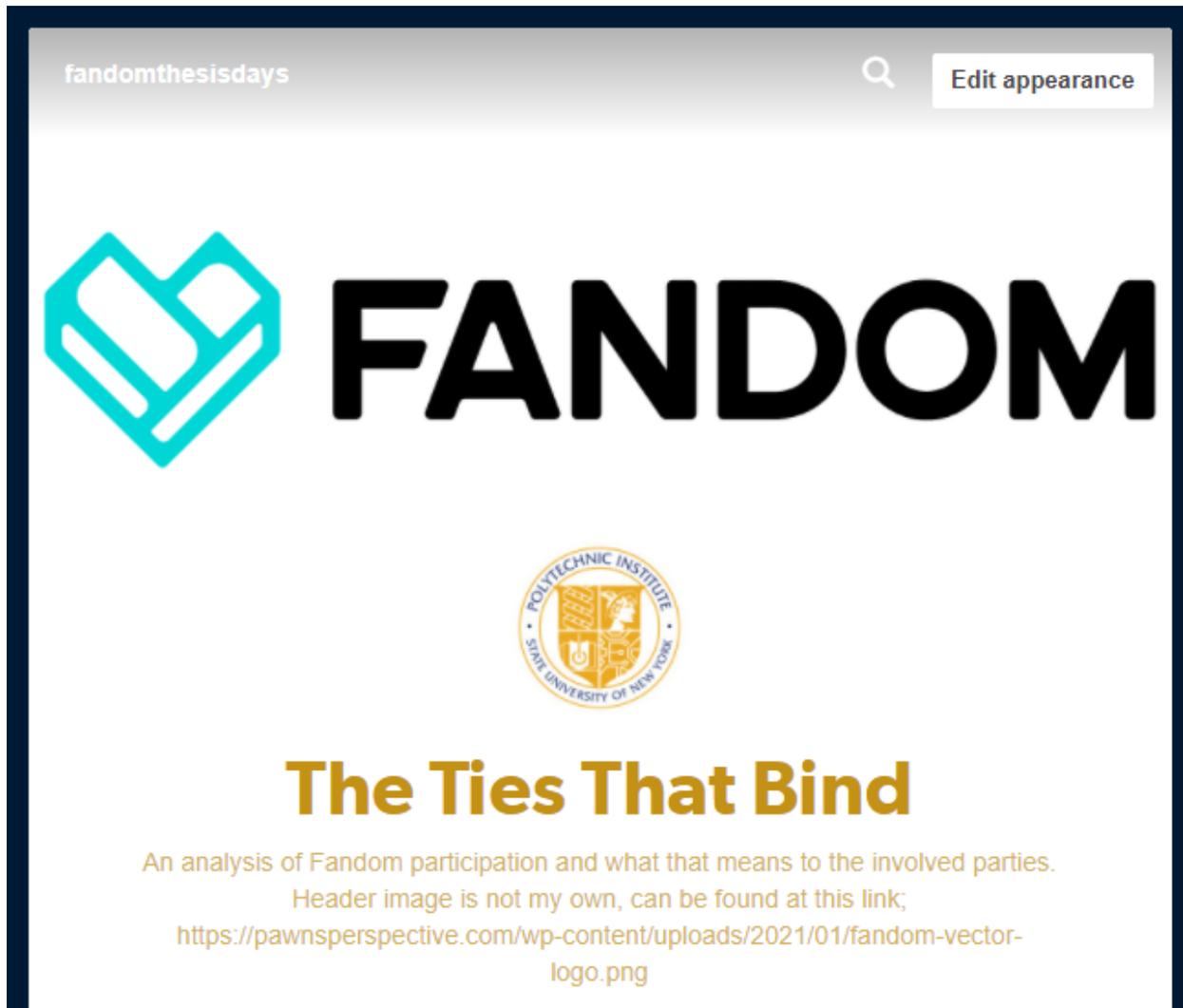


Figure 1: The header design for my blog; the first impression people will see upon visiting my blog.

Figure 2: Introduction post describing the purpose of this blog and the following posts.



Img [Link](#)

#thesis #student #rooster teeth #fandom

1 note



fandomthesisdays



## Who We Are

There is so much more to Fandoms than any of us know. Sure there have been studies, scholarly papers, and books written on the subject, but that can seem more like cold fact and numbers. Sometimes Fandoms are even **condemned**. Which is sometimes understandable. Yet as someone who has been a part of many fandoms, I am proud to say that there is so much more to it than just a collection of people that like to talk and share fanfiction. Fandom is community, it is support, it is friendship and learning and conflict and more and more. And Fandom can have just as much impact on the source; the reason for the Fandom, as on people within. On this blog, and through more posts such as this, I would like to share what I have found of the relationship between a Fandom(s) and the content source, both as someone who has done research, and as someone who has experienced being a part of the Fandom(s). That content source, and the Fandoms derived from it, being Rooster Teeth.

#thesis #student #rooster teeth #fandom #this is kind of weird #but i'm really happy to do this #and excited

1 note





fandomthesisdays



## Rooster Teeth Support 1/2

There is so much that RT does to be supportive, encouraging, and to actively engage with their community. Achievement Hunter often hosts their community streams, inviting members of the community to play a number of games with them. There is the Extra Life 24 hour event streams that they host annually for charity. The annual RTX convention in Austin, a weekend long event where community members from across the world can gather to meet the members of this company that bring them laughter and joy and to meet each other, much like a Comic-Con. Rooster Teeth even has a policy in which if a member of the community has proven themselves in some way, they will be hired by the company. It has happened with Jordan Scott, the creator of the RWBY: Grimm Eclipse game, hired by Monty Oum, the creator of RWBY, himself, and with Jeremy Dooley and Matt Bragg being hired into Achievement Hunter.

#thesis #student #rooster teeth #fandom

1 note



fandomthesisdays



## A Little About The Fandom

there is a lot about the RT Fandom that makes us unique, mainly in that we are not all fans of 'just' Rooster Teeth. We are a united combination of fans of Red vs Blue, fans of RWBY, of Achievement Hunter, Camp Camp, Fun Haus, Death Battle and so much more. Rooster Teeth, and those they have acquired, have created so many wonderful series, shows, videos and events for us that it is sometimes hard to find a fan of one of their works, and not any others. Like any community, the RT Fandom is kind, supportive, creative and outgoing, yet we can also be critical, mean, dismissive and cruel, to each other and RT. But that is their right, even if isn't a great thing. And there is so much that RT does to support this

Figure 3: General length of most of the posts.

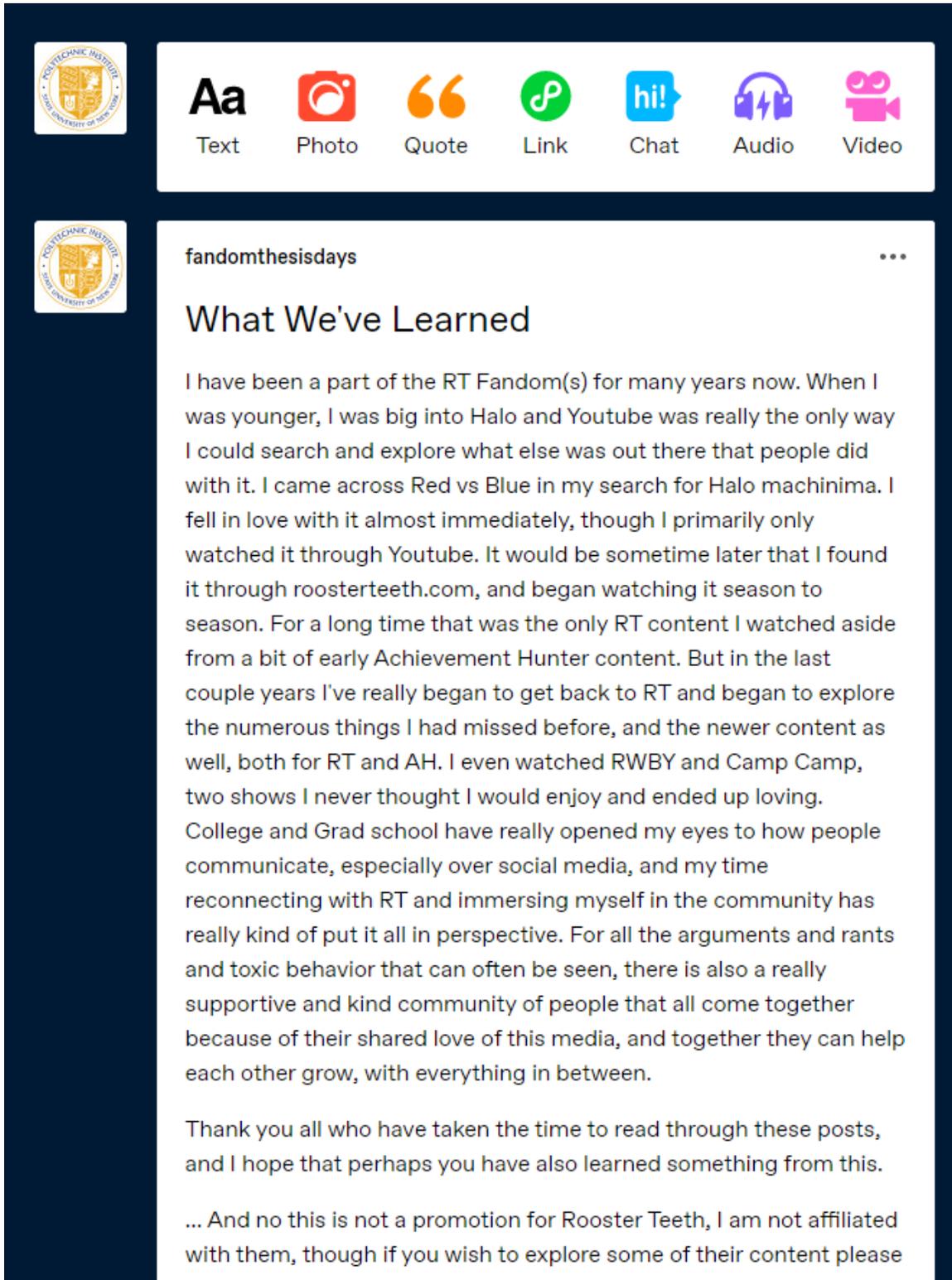


Figure 4: Concluding post, giving a bit of backstory to my own experiences and what I have learned

## **Discussion**

Tumblr as a platform has so much potential for creating the right kind of post. One is not limited to posting just a video, image or text, but can create one long post filled with each of those things, as well as including the ability to properly place multiple pictures and color the text. I tried to emulate some of the posts that I've seen in which someone does exactly this, usually as a form of rant or one sided discussion. There is much that I could, and, did learn about crafting the right kind of posts you want, so that you might get the desired reaction or attention. While I am satisfied with how my project turned out, there is more I could have done to make it more visually appealing. The inclusion of more images or GIFs, perhaps a video of some RTX moments that were brought up. I was surprised at how easy it was to go through the posting process, and once you've done a bit of experimenting it can be effortless to pick and choose what you want to create. I also wish that I paid more attention to some of the common tags that would appear in other posts, as these are the keywords people use to find your blog and posts.

## **Project Conclusions**

What does the relationship between a fandom and the media have to do with creating a thesis project? Henry Jenkins (Jenkins – Fandom Theory, 2019), a well known American media scholar, has a theory about fandoms; that they are a part of 'participatory culture', where the audience are active and creative participants in the media, and that this kind of culture can lead to a sort of convergence of media elements. Though his term of fans as 'textual poachers' seems a little derogatory, it is meant in a way that fans take elements of the media we are fans of, and

then form communities around it. Which is a pretty spot on explanation of how fandoms are made. The RT fandom(s) had no different start. The founders company itself were participatory fans themselves, as are all machinima creators. In the years following the founding of Rooster Teeth it has grown exponentially, as has the fandom(s), but they have been supporting each other, building one another up. The company could not have grown to where it is now without the support of its fan base, and the fans could not keep up the community to the level it has reached without RT, all the while utilizing and supporting the social platforms and information technologies that allow this level of interaction and support to be possible.

## Appendix

(This section contains the the text of each post from the blog)

### *Who We Are*

*There is so much more to Fandoms than any of us know. Sure there have been studies, scholarly papers, and books written on the subject, but that can seem more like cold fact and numbers. Sometimes Fandoms are even **condemned**. Which is sometimes understandable. Yet as someone who has been a part of many fandoms, I am proud to say that there is so much more to it than just a collection of people that like to talk and share fanfiction. Fandom is community, it is support, it is friendship and learning and conflict and more and more. And Fandoms can have just as much impact on the source; the reason for the Fandom, as on people within. On this blog, and through more posts such as this, I would like to share what I have found of the relationship between a Fandom(s) and the content source, both as someone who has done research, and as someone who has experienced being a part of the Fandom(s). That content source, and the Fandoms derived from it, being Rooster Teeth.*

### *A Little About RT*

*Rooster Teeth as we know it, is a media company based in Austin, Texas and has been around for 18 years now. In that time they have grown from a small group of friends making an adult comedy machinima with Halo: CE, to a multi hundred person company with their own studios, offices, sets and more. And they have attracted some of the best content creators and creative minds from all over the world. And there is so much that they do, so much that they have accomplished, that they have drawn in millions of fans.*

## *A Little About The Fandom*

*There is a lot about the RT Fandom that makes us unique, mainly in that we are not all fans of 'just' Rooster Teeth. We are a united combination of fans of Red vs Blue, fans of RWBY, of Achievement Hunter, Camp Camp, Fun Haus, Death Battle and so much more. Rooster Teeth, and those they have acquired, have created so many wonderful series, shows, videos and events for us that it is sometimes hard to find a fan of one of their works, and not any others. Like any community, the RT Fandom is kind, supportive, creative and outgoing, yet we can also be critical, mean, dismissive and cruel, to each other and RT. But that is their right, even if it isn't a great thing. And there is so much that RT does to support this Fandom, and we to support them.*

## *Rooster Teeth Support 1/2*

*There is so much that RT does to be supportive, encouraging, and to actively engage with their community. Achievement Hunter often hosts their community streams, inviting members of the community to play a number of games with them. There are the Extra Life 24 hour event streams that they host annually for charity. The annual RTX convention in Austin, a weekend long event where community members from across the world can gather to meet the members of this company that bring them laughter and joy and to meet each other, much like a Comic-Con. Rooster Teeth even has a policy in which if a member of the community has proven themselves in some way, they will be hired by the company. It has happened with Jordan Scott, the creator of the RWBY: Grimm Eclipse game, hired by Monty Oum, the creator of RWBY, himself, and with Jeremy Dooley and Matt Bragg being hired into Achievement Hunter.*

## *Rooster Teeth Support 2/2*

*Rooster Teeth is a company made of creative people, who want to make the things they want to make, for the community. And they want the community to do the same. They want fans to pursue and hone their creative skills, either through fan art, fan videos, reactions and reviews, fan fiction, and so much more. It also helps that they often frequently go on the platforms such as here on Tumblr, Twitter, Facebook, Youtube and so much more to see what we fans have made. So they know what's out there. It also helps that many RT members got their start doing the same, and love that people keep putting their hearts into these projects. Even some of the voice actors love to tease fans a little, putting out tweets telling them what things were like during a session; maybe there was a lot of emotion or screaming in the booth, we fans go crazy over these posts.*

## *Fandom Support 1/2*

*Now what is it that the fandom does to support Rooster Teeth? Well... almost everything really. Sometimes it's as simple as watching their content, and subscribing on Youtube. Sometimes it's creating fanart and tagging certain characters and RT members in it. Sometimes it's becoming a FIRST member on their website and buying merch. Regardless of what it is that the Fandom does, it is almost always in the support of RT. Of course there are those without the fandom, and even within, that can be very critical of the company, it's members and the direction some of the content it can take. It is unfortunate that some people get really upset and take it out on those that work really hard to create the content that is loved by so many, but that is to be expected in any community, and those differences should be embraced, so long as it doesn't create a toxic environment.*

## *Fandom Support 2/2*

*There is so much the Fandom does to support RT, and so much it has done to support its growth throughout the last 18 years. Yet we are just as supportive of each other as we are of the company, and the content they produce. If someone wanted to create a fan project of some kind (art, fiction, video super cuts, animation, etc.) it is not uncommon for community members to reach out and help. Some will offer advice, and teach or guide them along the way, some may offer constructive criticism in the hopes that they may improve, and some are just around to be supportive; to like and share the project with others. Fans can similarly do that with RT content. There is so much content that is produced by RT, that it isn't surprising that some of it can seem lost in a sea of animated shows, let's plays, podcasts, shenanigan's and more. Sometimes it's up to fans to spread the word, get others involved with more content, and if they don't like it there is so much more to choose from. There's a little something for everybody, and every little thing can go a long way in supporting the community and Rooster Teeth.*

## *Coming Together*

*If you haven't picked it up from my first post, and the tags I have included so far, this is my thesis, not just another blogging thread. To that end I must ask; what does all of this mean in the greater scheme of things? What does this all represent? What does the relationship between a Fandom and the media have to do with creating a thesis project? Well that is what I have been trying to show. Henry Jenkins, a well known American media scholar, has a theory about Fandoms; that they are a part of 'participatory culture', where the audience are active and creative participants in the media, and that this kind of culture can lead to a sort of convergence of media elements. Though his term of fans as 'textual poachers' seems a little derogatory, it is meant in a way that fans take elements of the media we are fans of, and then form communities around it. Which is a pretty spot on explanation of how fandoms are made. The RT*

*Fandom(s) had no different start. The founders company itself were participatory fans themselves, as are all machinima creators.*

## *Coming Together Part 2*

*They created Red vs Blue back in 2003 using Halo: Combat Evolved and their cell phones. Remarkable for the time. They weren't even 'Rooster Teeth' for some time either; all the episodes were uploaded to redvsblue.com. But by participating in this early Halo machinima culture, they started an enterprise. They began a convergence of many media elements into a new company, capable of creating and producing so much more, to be enjoyed by millions. And as the number of fans grew, so too did the company and the people who joined began to make new things that they wanted to, attracting even more audiences. Rooster Teeth and its Fandom(s) grew together, motivating each other to try new things and continue keeping up with new technology. It wasn't just Rooster Teeth that grew either, but the platforms they and the Fandom inhabit. Tumblr, Twitter, Facebook and more became the media we relied on to communicate and interact within the community, and with RT, providing these platforms with thousands of new users. It has become a symbiotic relationship of growth and support, each relying on the other to continue growing into the best they can be, no matter who you are.*

## *What We've Learned*

*I have been a part of the RT Fandom(s) for many years now. When I was younger, I was big into Halo and Youtube was really the only way I could search and explore what else was out there that people did with it. I came across Red vs Blue in my search for Halo machinima. I fell in love with it almost immediately, though I primarily only watched it through Youtube. It would be sometime later that I found it through roosterteeth.com, and began watching it season to season. For a long time that was the only RT content I watched aside from a bit of early Achievement Hunter content. But in the last couple years I've really*

*begun to get back to RT and began to explore the numerous things I had missed before, and the newer content as well, both for RT and AH. I even watched RWBY and Camp Camp, two shows I never thought I would enjoy and ended up loving. College and Grad school have really opened my eyes to how people communicate, especially over social media, and my time reconnecting with RT and immersing myself in the community has really kind of put it all in perspective. For all the arguments and rants and toxic behavior that can often be seen, there is also a really supportive and kind community of people that all come together because of their shared love of this media, and together they can help each other grow, with everything in between.*

*Thank you all who have taken the time to read through these posts, and I hope that perhaps you have also learned something from this.*

*... And no this is not a promotion for Rooster Teeth, I am not affiliated with them, though if you wish to explore some of their content please feel free.*

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